

**Notes from Reset for Renewal:
UCC Love of Children Ministries Conference
November 19-20, 2024**

Resources

[Curriculum Resources - Southern New England Conference of the UCC](#): includes meta-resources on how to select curriculum

[Building Faith's Top Picks for Intergenerational Curriculum](#): selecting curriculum for intergenerational ministry

[Bibliography for Intergenerational Ministry](#): a whole library of resources

[The Adapted Way](#): resources for accessibility and serving people with disabilities

[Faith Formation Leadership Training and Certification - Southern New England Conference of the UCC](#): entry-level, theologically progressive training and certification for faith formation leaders through the SNEUCC

[Complete List of Resources | AUCE](#): meta-resources from the Association of United Church Educators

[Become a Member | AUCE](#): membership in the Association of United Church Educators, includes resource benefits

[Association of United Church Educators](#): AUCE homepage, frequently updated with events and new resources

[Soul Matters Sharing Circle](#): UU curriculum for many age groups

[BLUE THEOLOGY](#): week-long youth or intergenerational mission opportunity for environmental education and creation care theology in CA, TX, and NC

[Progressive Youth Ministry](#): annual conference for progressive youth ministry leaders in TX

[Chalice Press: Family Faith Every Day](#): program providing resources for family faith life, accepting cohort applications in May

[Family Faith Start Up Plan](#): from Traci Smith and Family Faith Every Day

[Picture Book Theology](#): finding the sacred in secular (and some religious) picture books

[StoryPath](#): pairs story books with lectionary selections

[Read with Empathy — Doing Good Together™](#): empathy-building book list

Books

A Gospel for All Ages by David Csinos
The Rabbit Listened by Cori Doerrfeld
Unreasonable Hospitality by Will Guidara
Faithful Families by Traci Smith
Love Makes a Family by Sophie Beer
Make Room by Laura Alary
This is the Mystery of Easter by Amelia Dress
Holy Troublemakers and Unconventional Saints by Daneen Akers
When Church Stops Working by Andrew Root and Blair Bertrand
Little Prayers for Everyday Life by Traci Smith
Snuggle Time Easter Stories by Glenys Nellist
I Wonder: God's Grand Story by Glenys Nellist

Big ideas and themes

Program design: think why, how, and then what, and keep it simple (church is already intergenerational by nature)

Child-friendly: church activities are not child-centered 100% of the time, but children should always have a place and things to do anywhere and everywhere in the church (kids come to work with staff, anticipate that kids will be at everything even when they're not centered)

Playground considerations: too much division of age groups can hinder mutual transformation, prioritize "playing church," play communion sets and stoles, soft busy books (also great for neurodivergence and memory loss)

Isolation: post-pandemic, people are hesitant to make plans and commit to them, struggling to find connection within and across age groups, find support for parenting and caregiving, need to know they won't be judged because of their child(ren)'s behavior, avoid seeing church as just another thing that keeps people busy, but as part of the flow of daily life

Lifelong discipleship: investing in children's and youth ministry means you're investing in future adult church members and elders

Bringing children to church is a stewardship activity!

Models of Family Ministry

1. Cloud of witnesses: children's ministers, volunteers, and pastors as relationship architects, cultivating felt and perceived network of care
2. Milestones and markers: making space to recognize and support coming of age, different rites of passage and rituals through the lifespan
3. Formation at home: simple and tactile moments for the faith life of the family
4. Overhearing worship: children overhear better than they hear, playground as a space to partially engage while listening
5. Children-specific programs: important to give people the opportunity to learn children's names and get to know them
6. Community/compassion-focused programs: connect to neighbors, gives people of diverse ages and backgrounds a separate thing to focus and work together on that allows them to get to know each other more naturally
7. Intergenerational fun events: putting kids and adults in the same space for moments of pure joy

Ideas for intergenerational worship

- Embrace the sensory: use sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile elements
- Accessibility for one person or group often benefits everyone (i.e. visual bulletins help children, but also anyone who can't read English or see small letters)
- Sensory check-in: five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can touch, two things you can smell, one thing you can taste
- Opt-in for sensory elements: earplugs or headphones, sensory-free zone or entrance
- Creating a comfortable atmosphere: let people bring their cup of coffee or sippy cup of juice into the sanctuary, offer coffee before and after service
- Bring thematic sensory elements in: smell of bread and grape juice on communion Sundays, smell of frankincense and myrrh on Epiphany
- Pew pals: small stuffed animal for kid or adult comfort, never sit alone
- Prayer shawls: pick up and knit one, grab one and wear it in worship, give them to people who are leaving or grieving
- Shared craft projects: simple enough for all ages to do around a table together, like fleece blanket making
- Make every experience invitational rather than expectational, create a culture of belonging, encourage imagination, participation, and grace
- Trauma-informed care works for all, assume everyone needs accommodations
- Need for curriculum to be accessible for volunteers to pick it up and start leading, neurodivergent kids to have flexibility, helpful theology for all
- Curriculum ideas: The Big Story, Big Faith, Spark Lectionary, Soul Matters, Illustrated Ministry
- Question for the car ride: something to talk about as a family/think about on your own as you drive/ride home

