

# Older Adult Ministries

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)



## Bringing Generations Together

by Kaye Edwards

Contributors: Rev. Elaine Austin, Rev. Lois Kelley, Dr. Susan McFadden, and Jan Aerie, Gerontologist

### Introduction

Today when we hear the word, “segregation,” we think of the ways we are divided by race and culture. However, we are also often segregated by our ages and our abilities.

This resource is designed to bring together people of different ages, as well as different cognitive and physical abilities. It is our belief that some of the greatest learning can take place when people have opportunities to share the wisdom that differing life stages and life experiences provide.

To use these resources effectively you will need to prepare an environment in which everyone feels safe, comfortable, and appreciated. That means you must have a registration process that helps you get to know the particular needs of those participating. You will need to meet in a space that is physically accessible to all. Supports such as amplified hearing devices, large print materials, small tables and chairs may be needed. Someone may need to have an advocate provided for them.

Throughout history, storytelling has been important, especially stories that help us better understand ourselves and our relationship with God. Most, if not all, of us love a good story.

In this resource, participants will have the opportunity to participate in biblical stories. They will also have opportunities to listen to and tell personal stories.

### Sharing Stories

Time for each session: 30 - 40 minutes

Space: a big enough area to break into small groups.

Supplies needed: Tables and chairs to fit all sizes of people, art supplies such as crayons, colored pencils, clay, paint, markers, glue, scissors, and paper.

Also needed: an internet connection, monitor and computer if Bible stories are to be watched instead of being told by someone versed in [Worship and Wonder](#).

## Bringing Generations Together—continued

### The Wonder of Biblical Stories



**Worship & Wonder** Incorporates many different learning styles using a multi-sensory approach of storytelling as a primary means for encountering God. God is experienced, not just learned about. This approach enables all generations, together, to bring their lived experiences into dialogue with God in the biblical stories and to share these experiences with others.

By changing some of the wondering questions related to Bible stories in the Montessori-influenced program of **Worship & Wonder**, and having a time for a creative response to the stories, we can bring different ages together to hear, engage in, and share their understandings of Biblical stories with one another.

#### Use Your Imagination . . .

Participants need to be encouraged to use their imaginations—to get into the story and see how it might relate to their present and their past lives. The books, *Graceful Nurture: Using Godly Play with Adults*, and *Stories of God at Home: A Godly Play Approach* have some suggestions to help adults wonder and become more comfortable with being creative in their responses to stories.

After the story is told or watched, pause for a few seconds before starting to ask the wondering questions that are provided for each story. Allow time between each question for responses. There may be silence, and this is fine. Do not be concerned about taking moments of silent reflection. Not everyone will feel comfortable wondering out loud, especially in the beginning. Maybe a question does not feel “right” to you or maybe a different wondering question will come to mind for you. Go with it! God’s Spirit just may be urging you to ask the very question someone in your group needs to hear.

After the wondering time, have individuals pair with another person of a different age. Children who are

less than 5 years old may need to be paired with an adult who is known to them.

After a period of time, bring four people (2 pairings) together and have each participant tell what they remember about their partner’s responses to the story. Have the group decide what are the most interesting or important parts of the story.

Have each group of four create something to represent one or two aspects of the story they have shared. They could work with crayons and paper, clay, paint, markers, or perhaps create a dance movement, or dramatize the story.



## Bringing Generations Together—continued

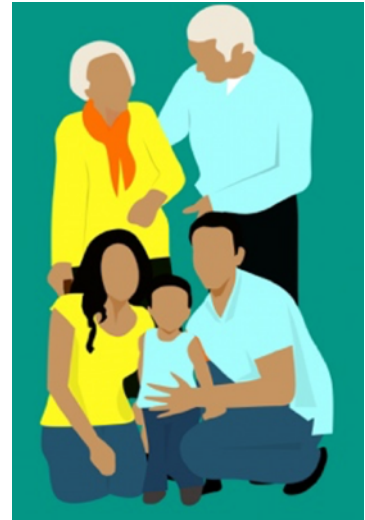
### Exploring Biblical Stories

#### Story #1: The Creation Story: [Video](#)

##### Wondering Questions:

*I wonder . . .*

- . . . what is the best part of this story?
- . . . where is your favorite place to rest and think?
- . . . are scientific stories about how the world was created and this Bible story of creation the same or different?
- . . . if there is anything you are wondering about this story?



