



Towards Truly Intergenerational Messy Church

More than a fad, the renewed interest in intergenerational ministry is underpinned by a growing body of research that affirms intergenerational connections as key to sustainable, long-term faith formation and discipleship. If an intergenerational approach is the key to effective ministry with people of all ages, what might it look like in the Messy Church context?

At the most basic level, being intergenerational is about two or more different generations engaging together. By its very nature, this is the reality of Messy Church – with at least three generations (children, their parents and older leaders/volunteers) often present. However, simply having multiple generations in the same space does not make the experience *intergenerational*. To be an intergenerational experience requires the generations to be genuinely interacting and engaging together – not just predominantly children with children or adults with adults, not just predominantly a small number of adults “organising” or “leading” activities for children, not just a parent/carer predominantly engaging with the child/children in their care – but multiple individual interactions across multiple generations.

Being truly intergenerational, however, is much more than our activities and engagement, the things we do. Being intergenerational is also about who we are and how we are – our values, our beliefs, our attitudes, our posture in relation to the different generations. In the Messy Church context, this predominantly plays out in the way we as adults “see” and relate to children. Whilst being alongside, listening, learning and sharing together are all valuable, being truly intergenerational involves a more comprehensive mutuality, equality and reciprocity in relationship. As much as we desire to see children at Messy Church grow and learn and change, how open are we, as adults, to growing, learning and changing as a consequence of our relationships with children? As much as we, as leaders/volunteers, long to see the lives of parents/carers enhanced through their engagement with us, how open are we to being transformed through our relationship with them?

A truly intergenerational Messy Church is not something that just happens. It requires intentionality. It requires modelling and deliberate action on the part of leaders and volunteers. It requires leadership that has a focus on curating Messy Church as an intergenerational experience and cultivating the values, attitudes and behaviours that enhance intergenerational engagement. For optimal growth as multi-age discipleship communities, Messy Church leaders need to be intentional in developing their understanding and practise of ministry that is truly intergenerational. Some next steps for Messy Church leaders and volunteers in their intergenerational journey might include...

- Reflecting on this article as a team
- Reviewing your Messy Church through an intergenerational lens
- Reading more broadly around the topic of intergenerational ministry
- Seeking out training in relation to intergenerational ministry and Messy Church

Recommended resources:	Barnett, Beth	<u>Party on Together</u>
	Moore, Lucy	<u>All-Age Worship</u>
	Moore, Paul	<u>Making Disciples in Messy Church</u>
	Payne, Martyn	<u>Messy Togetherness</u>
	Roberto et al	<u>Generations Together</u>
	Ross & Allen	<u>Intergenerational Christian Formation</u>

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