



# Why Intergenerational Mission?

## Introduction

So, you're thinking about engaging in intergenerational (IG) mission? That's great news, because you're holding a resource on that very topic. For some, the idea of all ages serving together on a mission project may be daunting. Could children really go on road trips? What role will the older generations play? What does having all generations participate in mission look like beyond our conception of service trips? How can we engage with the community we live in? Questions like these are why we designed this toolkit: to help you think through what it means to do mission and service "intergenerationally."

Keep in mind, what you're reading isn't a curriculum that will simply tell you how to do it; but rather, it's designed as an accessible guide to help you imagine what IG mission could look like in your context. You may be serving locally or internationally, from your home or in person. But before we get too far down the path, pause for a moment and consider this question: What comes to mind when you hear the word "mission"?

## What is mission?

When you think of mission do you imagine missionaries stationed in far-off lands preaching the Good News? Or perhaps those words make you think of a bunch of teenagers crammed into a stinky 12-passenger church van, making an epic road trip to some distant location? Or perhaps there is a faithful group of adult volunteers in your congregation that have always served the local food bank? Maybe there is even a small group that heads off to your international partner each year and returns with a witness in worship. Chances are your faith community has examples of small groups participating in this sort of mission, and you likely can name those faithful servants and adventurous youth that always represent your church.

While these pictures are some accurate reflections of what is happening, they are only one expression of mission. We are encouraging you to look at mission in a more expansive way. Since the recent pandemic, we know that doing mission in a new way is more important than ever. Doing mission intergenerationally calls us to step out of our preconceived notions about what mission is and reimagine how our faith communities serve others. Mission isn't limited by ages or stages of a person's life. In fact, mission is at the essence of who we are as children of God.

This sense of mission can manifest itself in a variety of ways. Without question, a team of youth painting, cleaning and "VBSing" qualifies as mission. But mission doesn't always have to be a grand project or involve a road trip. Bearing witness is also found in how we celebrate the Lord's Day with worship, how we share our lives with our neighbors, how we partner with organizations locally and overseas, and how we demonstrate God's love to those in need. In that way, mission begins in how we live our lives in our community and how we serve those who proverbially pass by our doors.

Although "destination mission trips" are possible to do intergenerationally, they require additional considerations and planning that make them challenging for many ministry contexts. Local mission, however, not only opens the door for more generations to participate, but it also builds stronger patterns of practicing service. Many churches have strong local partnerships, and those partnerships are more important than ever. How does the whole church body engage in the community?

So, what does it mean to be intergenerational when it comes to mission and service? In a nutshell, this type of mission is accessible to a wider swath of generations, and the service offered is not only a demonstration of Christ's love in the world, but

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also has an internal emphasis on intentional communal formation. In intergenerational mission, participants of all ages are formed together as a community of faith because their formation intersects in meaningful ways. These connections and this shared common work build strong relationships and lasting connections far beyond the actual service or project. When done well, they offer a foundation for other intergenerational places and spaces to flourish.

### **Why does Intergenerational Mission matter?**

Now that we've explored what intergenerational (IG) mission is, the next question is: "Why does IG mission matter?" When we consider how formative mission trips have been in the lives of our young people, it shouldn't surprise us to know that this type of interaction is essential for all ages to understand how we are called to serve.

One of the challenges of youth mission trips is that they often have the mountaintop effect of forming participants in a transformative way in the moment, only to leave them uncertain as to how they might carry on the sense of purpose they found in serving others. When their home context lacks the necessary connections for them to get involved, their interest and participation wane. When the full spectrum of the home context is engaged in mission, there is no mountaintop to return from. The local church setting is gradually transformed into the mountaintop, and all can experience the relational aspect of these types of mission trips.

When mission projects are intergenerational, they challenge each generation to consider the significance of sharing holy work with others. Children and youth who engage in mission projects, alongside their parents, siblings and friends, will form a much more holistic understanding of what it means to do mission. Moreover, the older folks in our congregations demonstrate that mission doesn't end when you become an adult. In short, each generation contributes to the larger understanding of mission.

When all generations participate in mission together, it leads to a portrait of mission that becomes part of the identity of every age and stage of your congregation. It communicates that mission has no boundary of life stage, but is rather part of lifelong faith formation. Intergenerational mission isn't easy, and it will take a little more legwork to sort out some of the logistics; but in the end, it invites all to serve Christ and, in doing so, demonstrates that we can all serve and love our neighbors together.

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