



APPLICATION TOOL 6

Developing a Youth-Friendly and Youth-Involving Congregation

Assessment

How would you rate your efforts in developing a youth-friendly and youth-involving congregation, building intergenerational connections between youth and the congregation?

	Rating *			
1. Our congregation knows and values young people, and this is communicated by church leadership and the whole community.	1	2	3	4
2. Our congregation is knowledgeable about the vision and activities of youth ministry, and places a priority on ministry with young people.	1	2	3	4
3. Our congregation invites and welcomes young people at Sunday worship.	1	2	3	4
4. Our congregation encourages young people to participate with other generations in church-wide ministries and programs.	1	2	3	4
5. Our congregation integrates young people into leadership roles within the church.	1	2	3	4
6. Our congregation involves young people in leading programs, activities, and ministries for the whole church community	1	2	3	4
7. Our youth ministry regularly offers programs that connect youth with the other generations in the church.	1	2	3	4

* 1 = low or not present 4 = high or a strong feature

	Rating			
	1	2	3	4
8. Our congregation offers intergenerational programs and activities that connects all of the generations for learning, worship, prayer, building relationships, and service.	1	2	3	4
9. Our youth ministry offers programming that prepares young people to participate in the life of the church throughout the year (worship, service, outreach, and so on).	1	2	3	4

Reflection

Reflect on the results of your assessment with the church staff and youth ministry team.

- What strengths did you identify? What areas of improvement did you identify?
- How “youth-friendly” is your congregation today? How connected to the church community do you think young people feel today?
- What barriers do you face when it comes to connecting youth with the community and building intergenerational relationships? What steps can you take to overcome these barriers?
- What are the one or two priorities that you need to act on now?

Strategies for Becoming More Intergenerational

There is no one way to connect youth with the whole church community. Each congregation is a very specific community with its own unique identity, history, traditions, people, and geography. Customize these ideas for your community. Use them to spark your own creativity. There are many ways to build a youth-friendly and youth-involving congregation.

- **Build a youth-friendly congregation culture where young people are valued and intentionally included in all of congregation life.**
 1. Raise the profile of young people in the congregation community by making them more visible at gatherings, recognizing their presence, and affirming their contributions.
 2. Cultivate a widespread, strong expectation for engagement of the congregation with young people. Develop a consistent expectation that all members should be engaged positively with young people and that positive engagement will be encouraged and appreciated.
 3. Educate the congregation to the “real” picture of young people, confronting the popular stereotypes of youth that they may see in the media. Presenting research

and actual stories of young people that will help the congregation understand and become comfortable with young people.

4. Examine your church's activities—from worship to education to social events—to determine if they are welcoming to all generations, especially young people. Explore whether these activities offer opportunities for more relationship building across generations.
5. Involve the congregation in praying for youth and their events, such as service trips or retreats, and milestones in the life of young people, such as graduations and other accomplishments.
6. Offer simple, one-time opportunities for adults and young people to get to know each other, such as social events, service projects, or educational experiences.
7. Link young people with adults in the congregation who have insights and life experiences that may be helpful to the particular young person, such as discerning life choices, planning for a career, managing money.
8. Create communication strategies for promoting the good news about young people and their role in the church and wider community, such as photo displays in the church building, newsletters, photos/video/stories on the church website, and presentations at church meetings and gatherings.

- **Infuse intergenerational relationships and programming into the existing youth ministry program and activities.**

1. Integrate intergenerational programming into the youth ministry plan and calendar, for example, quarterly intergenerational nights.
2. Intergenerationalize youth programs—take a youth-only program and redesign it to include other generations, for example, intergenerational service.
3. Structure youth programs with an intergenerational connection, for example, include interviews with church members of different ages or a invite a panel of congregation members into a youth program.
4. Incorporate intergenerational dialogues into programming—provide opportunities for youth to access the wisdom, experience, knowledge, and interests of older adults through presentations, performances, and discussions and provide seniors with an opportunity for recognition.
5. Develop mentoring relationships between youth and adults, such as prayer partners, learning-to-pray spiritual direction, service involvement, and Confirmation mentors.

- **Incorporate youth into the ministries and leadership roles of the congregation.**

1. Identify ways to integrate youth into leadership roles in the life of the congregation:
 - (a) Identify all of the possibilities for leadership in the ministries, programs, and

activities of the congregation. (b) Identify specific roles for youth and work with leaders to connect young people with leadership roles. (c) Provide training for adults on how to work with youth and for youth on how to work with adults.

2. Organize a leadership or ministry apprenticeship for youth to serve in ministry leadership positions or on committees and councils.
 3. Create new church leadership roles that are led by young people and which draw upon some of their unique and special gifts that can benefit the entire parish community, such as online and website strategies, video production, drama productions, music concerns (instrumental and voice), youth choir for Sunday worship, and art for worship.
 4. Create a youth program or task form to analyze youth involvement in the congregation. Working in teams, take a month to explore the life and ministries of the church. Create a report on youth involvement in church life and present it to the young people, the church staff and church leadership groups, and the whole congregation.
- **Create models of intergenerational programming for all the generations in the congregation.**
 1. *Intergenerational service/mission opportunities:* Offer a variety of service/mission projects for all ages where people can choose from different levels of commitment from beginner experiences to advanced projects that are local, regional, national, and international. Each mission/service project includes a learning component that focuses on understanding the issue being addressed, exploring the teachings of Scripture and tradition, developing the skills for mission and service, and then, upon completion of the project, reflecting upon the involvement. Service/mission projects can be “developmental” with projects geared to different levels of involvement and challenge including:
 - local mission projects lasting anywhere from a few hours to one day in length.
 - short-term mission trips lasting anywhere from two to five days and requiring an overnight stay on location
 - weeklong mission trips within the United States as well as to foreign countries, designed for those who are ready to take the next big step in service.
 - global expedition trips of ten to fourteen days that provide the opportunity to be immersed for a longer period in the targeted community and culture
 2. *Intergenerational retreat experiences:* Develop a congregation-wide retreat over several days with weekend and/or evening sessions. Organize the retreat experience by conducting intergenerational sessions, rather than sessions for

individual groups. Develop a focus for the mission, such as following Jesus, or growing in prayer, or what we believe as Christians. Select individual topics for each session of the retreat and provide participants with materials to continue the retreat at home.

3. Intergenerational learning programs: Develop learning programs that involve all ages in the congregation, such as:
 - monthly large group intergenerational learning programs (that can replace age-group programs once a month)
 - intergenerational workshops throughout the year focused on all-ages content, such as faith practices, church year seasons, and/or current social issues
 - intergenerational small group learning programs, such as Bible study or lectionary-based Scripture reflection (at the church or in homes)
 - intergenerational family retreats and camps

One model for intergenerational learning that is being used in thousands of churches incorporates the following elements:

- Welcome, community building, and opening prayer
- Part 1: An All-Ages Learning Experience for the whole assembly that introduces the theme or topic for the program.
- Part 2: In-Depth Learning Experiences that probe 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 conducted in one of three formats:
 - *Whole Group Format*: learning in small groups with the whole group assembled in one room (age-specific or all ages small groups);
 - *Age Group Format*: learning in separate, parallel groups organized by ages;
 - *Learning Activity Center Format*: learning at self-directed or facilitated activity centers (age-specific and/or all ages learning centers).
- Part 3. An All-Ages Contributive Learning experience in which each generation teaches the other generations.
- Part 4. Reflection on the learning experience and interactive group sharing.
- Closing Prayer