Culturally sustaining ministries

- Children and youth (and adults) are constantly asking: Who am I? Who does the world say that I am? Who do my peers say that I am?
- Culturally-sustaining approaches are grounded in a cultural view of human development, aware of social identities and intersectionality, and take collective responsibility for learning about youth cultures and communities
- Leaders should make time to talk to children, youth, and parents about their lives, families, and cultural practices and find ways to integrate those practices into the life of the church, especially children's and youth ministries
- Asset-based mindset and language means viewing culture as a resource to celebrate, honor, explore, and extend while learning about new ideas and practices at church

Making physical space welcoming

- Sensory support: headphones/earplugs available, fidget toys, relevant manipulatives
- Visibility and representation: pride flags and stickers, visible statements of inclusion for all ages/abilities/backgrounds
- Religious imagery: avoid choosing inaccurate depictions of Jesus and Bible characters that are whitewashed or anachronistic, remedy existing inaccurate or misleading imagery in a sensitive way
- Include different types of food in fellowship hour and potlucks, represent different cultures in the congregation and the world, celebrate different cultural traditions
- Use inclusive language: not only parents and guardians, but also caregivers— some people do not have legal custody, but care for children anyway
- Work with accessibility programs in local town governments and school systems
- Create seating options for all bodies
- Inclusive play: diverse books, toys, curriculum, visuals

Ideas for parents and families

- Give parents a sense of contribution and ownership with programming, but in a realistic way: break down activities into bite-sized tasks that parents can take on (takes extra effort on staff end, but worthwhile for engagement)
- Take home bags: resources, curriculum, manipulatives to take home and use as a family
- Family volunteer opportunities (Doing Good Together model), child-friendly service projects, reflection questions and resources to integrate into family's faith life
- Association, conference, and regional gatherings for children, youth, and families (next Regional Youth Event in 2026)
- Reuse market fundraiser (snowflake shop)

Traci Smith on Faithful Families

- Multigenerational: superficial, polite interaction vs.
- Cross-generational: more interaction, but not transformative vs.
- Intergenerational: comprehensive mutuality, equality, reciprocity, transformation, mutual sharing and learning, accommodating and including even with conflicting needs

- Not just grown ups and children, but adults of all ages (think 40 year olds and 80 year olds, 20 year olds and 60 year olds)
- Church as a third space (outside of home and work), but often the only third space that almost always includes meaningful interactions
- Try a mid-week intergenerational program with food and learning
- The more irrelevant programming is, the more magical it can be
- Start with your “why” and center that, then figure out how, then what

In worship/in your space

- Liturgies with repeated elements
- Creative prayer stations within service
- Intergenerational preaching moment
- Prayergrounds are limited in separating age groups, restricting mutual transformation
- Consider toys that allow children to “play church” like toy communion sets, battery candles, water for baptism Sundays, banners, mini stoles, mini robes
- Bright, interactive worship aids
- Alternative seating, labeled for what it is, not who it’s for
- Label restrooms based on what’s in there, not who they’re for (i.e. word restroom and icon with toilet and urinal, icon with only toilet), label quiet rooms as such (not only for people with sensory needs)
- Quiet books (ask handy church members to make) good for kids, also neurodivergence and memory loss

Intergenerational ministry in Advent and Lent

- Check out specific Faithful Families editions for Advent/Christmas and Lent/Easter
- Acts of kindness tree: write acts of kindness you’ve witnessed on ornaments or take an act of kindness off the tree and do it during the week
- Ornament stories: bring in a meaningful ornament and tell its story
- Advent workshops, crafts, intergenerational pageants
- Revised three pillars of Lent: service, simplifying, prayers

Block format for intergenerational ministry

- Food: not just an extra, but central to life together, part of the thing we do as church, a huge gift to all ministries, but especially intergenerational ministry, try food you can make and/or assemble together
- Stations: like stations of the cross, prayer stations, learning stations, craft/activity stations like candle making, mission stations like blessing bags, planting/gardening
- Worship: child-friendly, something for everyone, Psalms are great for all ages, accessible songs, accessible message
- Story
- Hands on Activity: for all kinds of bodies and minds, rituals like drawing hearts on hands with water or passing the peace, turning regrets into compost
- Learning: activities like raising caterpillars and releasing butterflies around Easter, exploring prisms and light

- Prayer: creative prayer, easter egg prayers, prayer beads, jelly bean prayer, pretzel prayer, daily examen, flower prayer, pitcher and bowl of water prayer

Key ideas

- Don't call it intergenerational ministry: give it a name that's less jargon-y
- Simplify: spend less time doing and more time being, get to know each other
- Get buy in, get help, and delegate
- Put on your intergenerational glasses and look at everything you do through them
- Slow down and listen: don't try to do more than everyone else, but do things differently with a purpose

General don'ts

- Do too much
- Use most children's sermon materials on the internet
- Use object lessons
- Teach theological concepts
- Insist children come forward

Sandy's notes from Rural Churches with the Rev. Roberto Ochoa

Focused on small churches, ethnic identified churches

Many of these churches have a feeling of disconnect

Feeling isolated

Struggling financially

No Children

Desperate for children – not knowing how to get them through the door

Suggestion of using Grandparents or “foster” grandparents to offer to get the children and youth to church on Sunday mornings.

They need to supplement or create their own programming for children and youth.

We specifically talked about the Filipino community as one of the participants was having a hard time getting her Filipino community to come to events.

We suggested she host a class that meets regularly where people/children can come and learn about the Filipino culture. This would be good for children growing up here in the states and for people who are not Filipino.