

# Intergenerational Learning Model

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James White, in *Intergenerational Religious Education* (Religious Education Press, 1988) identified four patterns of relationships that have become the basic pattern of intergenerational learning experiences: 1) In-Common Experiences, 2) Parallel Learning, 3) Contributive-Occasions, and 4) Interactive Sharing. Most churches design their family-intergenerational learning programs using these four movements, adapting the process to fit their particular needs.

1. **In-Common Experiences.** Intergenerational religious education begins with a multigenerational experience of the theme that all the generations share together. In-common experiences of generations are usually less verbal and more observatory than in the other three elements. In this pattern there is something “out there” or “over there” for us to see or do, something that equalizes the ages. Thus, at the same time and place and in a similar manner, different-aged people listen to music or sing, make an art project, watch a video, hear a story, participate in a ritual, pray together, and so on. In-common experiences for the most part remain at what Jean Piaget calls the “concrete operational” level, where all can learn together.

Shared experiences are absolutely critical for building IGRE. They are the stuff by which other patterns of relationships are built. To the point, Fred Rogers, of television’s *Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood*, makes the case for what is prescribed here when he asks rhetorically, “How can older and younger people respond to each other if they have no experiences together?”

2. **Parallel Learning.** Parallel learning is the second major IG relational pattern. With it the generations are separated in order to work on the same topic or project, but in different ways at a “best fit” development, interest, or skill level. Some of the developmental levels we are talking about are cognitive, psychological, physical, moral, valuational, and so on—all the ways that make people different and special.

Though age groups may be separated, each one is focusing on the same learning task or topic. One of the major criticisms of IGRE is “the tendency to view equality or persons across the age spectrum with uniformity of experience,” with that experience only from the vantage point of the child. By engaging in parallel learning, however, this IGRE shortcoming is avoided.

3. **Contributive-Occasions.** The third pattern of learning is that of contributive-occasions. These occasions are often the step after parallel learning. What is involved is a coming together of different age groups or classes for the purpose of sharing what has been learned or created previously. The joining or rejoining becomes a contributive-occasion where separated pieces to a whole are added together for everyone’s benefit.

Contributive-occasions are more participatory than the other three patterns. If the contributions come from a previous period of parallel learning, the last part of that parallel learning would have been concerned with how to communicate acquired insights or behaviors to other age groups. By

engaging “in mutual contribution” to one another, IG learners discover that the educational whole is great than the sum of its parts.

4. **Interactive Sharing.** Interactive sharing is the fourth major pattern in IGRE relationships. It is a distinctive style or way of learning. Here persons are provided with an opportunity for interpersonal exchange, which may involve experiences or thoughts or feelings or actions. At its best, interactive sharing facilitates a “crossing over” to hear and respond to another’s perspective.

In an ideal IGRE program or event, all four of the patterns of relationships will be enacted. People come together and have an in-common experience. Then they break to separately investigate the common subject at a level appropriate for their highest learning abilities. They come back together to present their insights and work in a shared program. Finally, different generations interact with one another, giving and receiving in the exchanges. In the latter case the participants are sharing, reflecting, debating, and dreaming from the side of the other but for their own edification. (White, *Intergenerational Religious Education*, 26-30)

Together with my colleagues at the Center for Ministry Development (Marianne Martineau, Leif Kehrwald, and Joan Weber), we developed a model of intergenerational learning based on White’s four patterns, which is being used by Catholic parishes in the Generations of Faith Project and in the intergenerational sessions for the *People of Faith* series (a 6-volume series of intergenerational programs from Harcourt Religion). This process is also described in the book *Intergenerational Faith Formation* by Martineau, Kehrwald, and Weber (Twenty-Third Publications).

## **Welcoming Participants & Meal**

Depending on the time of day, a meal begins the program. Use the meal time to introduce people into the theme of the learning program, build community among the participants, do table activities (especially for children) or model at-home practices, such as prayer or a table ritual.

## **Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer**

Welcome people to the program, provide an overview, and lead the opening prayer service.

