

Worship Session 3 – An introduction to Intergenerational Worship

Hello and welcome to the third of our third of our sessions on Worship replacing the planned worship roadshows. My name is Nicola and I am the children and youth development officer for the Eastern Synod of the United Reformed Church.

This session is entitled an introduction all age worship and to get us thinking about being together in Intergenerational worship.

In the first session Paul got us thinking about why we worship and before even venturing into trying to define all age worship it is good to recap why we worship together. So, to recap from the first two sessions. The number one reason for us gathering is to give God his worth: it should therefore be reverent, holy and full of praise. We are looking to enable a connection between God and those gathered to facilitate an encounter to be transformational and relevant to our lives today.

What is All Age/Intergenerational Worship?

Thinking about the prospect of All age worship can easily produce a cry of anguish. I remember as I started out in family ministry many years ago being given a short book entitled 'All Age Warship' suggesting that we might be entering a battle. I reflected on some of the things I had heard said about all age worship from different members of a church congregation when there is an all age service. Here are some of their quotes:

- From the single parent *'Oh no the children are going to be staying in church?'* Feeling the panic of keeping two small children occupied and quiet.
- From the more mature single person *'actions songs and craft that's not for me'* wondering why they cannot have their usual morning service.
- From children saying to their parents *'why can't I go to Junior church, Its boring here'*.
- And finally, from the person leading the service *'it takes so much preparation'*

These are just individual thoughts, but possibly reflect how many people feel. This quote from Lucy Moore sums it up for me 'It is time to admit that worship with all ages present is easy to do appallingly and difficult to do well. It's time to acknowledge that it takes a huge amount of grace from every participant...'

Let us think about what all age worship is. Just for a moment ask yourself what age do you think of when you hear the words 'all age'? When I have asked this question in training most people say a child somewhere between 3 and 11. Very few ever think of anyone between the age of 16 – 100. If that is our initial reaction, then we invariably start to plan around what we think the children need and not about intergenerational worship that engages everyone no matter what age, that gives everyone space to encounter God.

All age suggests that the only difference is age. We divide people by the number of years they have been alive not by their depth of spirituality, how long they have been Christians, the way that they learn, or any other definition that highlights the diversity of the people whom Christ has called to follow him. The list could go on as each of us are different irrespective of age. We come together, all generations, in intergenerational worship.

This definition of all age worship from Lucy Moore sums up what we are aspiring to. *'A gathered community of Christians coming together to Praise God, meet him and learn about him.'*

David Csinos writing about the Spirituality of children, and for me all ages, wrote:

'We come in many colours shapes and sizes and we express the common spiritual dimension of our humanity in many different ways still we are rooted in the same soil, we may express our spirituality in different ways, but we all need to be rooted in Christ. The source of our wisdom' This quote may have been about the children he was researching but I think applies to everyone.

Children in worship

In the bible we can see examples both in the old and new testament that highlight the presence of children in the worshipping community in some case at the heart and if we are to be like children to enter the kingdom then how can we do that if we constantly send them to another place for their worship and learning. We learn from each other by worshipping together. *'Children belong with the worshipping congregation because the body of Christ has no age requirements. Christianity is age-inclusive.'* David Ng & Virginia Thomas

Even when worshipping together we often feel the need to send the Children to another part of the church to colour or play. The challenge is to worship together as one body each bringing their own respective skills and needs.

What All Age is?

How do we consider this diversity and make a service accessible to all without dumbing down, trivialising or going above people's heads? The question what is all age worship?

Worshipping together helps to build relationships across the generations. Encouraging a parent and child to pray together using the five-finger prayer. The older person sat alone can help the dad struggling to manage three children on his own.

The worship needs to involve everyone, as Lindsey said in last week's session, we cannot please everyone all of the time. But by including a picture to accompany a bible reading that may be too difficult for some to understand, it engages them in a different way.

We need to be inspiring, if we are not excited by what we are saying then others will feel the same. And the service needs to be accessible to all thinking about the language that we use.

Engage the senses and include different styles, some of us like visual images; some symbols and others listening and the written word. By engaging the senses, we can really help people to reflect and engage.

Be creative in what you say and do and encourage those participating to think and respond creatively.

What it is not!

For just a moment let us consider what all age worship is not. As I have already mentioned it is not child focussed it is for everyone. We should not be dumbing down what we do but looking for

different ways to engage. We will be looking in future sessions about how to do this. The worship should not be considered as entertainment or become a performance it should never be considered as entertainment or become a performance. Everyone needs to feel they are part of the worship and the service should not be segmented into a service with bits in it for the children. I once attended a service and heard as the story was announce children this is for you, a sure way to get the adults to stop listening and the children to think this is the only part for them.

Hook, line, and sinker

In the session on structuring an act of worship Lindsey gave many ideas that are as relevant to all age worship as any other services. But I want to share with you my top tip for planning an all age worship. I have used fishing examples as my reminder and whenever planning a service that is intergenerational, I find this helps me to focus.

Starting with the bible passage and a time of prayer decide what you want everyone to go away from the service thinking about and use this to plan all the aspects of the service. What is your hook? how are you going to get everyone engaged? It can be a simple picture or an object, but it draws everyone in. I find when I revisit a church, they will always remember my hook! The line - Consider the main point that will ebb and flow through the service how this will be developed, how will you unpack the message through songs prayers reading and creative ideas. And finally, what will everyone take home in their net? what will they be thinking about and reminded of through the week ahead.

Children and many adults have a short attention span. With children you cannot exclude the fact that their attention span is less, a toddler will listen for a minute for each year of age so no activity can really be more than 5 mins. That does not mean the service has to be short but that no single element should last for more than 5 minutes. Try reflecting on the bible reading in two different ways with a song in between. Most importantly keep the flow of the service.

Stick to one theme one clear message reiterated in different ways don't try and make too many points decide on the aim as I mentioned previously. Use simple language, make it understandable not using long words that would require explanation.

Try to include the use of more than one sense in each activity so visuals and words or actions and words. Symbols are accessible to people of all ages for example a stone, cross, heart, light, and water all symbols that help us discover and rediscover truths about God through worship. Give space for silence and reflection. Children need space for reflection and silence just as adults do. If you are concerned the best way is to always say when the quiet time will end children (and adults) relax if they know how long it is going to be. You can combine pictures and music with quiet reflection time and that engages all learning styles.

Make space for awe and wonder. Ask I wonder questions and leave space for everyone to reflect and use their imagination, do not feel you need to give an answer or explain.

Encourage participation using different voices and ages to be part of the worship.

Conclusion

Paul quoted in his first session we should never come out of worship without having been surprised and perhaps that begins by surprising ourselves.

As this Quote from Vincent Donovan's 'Christianity Rediscovered' says we can journey in a different way and experience new things together.

"In working with children, do not try to call them back to where they were, and do not try to call them to where you are, as beautiful as that place may seem to you. You must have the courage to go with them to a place that neither you nor they have ever been before."