#### Story #2: The Story of Abram and Sarai: [Video](#)

##### Wondering Questions:

*I wonder . . .*

- . . . where you see God in this story?
- . . . where are you in this story?
- . . . if you have ever had to move and if it was your choice?
- . . . how moving made you feel?
- . . . what is the hardest part of moving to a new home, city, town, state, country?
- . . . if any part of moving ever feels good?
- . . . if any part of moving is fun?
- . . . what are you wondering about this story?



#### Story #3: The Good Shepherd: [Video](#)

##### Wondering Questions:

*I wonder . . .*

- . . . where you see God in this story?
- . . . what you like best about this story?
- . . . if there is anything in this story that makes you feel uneasy?
- . . . if there is a special place where you feel safe and cared for?
- . . . if you have ever been in a place of danger? How did that feel? How did you get out of the dangerous place?
- . . . what is the most important part of this story to you?
- . . . what you think this story might really be about?



## Bringing Generations Together—continued

### Exploring Personal Stories of Life and Faith

Sometimes a picture is truly worth a thousand words. Consider finding very beautiful and inspiring pictures of human actions of justice and injustices; pictures of the beauty of nature and the destructiveness of the natural world.

The [Religious News Service](#) often has very helpful pictures of present-day good and evil as well as what is happening in the natural world and how people are responding. [Unsplash](#) and [Pixabay](#) are two internet resources that offer free photographs.



As with the Biblical stories, after the whole group does some wondering together, provide time for responses. Bring together 2 people (a child/young person and an adult). Children who are younger than 5 years old may need to be in a group with an adult known to them. Have them use the [“Talking Point Cards”](#) or pictures to learn about each other. Then have two groups join one another and share what each learned about their partners.

Have the larger group consider if what is learned about one another suggests an outreach activity that might be done together.

#### Outreach Activity Suggestions:

- Shop for and put together items to create a care box for college students or perhaps an elderly person who can no longer get out on her/his own.
- Participate together in a local gleaning project or work at a local food bank or clothing ministry.
- Come together to paint or clean up a room in your church.
- Plant a tree together.



[Remember that one adult should never be alone with a child outside of his/her family.]

## Bringing Generations Together—continued

### The Grand Generations

Often it seems that relationships between the oldest and the youngest generations, grandchildren and grandparents or older adults of grandparenting age, develop naturally.



On the surface, these two generations appear to have very little in common, yet they often gravitate toward one another. Why? It could be that children quickly understand that grandparents have fewer rules. They also usually listen better because they have more time. They may move more slowly so there is time to stop and watch ants at work or investigate a particularly pretty flower together.

In their book, *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families*, Herbert Anderson and Susan Johnson write about a fierceness in the eyes of newborn children that often startles adults. Such a fierceness signals a knowing, a truth with which we are born. A closeness to God. This knowing, this closeness to God is often fleeting and doesn't stay with us human beings for long. It is taught out of us as we grow.



As more advanced age becomes a reality, many people seem to regain that innate early knowing, that closeness

to God that was once possessed as a very young child. Could this perhaps be the reason the youngest and oldest generations gravitate toward one another so naturally?



In the life of faith for all generations it would be a good thing if we could do more to nurture this relationship between the two Grand Generations. Give them space and time to be together in your church and in your home.

This resource can also be used to bring together just these two Grand Generations.

## Older Adult Ministries Resources

**Faith Tutor** is a new endeavor led by Rev. Dr. Olivia Bryan Updegrave, that invites you to a transformative journey of faith. With a focus on making faith a meaningful part of everyday life, [Faith Tutors](#) collaborates with families and churches to tailor strategies that suit their unique dynamics. There are opportunities to opt for one session or multiple engagements.

**GenOn Ministries** has free samples of many different resources for faith based intergenerational opportunities. Learn more [here](#).

