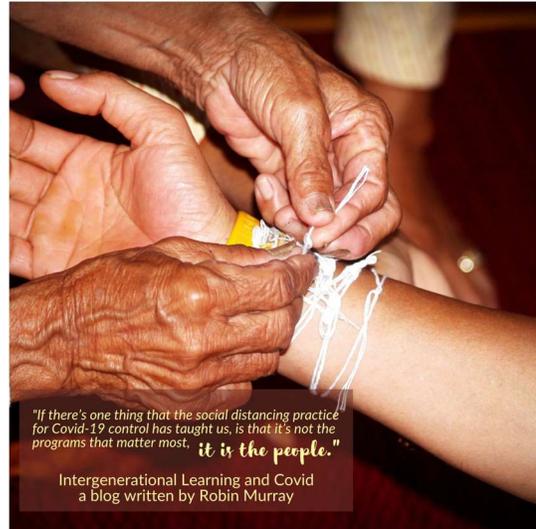


## Intergenerational Learning and Covid 19

By Robin Murray

If there's one thing that the social distancing practice for Covid-19 control has taught us, is that it's not the programs that matter most, it is the people. Most folks would rather watch an amateur livestream or Zoom worship with their own minister whose hair is in bad need of professional cutting, than watch a slickly produced online worship service from afar. This is not because there is anything wrong with high quality, well done livestreamed worship, but because for most people, the most important thing about church is the warmth and personal connection they feel when they gather. Being with our church family is an important part of worship.



As the hymn says, "Come in, come in and sit down for you are a part of the family!" This is the strength of intergenerational worship and learning, that people feel connected - held and nurtured by their congregation like a big extended family. For the most part, deep faith is absorbed, rather than taught. We see this idea reflected in the ancient wisdom of Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

Faith is passed from generation to generation like language – by complete immersion as an integral part of our lives together.

We have a beautiful opportunity for intergenerational worship during this time where many of us are attending church services from our living rooms at home. Families should know that children, small ones especially, are like sponges in their learning. They don't need to sit still and watch every moment of the service. They are perfectly content to sit off to the side, quietly playing with toys as their older family members engage more directly with what is happening on-screen. But don't be fooled into thinking they are distracted! They are absorbing all that is going on around them, learning hymns even if they don't sing, catching key words, and developing curiosity about why older family members value church. They are also worshipping God in their own way, especially that two-year-old bouncing on the couch in the background on Zoom worship!

While offering an online Sunday School or Children's Church during this time is a great idea, we should be sure to pay attention to the intergenerational aspect of any regular worship we might be offering as well. Making sure that at least some of worship can be easily followed by someone with an elementary reading and comprehension level, as well as inviting children and youth into discussion times, are some ways of being directly inclusive of younger generations. Having a sense of connection and inclusion is especially important during this time of social distancing, or rather "time of staying at home" to use an example of child-friendly language.

Another opportunity we have during this time is to take a hard look at the physical space of our church while the buildings are empty. What does our space say about who and what we value? Most of us recognize the need for our buildings to be accessible to those with decreased mobility, but how about those with higher than average mobility needs, like a three-year-old? Do we put hours of careful planning into creating a beautiful spiritually uplifting sanctuary space for "adult worship", and then send our children off to Sunday School in a room that doubles as a storage closet, filled with clutter and cast-offs? Now is a great time for staff or volunteers to come in (with careful attention to distancing and hygiene) and clean out some of these poorly designed spaces.

As a church, our goal should be to hold our generations in the warmth and love of the ideal family, God's family, where the needs of different ages and stages are all acknowledged as equally important. Our sense of belonging must go beyond just our peer group, and that goes for young and old alike. None of us are ever "done" spiritually, we are always in process, so from infant to 100 years and beyond, we all have something more to learn, as well as something to share. We all have room to deepen our relationship with God and one another.

*Image by 41330 Pixabay - Old hands tying friendship bracelet on young hand*