

Case Study

Intergenerational Worship Ministries

St. Katherine Drexel Church, Ramsey, MN

Sunday worship is the central intergenerational experience for any thriving church community. All other ministries lead people toward their experience of worship and meaningful worship also propels people into other ministries. As the core church experience, it is critically important to design worship in a way that engages all ages and all generations. The ministries that serve the worshipping community will help to make the intergenerational character of worship come alive if they represent all generations that are present in the community.

St. Katherine Drexel Church in Ramsey, Minnesota understands the importance of training and empowering worship leaders from every generation. Katy Hager, a member of the staff at St. Katherine, reports that there is no “You’re not old enough” in this church. They implement the call-of-Jeremiah approach to worship ministries. When Jeremiah claimed he was too young, God would not hear of it and called Jeremiah into ministry with even greater vigor! Representatives of every generation are active on Sunday at St. Katherine.

Lectors

Proclaiming the Scripture readings from the pulpit on Sunday is usually reserved for adults with the best voices. Child lectors are rarely seen outside of a special school worship service or a First Communion ceremony. But at St. Katherine, children as young as 3rd grade are on the regular schedule to proclaim the Scripture to the whole community on Sunday. Proper training can produce outstanding lectors of all ages. Training, practice, encouragement and parent support are keys to developing high-quality young lectors.

Music Ministry

Music is another key area of worship that intergenerational practitioners frequently address as a make-or-break element of intergenerational success. Music touches the heart and moves us at an unconscious level. Music that we don’t like drains the life out of us. How can music touch all generations present if the music ministry is only representative of one or two generations? Adding children and teens to the adult music ministry stretches the capacity of the ministry to effectively reach the hearts of all worshippers, not just one or two generations in the community.

Children and teenagers play instruments and sing in the choirs right along with the adults at St. Katherine. There’s no need for a separate children’s choir or a cool teen group that only plays music for the teen worship service. This church is integrating a variety of musical styles to empower the whole community to participate in song at every worship service.

The Tech Side of Music

Creating exceptional sound is important if music is going to accomplish its purpose. In today’s world, this means that a high-tech sound system needs to be used, especially in larger churches. Some churches, like St. Katherine, are using sound technicians to balance the music and the other sound components of the worship service so that people can clearly hear everything from the sanctuary. The world of technology provides abundant opportunities to build partnerships between the generations. Adults who understand sound technology have a skill that is highly attractive to teens. At St. Katherine, adults mentor teens into the sound technology ministry that serves the Sunday worshipping

community. The adults teach the teens how to run the sound board and then let them do their stuff on Sunday.

This is an important responsibility at St. Katherine because of the extensive instrumentation used in their choir. They have drums, keyboard, guitars and a complex microphone set-up. This kind of instrumentation in addition to traditional organ music is commonly identified as a key to designing successful intergenerational music for Sunday worship.

Ushers

In some churches, ushers represent the greatest challenge to innovation. It can become a men's club that is hard to break into, but the barrier is not impermeable. More churches are reporting great success with usher innovation that often results in intergenerational participation in the ministry. St. Katherine invites whole families to act as ushers together at the same worship service. Everyone is given important roles and mentored by experienced ushers.

St. Katherine is a church that values its intergenerational identity. They have successfully developed intergenerational learning models. They've designed community events that bring together the whole community for recreation. They even serve the poor with old and young working together. Worshipping and leading worship in an age-segregated way would be a glaring contradiction in the church like St. Katherine. Katy Hager sums it up this way, "What I appreciate about our parish is that it is intergenerational as a whole. Adults and kids regularly sit at tables during coffee and donut time after Mass and talk. This is not planned; it just happens.