

Q&A WITH WES & JUDY WICK

Getting Intentional About Intergenerational Ministry

Q As young people age, they're more likely to feel older generations could offer them guidance. What does this reveal about the value of cross-generational relationships? How might these relationships show up in faith community?

A As we grow older, we long for our experience accumulation to be valued, a hope realized in most non-Western cultures. Here in America, generationally interdependent attitudes may take longer to germinate. Yet the Apostle Paul stresses that the body of Christ, by definition, operates best interdependently. Collaboration, not competition.

A good starting point is realizing how much we need those at the opposite end of the age spectrum, not how much they need us, even though both are true. Cross-generational relationships are healthiest when we value each other. We can grow so much through these relationships.

Corralling people by age group is a common starting point in churches, but in the end we're better together. Ideally, church leaders would recognize the need for broader interaction and intentionally create opportunities where these intergenerational relationships can become more common.

Q Based on your experience, what have you seen intergenerational ministry do for the livelihood of a church? What are some of the Kingdom benefits to being intentional in this area?

A Our parachurch ministry, YES! Young Enough to Serve, focuses on the serving potential of adults over 55. We've led teams where just older adults are present, and we've also led teams where multiple generations serve and consistently interact with one another.

While all of these trips are meaningful, the intergenerational dynamic adds so much. Working side-by-side, the young engage in conversation with mature Christian adults. Missional, hard-working hearts are nurtured, and positive cross-generational relationships emerge.

Intergenerational leadership is also extremely helpful. One [older] adult leader we mentored was pleased to share that most of her volunteers were in their twenties. These relationships had a palpable ripple effect in her church and community.

Being sincerely valued by the whole church brings personal affirmation to a new level of wholesomeness. Certainly, it yields a Kingdom win, a healthier and more unified church and broader disciple-making opportunities.



Wes and Judy Wick are founders and directors of YES! Young Enough to Serve, a ministry targeting the serving potential of adults in life's second half. They have intentionally engaged younger adults with them in this quest.

Q Younger and older generations don't always hold positive views of the other. How can people of all ages work to bridge this gap and begin sharing with and learning from one another?

A Perhaps our lives reflect an "I have no need of you" attitude toward those much younger or much older. But a spirit of personal repentance can lead us down a biblical path that bears fruit. Once we put ourselves in the crosshairs of those needing change, we're on our way to building a bridge.

Reinforcing the Church as the family of God can help challenge cross-generational apathy.

The best cross-generational bridges are built with lots of collaboration and open discussion between generations. [A good place to start would be] adding some age breadth to your leadership teams. The New Testament is full of rich examples of collaboration between generations, including Paul, Timothy and Titus.

Q How would you encourage older adults who not only feel they lack opportunities to guide younger generations through life struggles, but also feel ill-prepared to help?

A Real-life application often differs from classroom study, and it's natural to have inadequacy jitters as we tackle anything new. "Go and make disciples" seemed a lot safer as a theoretical, back-room Bible study concept. But we've got to work through these inadequacies with a willingness to learn and a sense of calling, bravery and determination to steward our gifts of faith and longevity.

We do need help in structuring opportunities. Chances are, young people aren't lining up outside seniors' doors waiting to be mentored. Effective opportunities might include intergenerational small groups, prayer partnerships, teams at serving events, combined senior and youth events, in-home hospitality, hosting youth events and community meals (insisting on an intergenerational mix at each table).

We're not there to have the perfect answer and scripture reference for every life struggle. Part of the task is asking good questions and having a listening ear. When asked, we want to be ready to share what God has taught us through our own life journey and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us as we both listen and share. ■

