

Education Links

Inspiring, motivating, guiding Unity Churches to enhance and expand their ministries with children, teens & families

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Intergenerational Ministry— When All Celebrate as ONE



Intergenerational: between, among, in the midst of or shared by different age groups
Ministry: using one's personal talents and gifts to serve others

Intergenerational ministry is not new. However, in today's culture of segregating the different age groups, we forget that the greater the diversity of an ecosystem, the greater chance that system has of surviving times of stress. There is something about blending the wisdom and patience of the elders with the rambunctious joy and energy of young children that calls God into greater expression. Young adults and empty nesters, though their circumstances may be different, both seek a deeper understanding of the One.

Whether it is our similarities or our differences that bring us together, intergenerational ministry provides us with a forum to transform lives, to generate hope, and to embrace a greater part of ourselves. It supports the diversity that is needed to strengthen our community and promotes a greater realization of the I AM that binds us together.

Intergenerational ministry could be defined as "... transformational relationships: connecting elders and young people and all ages in-between; finding common ground, mutual interests, and places where we 'fill each others' gaps'; building a warm, healthy community. Sometimes, these things can only happen by *intentionally creating* the appropriate

conditions. Other times, it is simply a matter of *intentionally recognizing* the possibilities in an existing environment."

—Jennifer Griffin-Wiesner from
*Generators: 20 Activities to Recharge
Your Intergenerational Group*

Marygrace Sorensen, South Central Unity Region Children's Education Consultant, grew up in Unity and remembers this: When I was younger than six, Stan Hampson was our minister. Each Sunday our parents would sign us in, and then we'd all sit together in the sanctuary—*all 8 of us!* Service would start with a prayer and joy song, which we all loved. Stan would then have the children come forward and sit around him. He gave a 3-5 minute mini-lesson (often an object lesson), then would ask us and the adults a question. The adults would smile and sometimes chuckle at what we said and sometimes we'd tilt our little confused heads at what an adult had said. Stan closed with a synopsis of his point and all the adults would sing "Walking in the Light" as we children went to our classes with our teachers. I cherish those times. I felt special and loved by everyone in the church, and I got a taste of speaking in front of people! To me, that's an ideal intergenerational activity.

The Joy of Intergenerational Ministry

by Rev. Sandra R. Hymel
Unity Church of Christianity
Chesterland, OH (9/94-12/04)

This vision of ministry grew from the teachings of our Way-Shower, Jesus the Christ, whose whole life demonstrated inclusiveness, even at risk of crucifixion itself. This concept of intergenerational ministry took a while to catch on as most traditional churches departmentalize their communities with groups such as: singles/elders/young adults, yes, even toddlers, Uniteens, and YOUers. Though certainly these criteria are necessary for educational approaches, in life itself everyone, all ages, are teachers and students, each bringing their own wisdom to living experiences.

First of all, I tried my best to be intentional about using varied ages and sexes during church services, especially for special readings: Sundays in Advent—presenting metaphysical interpretations of scripture surrounding the season and lighting of the candles on the Advent wreath; Candle Lighting Service; and presenting of the Passover Meal. Special reports from the children were presented at the end of Sunday Services, after which we sang all the children into the sanctuary. On the first Sunday of each month, a different child presented their Offerings collected for the previous month. These were blessed in front of the whole congregation.

A senior member conducted Arboretum Tours periodically, and all ages coordinated overnight campouts on our grounds. The property was in a country setting with woods and a hill.

Several annual events incorporated all ages working together:

- Animal Blessing in October (video available)
- Holy Hilarity Sunday (There Is Joy After Taxes)—held the Sunday following tax day in April. Children of *all ages* presented a couple of upbeat tunes on kazoos, while everyone joined in singing.



- Mardi Gras Pot Luck/Talent Show—no prizes were given. Everyone felt free to present their own “party piece” and were totally supported by each other (video available).
- Summer Solstice outdoors in June
- Flea Market in August, during which all helped to donate items, set up, sell, and clean up
- Thanksgiving Service followed by a covered dish dinner. Adults and children shared that for which they were most grateful and were encouraged to look at even not-so-comfortable things that may have helped them to grow in consciousness.

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Our adult Sacred Circle of Prayer Team coordinated several weeks of introducing our children to calling Silent Unity as their partners in prayer. This was arranged in cooperation with the Silent Unity Supervisor on duty during church time on Sunday. The children were given a brightly colored business card with Silent Unity's 800 number. They were guided, in groups of three, to ask Silent Unity for prayer. They were told they could use this number *wherever* they were, from any phone, and especially if they were in any kind of fearful situation.



A highlight year was when the whole church focused on the 12 Powers: all ages focused on a Power a month. Sunday Service lessons and Sunday School teachings focused on that same power and the color was used everywhere around the church, and those who had special roles to play tried to coordinate the color in their clothing.

