

Case Study

Weekly Intergenerational Faith Formation

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help - Rapid City, SD

Monthly intergenerational faith formation programs are the norm around the country primarily because this kind of scheduling reflects the recommendations of the Generations of Faith Project that launched so many intergenerational faith formation programs across the United States and Canada. More and more churches are joining the ranks of those who offer weekly intergenerational faith formation. They are seeing that shorter and more frequent intergenerational experiences have a more powerful impact than longer and less frequent offerings.

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Rapid City, South Dakota (<http://www.cathedralolph.org/faithformation.html>) switched from a monthly program at the end of 2012 and they were surprised to discover that average attendance increased significantly. Average attendance was 160 people when they offered the intergenerational program monthly. When they switched to the weekly offering, average attendance jumped to 250 people! The staff reports that church members are thrilled with the weekly program.

The program is offered on Wednesday evening and begins with supper at 5:30 p.m. At 6:15 age groups are dismissed in the following groups:

1. Preschool
2. Grades K-1
3. Grades 2-3
4. Grades 4-5
5. Grades 6-8
6. High school
7. Adult

They use Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (<http://www.cgsusa.org/>), a Montessori faith formation program, for their preschool group. All of their elementary, middle school, and high school materials are based upon the Life Teen program (www.catholicyouthministry.com). Life Teen is a high school faith formation program, but they have adapted the materials to be suitable for a wide range of children and teens. This kind of flexibility and creativity is a hallmark of many successful intergenerational practitioners. Linda Baldwin, the program director, claims that her presenters are far more focused, creative, and prepared because they don't use textbooks. The lack of a book challenges all of them to work harder and prepare better for their learning sessions. They see this as a definite advantage in their program.

The adults at Our Lady of Perpetual Help have two options. They can attend a Lectionary-based Bible study or they can participate in a themes-based faith formation session. The Bible study, a popular program that predates the weekly intergenerational faith formation program, has been integrated into the new model.

All of the groups have a short prayer experience at the end of their sessions and they sometimes gather the adults with the high school teens for this. All of the age groups, along with some other church members, gather together at 7:30 p.m. to close the evening with a liturgy.

There are many reasons why this is working for the Cathedral of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Success doesn't happen by accident or by chance. It takes strong leadership, support from the power structure, a strong work ethic, a team that is both creative and detail oriented, and deliberate connection to the life of the church community. The leaders at this church are dedicated to and highly enthusiastic about bringing the generations together. The Pastor and Assistant Pastor both support the program and are regularly present during its implementation. They expect their catechists to prepare well. They hold them accountable for doing their homework before they present learning sessions. While this team uses resources from publishing companies such as Life Teen, they do not hesitate to alter the materials to make them work in their local setting. The team takes the time to know the people they serve and they provide experiences that meet the needs of the people.