We Are Family: A Multi-Generational Approach to Worship and the Arts
Ross Parsley

How to Use This Tool

This Conference Classics process tool is designed to accompany an audio recording of a Willow Creek Association conference session. You can refer to the tool while listening to the session and use it afterward to dig deeper into the content, or you can use the tool to get the highlights without even listening to the session.

This tool consists of four parts:

- The **PREVIEW** section lists the problem that the session addresses and the recommendation that the speaker makes.
- The **KEY CONCEPTS** section breaks the session down into the core ideas most important for you to understand.
- The **NEXT STEPS** section gives step-by-step guidance for implementing the speaker’s recommendation.
- The **REFLECT** section includes questions to help you practice, apply, and implement what you’ve learned. Although the questions are geared primarily to individuals, groups can use them as a discussion guide.

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Problem: Churches separate age groups with good intentions, but unwittingly sabotage the ability of different generations to value and learn from each other’s gifts and wisdom.

Recommendation: Implement a multigenerational approach, where the benefits of the wisdom and resources of age are combined with the enthusiasm and innovation of youth.

Key Concepts

A New Paradigm of Ministry

- The church is described as a family, a building, and a body.
- Today, the church is often thought of as a product to be consumed.
  - Individuals go church shopping, looking for some sign that they belong.
  - Unlike shopping, no one gets to choose their own family.
  - The church shopping paradigm is wrong.
  - That doesn’t mean that churches shouldn’t try to reach people.
  - Instead, it means that for members, it’s not about how the church serves them.
  - Belonging in a church comes from God adding someone to a family.
- Fewer and fewer people in society know what it’s like to be in a healthy family.
- As people have lost the concept of family in society, they have lost the concept of the church as family.
- God wants us to belong to one another, knowing each other’s failures and flaws and loving each other anyway.

The Family Worship Table

- Eating together is a sign of family health.
- The dynamics of a family table require everyone to acknowledge that everyone else is there.
  - Parents need to help their children eat and teach them to how to behave.
  - The children need to listen to the adults’ stories.
- Like families dividing into adults’ tables and kids’ tables because it’s less messy and inconvenient, churches divide into age group ministries.
  - Dividing into age groups is done in the name of reaching each age group where they are.
  - Instead, we teach them not to value dinner with the family, buying into the concept of niche marketing.
  - Because the different age groups don’t interact, there’s not an opportunity to teach children to respect their elders.
  - This division creates spoiled children.
  - Teenagers today hunger for community and acceptance in a family.

Thinking Generationally

- Psalm 145:4 says that one generation will declare God’s works to another.
- Because the generations are not often together anymore, each generation only declares God’s works to themselves.
- Both the young and the old benefit from being together.
- At the dinner table, children need to be accommodated so that they can even come to the table, where they can be trained and shown how to act.
- Churches need to lean toward the young, not to placate them, but to give them something they recognize and to help them feel like they belong.

2. **Invest in them; don't merely use them.**
   - It’s not uncommon to find young people playing on a worship team but it is unusual to find them shaping the worship routines.
   - Often worship leaders are tempted to find young artists to make themselves look good.
   - Instead, let them shape what you’re doing.
   - Engage in real dialogue with them, listening to what they have to say.
   - Through that dialogue, you can begin to shape and mentor them.

3. **Include them in all areas of ministry.**
   - John Maxwell says that the key to reproducing yourself in ministry is to never do ministry alone.
   - Ask yourself if you’re willing to watch.
   - Being willing to watch doesn’t mean sitting on the sidelines for the rest of your life, but it does mean a change in role from the person who does to the person who mentors.
   - Give the younger person responsibility and accountability.
   - In exchange, they will give you respect.
   - If they don’t respect you, do an honest self-examination and ask if you’re worthy of their respect.
   - Consider what you have done to invest in them so that they can respond to you.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Qualities to Look For:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>Innocence</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Look for young people who love God and have energy.</td>
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<td>- Older people love to see a young person worshipping God with innocent abandon.</td>
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<td>2. <strong>Love</strong></td>
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<td>- You need to find someone that you honestly enjoy being around.</td>
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<td>- You need to have a God-given connection with them.</td>
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<td>3. <strong>Danger</strong></td>
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<td>- Some of the most dangerous kids in our youth groups are the ones we reject, but they’re the ones that God wants to use most.</td>
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<tr>
<td>- The youth who look dangerous are the ones who can reach the kids who most need to be reached.</td>
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**Reflect**

1. Ross makes a provocative claim that many churches unintentionally create spoiled consumers when they keep the generations separated in age-specific ministries. How does this fit with what you’ve observed in your church? Journal your thoughts below, continuing onto the next page if needed.