We also celebrated the "passing on" of several members of our spiritual family. We celebrated together the lives they had shared with all of us and embraced the love we felt as grief in the moment.

As I reflect on the 10 years shared as a spiritual community, I have a heart filled with gratitude for all of it!

Intergenerational Unity Bible Study

by Valerie Mansfield
Youth & Family Ministry Director
Unity of Louisville, KY

During our October 2004 Youth and Family Quarterly Meeting, several families shared an interest in a Bible Study class for youth. As we brainstormed, it was decided that we would offer an intergenerational class, since the adults have a great interest in learning more about the Bible. We discussed having the class at homes or some other designated site, but decided for risk-management reasons we would offer the class at church. The class was set on Wednesday nights, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. We offer an area for families to bring in brown bag dinners to eat before class.

During the class we study the Bible both literally and metaphysically at the level of a 6-year-old. The curriculum we are using is *Learning About Myself Through the Old Testament*, which we purchased from the Association of



Unity Churches International. We are using the New Revised Standard Version Bible. The curriculum for youth makes the class more interesting for all ages with crafts and games.

We start with introductions; proceed into prayer, then read the Bible chapter that we will discuss for the evening. We discuss the chapter and use *The Revealing Word* and *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary* as references. Then we move into creative expression. Sometimes the discussion will continue if we are working on an art experience. The class varies each week with participants—we've had elders from our church attend, youth volunteers, parents and youth.

Responding to the Call

Dear Ministers,

What does intergenerational ministry look like to you? How do children and teens interact with the adults in your church? When? Where?

The next issue of Education Links is all about intergenerational ministry and how that might look in a Unity church. What is successful and what isn't. We'd like to hear from you about programs, events, activities, etc. that have worked for your ministry, and if you have any special tips on what pitfalls to avoid, we'd like to hear those, too.

In the Fall of last year, I sent out the above e-mail. I figured that if you wanted to know about intergenerational ministry in Unity churches, you had to go to the source. Thank you to all who responded. It's great to hear about what is happening in the centers, and I hope that the following will spark some more ideas.

Kathy

Unity Chefs, Experiencing Bible Stories, Sharing Talents

I am thrilled you asked. We do four things that have made a huge difference towards bringing the generations together. The first Sunday of the month, the children tithe of their gifts and talents to the church community by making food for after the service. They have done lots of wonderful things, such as vegetable pizzas, high-tea sandwiches with varied tea flavors, caramel apples, chocolate-covered strawberries, tiered flavored pudding, fruit bars and pies, etc. Between their "work," they have a short lesson, often being a special story with a practical moral. At the time we started doing this, there was not a consistent after-service snack. When the first Sunday was scheduled each month, the adults were more willing to handle the other Sundays. It is a heart-warming experience to watch the children as they serve the adults, as they are filled with the gift of giving and accomplishment!

We sometimes create big projects, such as having the children experience the parable about sitting in a boat while Jesus walks on water. The Uniteens made a boat and oars out of cardboard and were so excited about the project, they wanted to come into the children's class to shake the blue sheets (water) which were under the boat and flick the lights on and off to emphasize the frightening storm. Since we had three classes, this took the whole hour. Everyone loved it.

What to do with the four 5th Sundays each year? Well, since Unity people are amazingly talented, we invite people from the congregation to help out on a one-time basis. This has been very successful. One person wanted to have a piggy bank for pocket change which could go towards the children's program. So, every child made a piggy bank out of baby shoeboxes using lots of available supplies (foam, wooden, sticker pigs), pink paint and construction paper, and wiggly eyes and pink pipe cleaners for the tails. The topic: Tithing.

Other examples: storytellers told learning stories and then helped the children co-create a fun, spiritually-oriented story together; the YOUers taught the children YOU songs.

At the end of the service, all the Rainbow Circles kids and Uniteens come into the sanctuary while the congregation sings "Walking in the Light." The YOUers who are already in the service also come forward. Each group briefly tells what they did that Sunday or previous Wednesday night. The congregation looks forward to hearing what the children/youth have to say.

Fun-d raising is another topic unto itself where adults help the kids raise money for regional teen activities and events.

Kate Pepler, past Children's Ministry Leader
Unity of the Valley, Burnsville, MN

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Open and Close Together, YOU Lead Service

We have the children with us for opening prayer, welcome, our mission/vision statement and a song (which we call motivational moment). Then we bless them and they go off to classes as we sing "Go Now in Peace." They usually return to sing the Peace Song with us, depending upon their schedule.

We also have them provide our special praise at times and holiday activities, which will take the place of the lesson at least once a year. The YOU also provide one service a year with the topic or theme coinciding with the ongoing theme in adult services, or one that is cleared with their sponsor and me.

