

Why Intergenerational Worship?

By Jeff Vogan, Director of Worship



THE OBSERVED PROBLEM

For many years, our Children's and Youth Ministries staff have observed that the great majority (perhaps as high as 80%) of our children and youth do not attend corporate worship on any type of regular basis. These are children and youth who come to church on Sunday but only attend their own age-segregated programs. Because they do not attend corporate worship, they miss out on meeting with God together with their broader church family. They do not learn the songs, liturgy, prayers, and practice of corporate worship. They do not hear the preaching of God's word from our ordained pastoral staff. They do not witness or participate in the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. If we believe that our mission is to glorify and enjoy God by making disciples who make a difference through grace-filled worship, then we should surely desire that our children and youth actively and regularly participate in the corporate worship gatherings of the church.

The Fuller Youth Institute of Fuller Theological Seminary conducted a survey of nearly 500 youth group graduates from around the country and revealed that involvement in all-church worship during high school is more consistently linked with mature faith in both high school and college than any other form of church participation. If we want to disciple our children to be lifelong worshipers of God, that discipleship must begin when they are young.

A BIBLICAL MODEL

Scripture demonstrates that the gathered worship of the people of God is intended to be intergenerational in nature. Consider these examples:

Psalm 148:11-14

Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and maidens together,
old men and children!
Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
His majesty is above earth and
heaven.
He has raised up a horn for his people,
praise for all his saints,
For the people of Israel who are near
to him.
Praise the LORD!

Deuteronomy 31:12-13

Assemble the people, men, women, and
little ones, and the sojourner within your
towns, that they may hear and learn to fear
the Lord your God, and be careful to do all
the words of this law, and that their
children, who have not known it, may hear
and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long
as you live in the land that you are going
over the Jordan to possess."

Joel 2:15-16

Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy
fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the
people, consecrate the assembly; bring
together the elders, gather the children,
those nursing at the breast.

Why Intergenerational Worship? *(continued)*

A BIBLICAL MODEL *(continued)*

“Paul’s letters, written to churches in Asia Minor, offered directives to believers across the life span. In these house church settings, when Paul’s letters arrived, all ages listened as his directives were read to wives and husbands (Eph 5:22, 25) to slaves and masters (Eph 6:5, 9) and to children and parents (Col 3:20, 21).”¹

COVENANT THEOLOGY

Covenant theology places a strong emphasis on the family — both the biological family and the broader family of God. As God’s covenant people, we belong to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ; therefore, corporate worship should model brotherly love and Christian unity. Hughes Oliphant Old writes, “Christian worship is in the name of Christ because worship is a function of the body of Christ and as Christians, we are all one body”.² [We believe that] this oneness of body needs to be reflected in our worship gatherings. One important way Christians can demonstrate corporate unity is by intentional, intergenerational participation in corporate worship.³

THE PCA BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

Our denominational Book of Church Order clearly speaks to the importance of intergenerational worship.

Public worship differs from private worship in that in public worship God is served by His saints unitedly as his covenant people, the Body of Christ. For this reason the covenant children should be present so far as possible as well as adults. For the same reason no favoritism may be shown to any who attend. Nor may any member of the church presume to exalt himself above others as though he were more spiritual, but each shall esteem others better than himself (BCO 47-7).

All who attend public worship are expected to be present in a spirit of reverence and godly fear, forbearing to engage in any conduct unbecoming to the place and occasion. Since the family, as ordained by God, is the basic institution in society, and God in the Covenant graciously deals with us, not just as individuals but also as families, it is important and desirable that families worship together (BCO 49-4).

¹ Allen, Holly Catterton and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. InterVarsity Press, 2012.

² Old, Hughes Oliphant. *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

³ Vogan, Jeff. *Developing a Course of Study on the Fundamental Principles of Christian Worship for Willow Creek Church, PCA, Winter Springs, Florida*.