**Nuns & Nones** is an intergenerational, spiritual community dedicated to care, contemplation, and courageous action in service of life and liberation. Become inspired as you learn about this community of young people who began to seek out the Catholic nuns and their commitment to working for peace and justice grounded in spirituality. [Nuns & Nones](#) describe themselves as, “An unlikely alliance across communities of spirit.”



**Outofthebox** is a [nonprofit organization](#) out of the UK who offer many stories with the Montessori methods. Some are faith-based and some are not. It is a different group which also offers chat groups, and other resources

**Religion News Service** is free to read, but it's not free to produce. To access pictures, go to the bottom of the opening page and click on “View the archives of previous newsletters”; go to the bottom of that page and click on “photos of the week.” If you use pictures from this service, please [make a donation](#) or sign up for the paid subscription.

**Talking Point Cards** have several categories from which to choose, including “family” and “Christian.” Learn more [here](#) about the \$30 subscription.



## Bringing Generations Together—continued

### Books

(Some of these books have been published long ago. However since they are still available via the internet, we have included them because they still have much to offer to our ongoing understanding of faith formation across generations.)



***At the Crossroads: Leadership Lessons for the Second Half of Life***, Clayton Smith, Dave Wilson. Abingdon, Nashville, TN 2016

***Celebrating the Graying Church – Mutual Ministry Today, Legacies Tomorrow***, Richard P. Olson. Rowman and Littlefield, Washington, DC 2020

***Following Jesus***, Sonja M. Stewart. Geneva Press, Louisville, KY 2000

***Graceful Nurture: Using Godly Play with Adults***, Rebecca McLain. Church Publishers, Inc., NY, NY 2017

***Keepers of the Story***, Megan McKenna and Tony Cowan. Orbis Books, NY, NY 1997



***Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families***, Herbert Anderson and Susan B. W. Johnson. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1994

***Seeing Children, Seeing God: A Practical Theology of Children and Poverty***, Pamela Couture. Abingdon Press, Knoxville, TN 1951

***Stories of God at Home: A Godly Play Approach***. Jerome Berryman. Church Publishing, NY, NY 2018

***The Faith of Parents***, Marie Harris. Paulist Press, NY, NY 1991

***The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully***, Joan Chittister. Darton, Longman and Todd, London, UK 2008

***The Spiritual Child: The New Science on Parenting for Health and Lifelong Thriving***, Lisa Miller. St. Martin's Press, NY, NY 2015

***Voices of Aging: Adult Children and Aging Parents Talk with God***, Missy Buchanan. Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN 2015

## Bringing Generations Together—continued

***Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood***, Joyce Ann Mercer. Chalice Press., St. Louis, MO, 2005

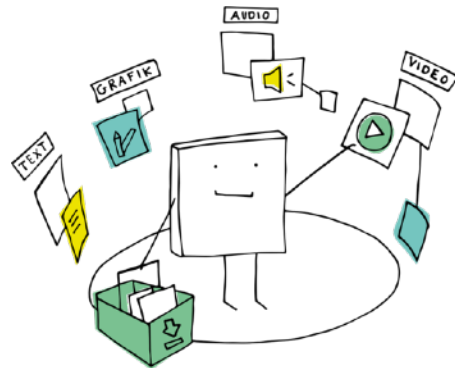
***When Words Fail: Practical Ministry to People with Dementia and Their Caregivers***, Kathy Fogg Berry. Kregel Ministry, Grand Rapids, MI 2018

***Young Children and Worship***, Sonja M. Stuart and Jerome W. Berryman. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 1989

## Website Resources

Free photos sorted by key words: [Unsplash](#), [Pixabay](#)

NPR's [Story Corps](#) great questions and many, many suggestions.





## Bringing Generations Together—continued

### Websites and Books about Dementia-Friendly Faith Communities

Compiled by Susan H. McFadden, Ph.D.

[Fox Valley Memory Project](#)

#### Websites

##### [USAagainstAlzheimer's](#) (*Faith United Against Alzheimer's*)

The website offers a list of practical ways faith communities can become more dementia friendly.