The YOU also have many fundraisers where they greet and serve the congregation, such as ice cream socials and after-service lunches. Everyone enjoys these times together.

Thanks for asking. I believe that the children should be visible.

Blessings,
Rev. Nancy L. Purcell
Unity in the Seven Hills, Lynchburg, VA

Sharing Unity Experience

In my former church in Charleston, we had social events in which children and adults interacted quite often. I always encouraged the children to participate and the families to bring them. We conducted a Children's Sunday in which the children (mostly older) were invited to share their Unity experience. That was in place of the sermon, which was condensed to about ten minutes. The program was primarily done by the Sunday school teachers and director with my assistance. It was packed full and one of our best services.

The children handed out the bulletins and special favors on Mother's Day, too. The children were given special attention on many occasions and encouraged to ask questions.

Rev. Brenda Mays-Gurnee
Charleston, West Virginia

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Carousel Party

At Unity in Spokane, each year we rent the carousel in our Riverfront Park on a Sunday evening for two hours for a truly intergenerational event. The rental cost is paid by the church so the event is free. We have many young families that attend, grandparents bring their grandchildren, and our YOUers and Uniteens look forward to it each year. Even our Single's Group (ages 45-65) has it on their calendar, and there is great competition among the youth and adults to see who can grab the most rings and successfully get them into the clown's mouth. The Uniteens spend that Sunday afternoon making sweet treats that they sell, along with water and sodas, at the carousel party as a fundraiser for their other activities. It is a wonderful, relaxed party atmosphere and many just come to watch the fun being had by all ages.

Rev. Jackie Green
Youth and Family Minister
Unity in Spokane, WA



All-Ages Clown Ministry

One of the most successful intergenerational ministries I've experienced/facilitated/initiated is Clown Ministry. In the previous ministry I served, we had, at one time, 20 "clown ministers" ranging in age from 80 to 4 years old—children/Uniteens/YOU and adults. It was an outreach ministry that went out to local nursing homes and hospitals. It was a great way to connect with the larger local community. We also served at the local hospice for their Good Grief Days (for children who had siblings who had died.) We were annually invited to the Special Olympics and other community events. It is a creative, fun, playful way to connect all ages of your congregation in service. ***The family that plays together stays together!***

This is taken off my website, www.Planetaryplay.org.

What a Clown Ministry can do for your church community:

- **Healing** ~ reawaken the child within all of us; an opportunity to play (some of us never learned to play in childhood and don't take time to play now); a way to heal through play
- **Education** ~ Clowns have a special way of making learning fun for youth and church school. It's for children of all ages.
- **Worship** ~ Clowns add a light touch to worship services and can create a dramatic element in the portrayal of scriptures.
- **Community** ~ an excellent way to serve the community. A clown group can visit local hospitals, schools and other churches. It puts your Unity church on the map!

This seems so timely with Unity's Noble Purpose Project for 2006 "Planetary Play Day"!

Blessings and HUGS!
MarciahMello
Rev. Marciah McCartney
Co-leader, Unity Light Center
Baldwin, KS

Flagship Intergenerational Programming

by Helen Vaughn Marshall, CSE
Uniteen Sponsor, Unity Christ Center, Suwanee, GA

Imagine beginning a Sunday or midweek service with the lighting of trinity candles by a youth, an adult, and a senior. This is not unusual at Unity Christ Center (UCC) in Suwanee, Georgia, where each of these age groups represent about a third of the congregation. Intergenerational programming is a conscious choice here so the task of creating programs that appeal to all ages has become a Board and community focus.

Services

Once a month, a Sunday Service is devoted to a family message and to music that appeals to all ages. Everyone, no matter what age, remains in the hour-long service that is designed with a special message for the young people. The YOU (Youth of Unity, usually grades 9-12) act as ushers and greeters. Youth and seniors also assist through the expression of music, prayer, meditation, poetry or story. A birthday blessing is also a part of this time.

The midweek service is a new addition to UCC programming and led by Allison Mann, Associate Minister and Youth Director. The Creative Director, Dana Shultz, supports this effort by providing music with a wide appeal from drumming to congregants' original pieces. Together these two connect the children's and adult activities by generating a message where

children can explore spiritual themes during the family-friendly message. The children might be constructing a bridge while adults are crossing theirs metaphysically through meditation and message. The children are as much a part of the service as the adults and help lead affirmations, blessings, offerings, and music.

Regular creative publications of *Reflections*, a church newsletter, include creative works by all age groups. Regular talent searches open to all ages provide a way to create intergenerational services at UCC.