## **Part 2. All-Ages Learning Experience**

Conduct an All-Ages Learning Experience to introduce the whole assembly to the theme/content of the program. Select or design learning activities that will engage all ages. Examples of all-ages learning activities include:

- ritual or extended prayer service
- dramatic presentation of a Scripture passage or real life story
- storytelling or retelling a Scripture passage with contemporary examples
- witness presentations by church members (of all ages)
- learning games or TV game show formats
- film or media presentation using art/photos and music
- table group activity and discussion in intergenerational, family and/or age-groups.

### **Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience**

Conduct learning activities that explore the theme or topic, organized for all ages (intergenerational) or for specific age-groups (families with children or children-only, adolescents, young adults, and adults), and developed in one of three formats.

1. **Whole Group Format:** learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room in one of two ways:
  - age-specific groupings
  - intergenerational groupings
2. **Learning Activity Center Format:** learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers targeted to specific age groups, or organized by family and/or all age:
  - age-specific learning centers
  - family-centered learning centers
  - intergenerational learning centers
3. **Age Group Format:** learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages:
  - pre-school children or parents with young children (ages 3-5)
  - parents with children (grades 1-5)
  - young adolescents (middle school)
  - older adolescents (high school)
  - young adults
  - adults

### **Part 4. Sharing Reflections and Home Application**

Determine what each participants will bring back from their In-Depth Learning Experience to share/teach the whole assembly or their small group. This can include reports from each age group, presentation of a project or skit, small group sharing, and so on. After the presentations, engage small groups in sharing reflections on the learning experience. Explain the home resources that will extend the learning from the session and demonstrate how people can use them in their daily lives.

### **Part 5. Closing Prayer**

## **Intergenerational Program Examples**

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### **1. Jesus Christ, Son of God**

(From *Professing Our Faith* by John Roberto. Harcourt Religion, 2006)

**Format: Intergenerational Activity Centers**

#### **Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer**

#### **Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Who Do You Say That I Am?**

- Conduct the learning activity to help participants name who Jesus is for them.

### **Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience: Experiencing the Son of God through Gospel Stories**

1. The focus of the activity centers is to discover the qualities of God by exploring a variety of Gospel stories that present the words and actions of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2. Each learning activity center provides an interactive and experiential way for people to explore one aspect of Jesus' divinity through Gospel stories.
3. Activity centers will engage participants in presentations, discussions, and activities. Several centers include dramatic presentations, while others engage participants in creative arts or prayer or a ritual activity. One center includes a film presentation. There is even one that includes eating. If the children get tired, there is a storytelling center just for them.
4. Each center is staffed by a team who guides participants through the learning activities.
5. Each center is designed for all ages, participants can select the centers that interest them the most. Families with children stay together.

#### **Activity Centers**

1. Jesus is Born (Infancy Narratives)
2. Jesus is God's Beloved Son (Baptism of the Lord and Transfiguration)
3. Jesus Teaches Parables of the Kingdom of God
4. Jesus Heals People
5. Jesus Forgives Sin
6. Jesus Raises People from the Dead
7. Jesus Feeds People
8. Stories of Jesus (Storytelling Center)

### **Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application**

#### **Part 5. Closing Prayer**

## **2. Death and Resurrection of Jesus**

(From *Professing Our Faith* by John Roberto. Harcourt Religion, 2006)

**Format: Whole Group**

#### **Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer**

- People are organized into intergenerational table groups for the whole program

#### **Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience: Triduum Quiz**

- Test everyone's knowledge of the Triduum through an activity that matches symbols, ritual actions, and events from the Lectionary readings with the correct Triduum liturgy.

#### **Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience**

##### **A. Guided Tour of Holy Thursday**

- Present the Gospel story of the Last Supper from Matthew, Mark, or Luke in word, drama, and/or visuals (artwork or the film, *Jesus of Nazareth*).
- Guide people in reflecting on the story. Provide commentary on the reading.
- Celebrate a table ritual modeled on the Last Supper.

- Present the Gospel story of the Last Supper from John in word, drama, and/or visuals.
- Guide people in reflecting on the story. Provide commentary on the reading.
- Celebrate a table ritual modeled on the washing of feet with people washing each other's hands.