##### [Dementia Friendly America: Faith Communities](#)

The Dementia Friendly America organization publishes a number of “sector guides.” Scroll down on this page for the one on faith communities. It lists concrete steps for faith communities to become more welcoming for people with dementia.

##### [Dementia-Friendly Faith Communities](#)

The Dementia Friendly America organization began in Minnesota. This website from “ACTonALZ” includes many links to helpful information.

##### [Loving Through Dementia](#)

This is a program from Due West United Methodist Church in Marietta, GA. The website offers 14 topics for congregations to consider as they minister with people living with dementia.

##### [Alter](#)

Alter was created by a nurse-led collaborative team to inform and support African American faith communities as they minister with families dealing with loved ones with dementia.

#### Books

***Aging together: Dementia, friendship, and flourishing communities.*** McFadden, S. H., & McFadden, J. T. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011

A book about how nurturing relationships with friends journeying into progressive forgetfulness. It argues that faith communities have many resources to support these relationships, not the least of which are the beliefs that bind them together. It includes discussion questions for each chapter.

***Awe: The new science of everyday wonder and how it can transform your life.*** Keltner, D. New York, NY: Penguin Press, 2023

This new book is getting a lot of attention. Keltner has been researching awe for many years and his work inspires us to consider how too many older adults are deprived of experiencing this “everyday wonder.” See Chapter 9 for the way he describes “how spiritual life grows out of awe.”



## Bringing Generations Together—continued

***Dementia-friendly communities: Why we need them and how we can create them.*** McFadden, S. H. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2021

We need dementia-friendly communities because of the increasing numbers of persons living with dementia (and this includes their care partners) and also because these folks are asking for more programs and services that enable them to remain connected to their communities. The book offers suggestions on creating these inclusive communities and has a chapter on spiritual connections.



***Meditation for older people: A how-to guide for mindfulness meditation groups.*** Steller, B. Victoria, British Columbia: Tellwell Publishing, 2023

Rooted in the ancient tradition of Christian meditation but also incorporating wisdom from other faiths, this is a practical guide for establishing meditation groups for older people. It can be used in residential care communities as well as faith communities and could be helpful for care partners and people living with dementia. It is available as a free downloadable PDF; hard copies can also be ordered from the author's [website](#).

***Ministry with the forgotten: Dementia through a spiritual lens.***

Carder, K. L. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019

After his wife was diagnosed with frontotemporal dementia, this Bishop in the United Methodist Church and Professor at the Duke Divinity School retired and became her full-time care partner. The book is a valuable resource for pastors and laypeople alike as it weaves together theology and stories of Carder's dementia journey with his wife. Carder is also a leader in the Respite for All Foundation.

***Second forgetting: Remember the power of the Gospel during Alzheimer's disease.*** Mast, B. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014

The author's brief biography is a good introduction to this book. He's Associate Professor in Psychological and Brain Sciences, and Associate Clinical Professor in Geriatric Medicine at the University of Louisville, as well as being an elder at Sojourn Community Church in Louisville, KY. The book is grounded in evangelical Christianity and psychological research on memory and dementia. It's very accessible and would work well in congregational discussion groups.



We encourage you to share your feedback on the following form. Please scan and return to Older Adult Ministries, [aeriej@mail.com](mailto:aeriej@mail.com). Or respond by email with written answers for questions numbered 1 — 8.

## Feedback Form

1. In what ways did you think engaging in multigenerational learning was most successful?
2. What were some challenges along the way?
3. How did people from the different age groups respond to the idea of sharing faith through hands-on activities?
4. What impacts did the sharing about Bible stories have?
5. What impacts did the sharing of personal stories have?
6. How might this guide and resource be strengthened for children? For adults?
7. What suggestions do you have for additional educational programs and resources for intergenerational learning?
8. How might your congregation expand its current efforts or initiate new efforts to bring together the generations?

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Church name \_\_\_\_\_

Contact email \_\_\_\_\_

Please scan and return to Older Adult Ministries, [aeriej@mail.com](mailto:aeriej@mail.com). Or respond by email with written answers for questions numbered 1 — 8. Thank you for your feedback!