

Case Study

Intergenerational Caring: Faith Webbing St. John's Lutheran Church, Grove City, OH

Building warm and caring relationships across the generations is a foundation stone to becoming a vibrant intergenerational church. All other ministries will be strengthened by the effort to facilitate friendships among church members of different age groups.

Gary Pecuch has been working as the Youth Ministry Director at St. John's Lutheran Church in Grove City, Ohio (<http://stjohnsgc.org/>) for over three decades. He and his wife, Laurie (the Children's Ministry Director), collaborate to create an intergenerational culture of caring through a process they developed called Faith Webbing. "Faith Webbing is the wrapping of children and youth in a web of faith so loving and so caring that children and youth will know Jesus and always want to be a part of a local congregation," says Pecuch. This process has not only been captured in a book by the same title, but is also being promoted throughout the Southern Ohio Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with dozens of churches being trained by Gary to implement Faith Webbing in their congregations. Here's a link to the book on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/).

The Faith Webbing ministry is comprised of three concepts: The Faith Web, Faith Skills and A Personal Ministry Plan. The Faith Web is expressed in a diagram that shows how extensively a teen's intergenerational relationships have or have not developed. Faith Skills are the practices that create the structure of a teen's intentional journey of faith within the congregation. The Personal Ministry Plan brings focus to areas of faith formation that a teen needs to work on the most given the gaps that are discovered in relationships and skills as they reach out to those both inside and outside of the congregation.

Faith Webbing

It starts with the Faith Web. Each young person at St. John's maps out on paper a personal Faith Web. The web includes the name of the teen in the center. Then five other groups of people admired by the teen are added in the following manner:

- The teen is asked to identify six grandparent-age members of the congregation that the teen admires.
- The teen is asked to identify six parent-age members to add to the web.
- The teen is asked to identify six twenty-something adults to add to the web.
- The teen is asked to identify six peers to add to the web.
- The teen is asked to identify six younger children to add to the web.

Some teens who have been lifelong, active members of the church often have no trouble identifying at least thirty people in their web. Others struggle to name them and end up with gaps on their Faith Web. The intergenerational congregation is then engaged to help children and youth fill these relationship voids.

40 Faith Skills

Forty Faith Skills have been identified by Gary and Laurie Pecuch. Examples of Faith Skills include leading prayer, cultivating visionary thinking, developing the discipline of fasting, giving/receiving compliments and learning a decision-making method. These skills are taught with strategic timing and

emphasis to teens based upon a number of factors. If there are relational gaps on a teen's Faith Web, then skills that will help fill those gaps are emphasized. For example, if a teen is lacking in relationships with younger children, that teen may be recruited to be a teen helper for the upcoming VBS program. The teen will be trained to lead table grace, lead devotions or simply help build relationship skills among VBS attendees. Participation in the VBS program maximizes the opportunity to fill the relational gaps with children that appear on the teen's Faith Web.

Other skills such as leading music or facilitating games are taught because a teen has a particular interest in the skill. In this way, the teen's interests and passions are being honored, which is an important way to keep motivation levels high. Teens that feel empowered by participating in developing their own faith formation plan are more likely to engage in the congregation enthusiastically.

Some skills are taught because there is a need in the congregation for people with particular skills. This might include skills such as public reading, leading service projects or public speaking. This approach teaches a spirit of service and concern for the community. When the community has a need, teens are challenged to learn new skills to help them meet the need. For more information about Faith Skills, you can check out Gary's book, *What's In your Bag?* on [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

Personal Ministry Plan

Every teen creates a Personal Ministry Plan to fill relational gaps and to strategically learn ministry skills that will enhance their lives, the life of the congregation and the life of the broader community. Youth Ministry leaders help teens build their plans in a variety of ways. One way is to explore the relational gaps. Leaders identify adults and children that a particular teen may need to know to fill in the gaps on the teen's Faith Web. Then they help the teen plan to be present at ministry events where they will have the opportunity to meet the people they need to meet in order to fill their gaps. It's a great way to get caring intergenerational relationships started.

Another great way that they initiate intergenerational friendships at St. John is through the concept of Prayer Buddies. Children and older adults become Prayer Buddies for teens who go on the summer trips offered at St. John's. Many lasting intergenerational friendships develop from the Prayer Buddy experience. Both older adults and preschool-age children often attend church trip send-offs to specifically pray over their "adopted" teen as they depart from the church for their experience.

A key part of a ministry plan includes the daily pursuits of each particular teen. Young people are busy with school and community activities outside of church. Gary and Laurie help youth to connect their activities with their personal ministry plan. Pecuch believes that through their personal interests and talents God has placed and positioned them to have a positive Christian influence on the people around them. For example, if a teen is in the marching band at school, then the marching band becomes part of the Personal Ministry Plan for that teen. Standards are established for how this particular Christian teen can be an inspiring presence within the marching band. Values such as dedication, creativity, respect and friendship are fleshed out in the plan. The teen is encouraged to pray for squad leaders and to be an example of Christian virtue in the band. The same effort is made for athletes, dancers, debaters, etc. Each teen is called to minister in the unique circumstances of his/her life.

Adults at St. John's know that their community depends upon expressions of care offered to and received from teens and children. They enthusiastically embrace the opportunities to build friendships across the generations. Deliberate promotion in programming and preaching have helped change this church from an age-segregated model to a full-blown intergenerational model that expresses the body of Christ in a remarkably complete way. Check out Faith Webbing... this can happen at your church too!