Summer Programming

One summer program, Sizzling Summer Sensation, offered classes to adults and children for a week of evening fun and spiritual growth for all. Some classes were age-specific and others were for "kids of all ages" like reflexology, T-shirt design, photography, swing dancing, watercolor, treasure mapping, visioning, love my body, sounds of silence, and outdoor adventure challenge course. The experience of working with toddlers to young adults was heart warming. In teen to adult classes, one witnessed the admiration of the elders grow for the young talents, and the youth showed a willingness to listen and to learn from their elders.



During the summer months, the youth send invitations to adult members asking them to attend one of their classes to answer a puzzling truth question. Adults attend the classes and lead Heart Talks on pressing issues. This has proven to be one of the best promotions for our youth program ever. Once the adults come into the youth classes, they become captive audiences and want to keep coming back. This is a great way to open dialogue between the generations.

Youth of Unity-Led Programming

The YOU offered an adult retreat where the family groups (small discussion groups) were led by YOUers. The elders of the church have never been more honored than to be in the presence of these young masters.

The YOU also offered a lock-in for the Uniteens to help prepare them for moving up to the next youth level. The YOU decided that a greater impact would be made by demonstrating the YOU experience rather than by simply talking about it. The result? All the Uniteens are hooked and now have an experience to look forward to and models to aspire to become.

The YOU and youth groups have also been influential in planning center-wide events such as the World Day of Prayer and Season for Nonviolence.

Events and Activities

Family Fun Nights are also a big hit at UCC. Themed events provide non-competitive fun for families while teaching spiritual truths. These can be offered at holiday times or for events like the Season for Nonviolence in the spirit of the Olympics.

Some of our best-attended events include a tailgate party for July 4th, the annual Halloween Carnival, Christmas Cast Party, and Egg Hunt for all ages. Whenever an intergenerational event is planned, a crowd shows up.

Unity Christ Center

At UCC where *Love Is the Center*, embracing God's love by honoring diversity whether it be through different paths to God, through creative thought and expression, through experiences of different generations, or through cultural expression, allows us to better recognize the divinity in each of us.

We are so grateful for the leadership of Rev. Steve and Mary Bolen and Allison Mann who provide the spiritual community where this practice is possible. Through their family and intergenerational ministries, we are growing our center from a program one to a corporate one.



Valentine Connection



At Unity of Phoenix, we have a program that is called the Valentine Connection. Each year our seniors and children sign up to participate. The children come together for an evening of preparing all sorts of different crafts to put into a valentine basket. The parents (who are also a big part of this process) call the senior that their child is matched up with and make arrangements for a meeting so that the children can give their senior their basket.

This is such a special gift that the children take such pride in giving. We even have some seniors that have done it for many years and come back each year and even request children that they have had in the past.

The Valentine Connection's mission is "to create an intergenerational program that connects children and seniors of our community in a relationship of sharing and caring; and to open the opportunity for all participants to have a greater experience of God."

Thanks,
Megan Shepherd
Unity of Phoenix, AZ



Challenge Adventure Activity

For Use With Intergenerational Groups

by Helen Vaughn Marshall, CSE
Uniteen Sponsor, Unity Christ Center, Suwanee, GA

Toss-a-Name

Materials: 3 or more easily-tossed balls or other items

Form groups of about 8-10 people, and stand in an informal circle. A leader introduces the game by saying his/her first name, and then passes a ball to the person on his/her right or left. Each person says his/her first name and continues passing the ball to the person beside them who says his/her own name until the ball is back to the leader again.

The leader then calls out someone's name anywhere in the circle and throws the ball to him/her. That person catches the ball and says, "Thank you, _____." The second person calls another individual's name, etc., until everyone has had a chance to catch the ball once. The ball then returns to the leader again.

Repeat the above sequence and see if the group can go faster. Then the leader asks the group to predict how long they think it will take to complete the sequence, adding penalty time for drops and mistakes.

Step Up the Challenge

When this has been completed, the leader starts the first ball using the same order or sequence of players as before, and then starts a second ball in the same sequence. Continue to predict the time, and process how the time could be shortened. Add a third ball toward the end of the game just for fun. Names and balls are flying about so rapidly that the group usually ends with everyone laughing.



Continue rounds as the group brainstorms how to shorten the time: change their order in the circle to speed up the sequence? pass all items at once? cluster everyone's hands on all items in a pile while they shout names and thank-yous?

After the activity, take time to process:

A. What?

Reflection and Generalizations/Focus on Facts

What just happened? What did we do? What behaviors were observed? Did the group solve the problem? Who did what jobs? Who actively helped? Were the rules followed?

B. So What?

Interpretation and Examination

How did it feel for you? How did you work together? How did you solve the problem? What do you think you did to help the group or to hold the group back from completing the activity?

C. Now What?

Application

Now that we know _____, how are we going to _____?

Unity Principle—There is only One Power!!!!