

Restoring
Passion
Reclaiming
The Past

Reclaiming the Past

By Joanna Perkins

We have many times heard older adults say things like, "These young people today just don't have any appreciation of the past." And many times we have heard younger people say, "Those older people just don't get what we're dealing with. They don't understand us." How can your church bridge that understanding gap? And why should you?

Deuteronomy 32:7 says, "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: Ask thy father and he will show thee; thy elders, and

they will tell thee."

In order for a church to reclaim its past, members must reach across generations to bond together. It is crucial for the church body to have a sense of where they came from, so that they know where they are going. Our seniors carry the corporate memory of the church, and need to pass that down to younger members. The memories of the kind of things that used to be important to the church or that were a focus in the congregation may help younger generations appreciate where the church is today. Sharing this information is important, not only for the church, but for the senior's own sense of contribution. And certainly, young leaders are molded by older leaders; without the older generation to model leadership for the next generation of church leaders, where will they learn it?

Cross-generational groupings

There are several cross-generational groupings that your church can look into strengthening. Here

are some groupings and some ideas to target generation-bridging:

- **Youth and seniors:** Youth are the group that can, with some encouragement and opportunities, benefit the most from generation-bridging. They know enough to be interested in the past, with someone to make it interesting for them. They will often put down these ideas as dumb, but they will appreciate the fact that someone who didn't have to pay attention to them would take an interest.

Try inviting an older adult or two to your annual youth activity planning sessions. They can offer suggestions on activities where they can be involved and add the "senior slant." Have older adults talk to the youth about the activities they had in church "when I was your age."

"Flash back to the past" activities, such as a basket lunch, could encourage intergenerational interaction. Parents could bid on a basket to share with a senior adult or couple and

their youth, to join the middle generation. The idea could be encouraged as a fundraiser, with proceeds to go to the youth mission trip, or to a special mission project of the youth.

Mostly, just get the youth talking with the older adults. They'll break the ice, and form their own bonds.

- **Children and seniors:** This bond is the one that will have the longest-lasting effect in the younger people of your congregation, as children expand their adult comfort level in church to another generation.

Encourage seniors to come to Sunday school classes and talk about what it was like to be a kid at church when they were young.

If the church has photographs of past church activities, involve children and seniors in identifying these activities to retain the record for the historical committee or team. Create teams of "photo labelers": older children who write legibly could be paired with older adults who no longer write so well, but who remember all the people in the picture, and a record could be created of the people in the picture. This kind of activity forms a natural starting point to talk about the church and its activities, and has a work product that the children can be proud of contributing to the church.

- **Young families and seniors:** In our mobile society, many children do not grow up close to grandparents, and grandparents often do not have their grandchildren around to spoil. Find people willing to match up to create "substitute families." This is a beneficial arrangement for the church, because the young families get to draw on the experiences of the seniors.
- **Intergenerational activities:** Many churches have activities that revolve around an age group or



Sunday school group, or that include the church as a whole, but these neglect the bonding between smaller, more intimate groups. Create mixed generation Bible studies, supper clubs, or Bible studies that have dinner together. A young couple, a

While these kinds of intergenerational activities can be truly beneficial to a church, they must also be started with great care. Being too ambitious and falling short in these activities can sour a church for a long time on continuing them, and can permanently damage the opportunities. Be sure to choose people who are excited and positive about these activities when piloting them, so that they can sell the idea to others of their generation through their enthusiasm.

No matter what size your church, there are opportunities to work through age barriers. Look for those openings, and seize them. They introduce those who are the future of the church to those whose footsteps they can follow from the past.

Preserving the past of Missouri Baptist churches is the mission of the Missouri Baptist Historical Commission. Contact the Commission's archivist, Joanna Perkins, jperkins@mobaptist.org, 800-736-6227, ext. 205, for more ideas or for assistance in ways to preserve the church's history and bridge the generation gap.

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mid-life couple, a retired couple, and some singles could all benefit from forming such a small group together, and share an appreciation of where the other people in the group are in their life journey and spiritual travels. The bonds they build there can offer chances to mix the wisdom of the elders and the energy of the youngers.

For more information about MBHC services, contact Joanna Perkins, Archivist at 800-736-6227, extension 205 or visit www.baptistparchments.org.

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