#### B. Guided Tour of Good Friday

- Present Gospel excerpts of the Passion of Christ in word, drama, and/or visuals.
- Guide people in reflecting on the Passion; provide commentary.
- Explain intercessory prayer and pray together intercessions modeled on the Good Friday liturgy.
- Explain the tradition of the veneration of the cross and process with the cross in the meeting room while people pray and sing.
- Guide people in making their own cross for their home.

#### C. Guided Tour of the Easter Vigil

- Provide a brief overview of the major elements of the Easter Vigil liturgy.
- Celebrate a Service of Light modeled on the Easter Vigil. Use the prayers from the Easter Vigil liturgy. Lead the group through the ritual and explanation of the symbols on the Easter Candle. Light individual candles and sing an appropriate song.
- Present selected Lectionary readings with accompanying prayers from the Easter Vigil liturgy, for example: Genesis 1:1—2:2, Exodus 14:15—15:1 (consider showing the crossing of the Red Sea scene from *The Prince of Egypt*), Romans 6:3-11, and the Gospel reading from the current liturgical year in word, drama, dramatic reading with visuals, or film (Jesus of Nazareth).
- Introduce the sacrament of Baptism as central to the Easter Vigil liturgy and to how your church initiates new members every Easter. Guide people through the initiation rite: pray a short version of the Litany of the Saints, bless the bottles of water at each table, explain the celebration of Baptism and Confirmation, renew the baptismal profession of faith, sprinkle the people with holy water, and sing an appropriate song.

### Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application

#### Part 5. Closing Prayer

## 3. Justice and Solidarity

(From: *Acting for Justice* by John Roberto, Harcourt Religion, 2005.)

**Format: Age Group**

#### Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer

#### Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience

- Activity 1. Where Are You From?—tracing each individual or family journey to the U.S.
- Activity 2. If the World Were a Village of 100 People

#### Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience: Age Group Format

##### 1. Activity 1. How Are We Connected to People around the World?

- Family Activity: What's Inside Your House? (from around the world)
- Adolescent and Adult Activity: What's in Your Life? (from around the world)

2. Activity 2. The Journey of Interdependence
  - Option 1. The Journey of the Chocolate Bar (all ages)
  - Option 2. The Journey of the Banana (all ages)
  - Option 3. The Journey of Coffee (teens or adults)
3. Activity 3—Presentation: Solidarity through Fair Trade
4. Activity 4. What do the Scriptures and Church Teachings Say about Solidarity?
  - Activity: The Good Samaritan for Today
  - Activity: Who Do We Need to Be in Solidarity With?
5. Activity 5. How Can We Build Solidarity among People?—Developing Action Projects

#### **Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application**

#### **Part 5. Closing Prayer**

### **4. The Christian Practice of Forgiving**

(From: Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life by John Roberto, [www.LifelongFaith.com](http://www.LifelongFaith.com))

**Format: Whole Group or Age Group**

#### **Part 1. Gathering and Opening Prayer**

#### **Part 2. All Ages Learning Experience**

- Stories the Challenge of Forgiving
- Telling a Story of Forgiveness
- “Forgiveness Quiz”—8 Reasons to Forgive (Continuum Activity)

#### **Part 3. In-Depth Learning Experience**

1. Challenge of Forgiving: Video Presentation and Discussion: Nooma Video by Rob Bell: Luggage or Lump)
2. Biblical Teaching on Forgiving
  - Courage (Story of Joseph); Mercy (Unforgiving Servant); Faith and Love (Pardon of Sinful Woman); Restoring Relationships (Prodigal Son); Way of Forgiveness (Matthew 5)
  - Activity Options: 1) Read and Report, 2) Rewrite a Bible Story, 3) Dramatize the Story, 4) Create a Forgiveness Ad
3. Ways to Live the Christian Practice in Daily Life
  - Film: Power of Forgiveness (Segments: “The Amish” and “Paths to Forgiveness)
  - Developing the Practice: Strategies & Ideas: “Ten Ways to Forgive;” Role Plays, Demonstration of Forgiveness; Costs and Benefits of Forgiving

#### **Part 4. Sharing Learning Experiences and Home Application**

- Practice Plan for Living the Practice of Forgive Daily
- Writing a Letter to Someone You Are Struggling to Forgive

#### **Part 5. Closing Prayer**