



Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship

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“The authors have done a superb job making the case for the importance of intergenerational ministry in our churches. . . . This book belongs on every pastor’s bookshelf.”

Ivy Beckwith, Ph.D.,
author of *Postmodern Children’s Ministry*

Holly Catterton Allen
(Ph.D., Talbot School of Theology) is professor of Christian ministries and director of the child and

Christian education professors expose the benefits of living and worshipping intergenerationally

What does *intergenerational* mean in your book?

Holly Allen & Christine Ross: We are building our understanding primarily on James White’s and Allan Harkness’s definitions. James White defines intergenerational religious experience as “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.” Allan Harkness says that “intentional intergenerational strategies are those in which an integral part of the process of faith communities encourages interpersonal interactions across generational boundaries, and in which a sense of mutuality and equality is encouraged between participants.”

Why did you decide to write a book about the integration of generations in churches?

Holly: For four years my family worshiped with a nondenominational church that was intentionally intergenerational. Every Sunday evening we met in homes in cross-generational small groups; on a weekly basis, I participated in these small intimate settings where children, teens, college students, young families, middle-age adults and older adults sang, prayed, listened, laughed, shared, played, cried, ate and hoped together—and blessed one another. My experiences in those intergenerational groups changed my understanding of children and my understanding of Christian spiritual formation for children *and* adults. Ultimately these new understandings led me to change my career. The work I do now has grown out of those life-changing intergenerational small groups and is the work that I believe God has called me to do in this season of my life.

What is your goal for this text?

Christine: The main need that I desire to address is the need for unity amongst the body of Christ. If the generations within one congregation are

AUTHOR Q & A

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Christine Lawton Ross (Ph.D., St. Louis University) is professor of Christian education and director of the Christian education program at Concordia University in Irvine, California. She has worked in congregational ministry and has taught in intergenerational, multicultural and overseas contexts. She is also the author of several Bible studies and Sunday school curriculum resources.

constantly separated from one another in ministry activities, and of late in worship, how is there to be any unity? I believe, and the research supports, that all ages are more likely to develop a mature faith when ministry includes all ages working together to build Christ's church through the gifts and talents that God has given each member of Christ's body.

What are the positive takeaways from a church that practices intergenerational Christian formation?

Holly & Christine: Intergenerationality enables the whole church to benefit from each individual's God-given gifts and enables believers to fully live out being the body of Christ and the family of faith. Among the many benefits for both adults and children are a sense of belonging, support for troubled families, better use of resources, character growth and sharing each other's spiritual journeys. Additionally, this book will highlight special benefits for particular age cohorts—children, teens, emerging adults, young adults, middle adults and older adults.

Can intergenerational Christian formation happen just by attending multigenerational churches?

Holly & Christine: For intergenerational Christian formation to happen, the generations must *be* together; they must *know each other*; and they must experience life in the body of Christ *together*. Creating an entire culture or ethos of intergenerationality will require wise leaders who will remind the faith community often of the strengths, benefits and joys of intergenerational experiences. These leaders will share encouraging cross-age stories in person and through Facebook and blogs: eighty-something Charlie and five-year-old Slade pulling weeds together; the youth group and their parents serving Thanksgiving dinner at the shelter; older members inviting all the elementary-aged children to an evening of "Stories from the Dark," where the seniors shared memories from their childhood when the lights went out—or even tales of life before electricity.