

A sermon preached by Emma Hodge at St. Michael & All Angels Church, Sandhurst, on 27th June 2021, the last in a four part sermon series exploring Intergenerational Church.

Readings:

Acts 2:37-47

Matthew 5:13-18

Psalm 98 (Responsorial)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

This month we have been exploring what it means an intergenerational church with the idea that everyone feels welcomed and valued and we have looked at various aspects of this,

We started by looking at **Belonging Together** where we looked at how different aspects of the body of Christ all are equally valuable and essential and we related this to the church community.

We then moved on to **Worshipping Together** where we explored what worship means

Last week we explored **Growing Together** where we looked at how we grow in faith including using our gifts to help with the various volunteer roles in church.

And today, in the last of our sermon series we look at **Reaching Out Together**.

But before we explore what **Reaching out together** means in the context of an intergenerational church, I want to go back and look at what a church is, as this is a fundamental question if we want to become a more intergenerational church then we need to understand what a church is and I want you to take a few moments to think about how you would describe "**What a church is?**"

SILENCE

I'm sure that there will be different answers to this question and it will of course depend on you and your life experiences but for me, a good description of what a church is, is found in our first reading from Acts.

To set the scene, the reading is the last part of a story that started on the day of Pentecost. The day when the Holy Spirit had come upon the apostles.

Once the apostles had received the Holy Spirit they went out into the town and there was a large group of Jews from different countries, all the Jews spoke different languages. The apostles were able to speak to the Jews in their own language and this caused confusion as they wondered how it was possible. Peter, explained and related it to their Jewish faith so they could easily understand.

We then join the story, As a result of hearing Peter's teaching, many of them became Christians and were baptised.

These Christians who did five key components

- 1) They were devoted to the apostles teaching
- 2) They were in fellowship with one another
- 3) They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread - this is the sacrament of Holy Communion – which we ourselves will be celebrating shortly
- 4) They prayed
- 5) And lastly they cared for those in need

For me a church is a group of people, who are diverse (they were originally from different countries and spoke different languages) but are united in prayer, worship including the sacraments, to learning, spending time with one another and caring for those who are in need.

Let's look at these in more details

Teaching – There are many different styles and ways of learning and no one style will suit everyone, so if we are to be intergenerational, we need to employ different teaching styles and as a church, we have some different learning styles, we have the very traditional style sermons from the pulpit, to the more interactive style sermons and also we have mid-week house groups, Bible Bites for those in years 5 and 6 at St. Michael's School. Reach and Kidz Church during the 9:30 service, but what other learning and teaching styles should we use and for what age groups?

Fellowship - The dictionary defines fellowship as a friendly feeling between people who share the same interest or do the same things together. While we can be fairly good at fellowship at St. Michael's and certainly over the pandemic there have been a concerted effort to make sure that we do keep in contact with members of the church who are more isolated, and there have been intergenerational aspects of this, especially the Christmas envelopes, with the exception of the choir who are great at intergenerational fellowship, we definitely have room for improvement in this aspect of church and involving the whole church in getting to know each other across different age groups and social events are a great way of doing this and pre-pandemic we had a range of social events, some such as the Burns Night Suppers were great at being inclusive and welcoming all ages while others such as the Quiz night were aimed at adults. We have an intergenerational social event coming up in July where there is a church picnic that the Baby and Toddler Time group are kindly organising. And if you have any ideas for future intergenerational social events, please let us know.

Worship the style of worship described in the reading is Holy Communion, the breaking of bread, and we do have different styles of Holy Communion from the quiet spoken Book of Common Prayer service to services with choir. We also have non communion services which are the family service and the contemplative evening prayer and evensong services, but are our services suitable for everyone or should we change some aspects of some of them or add new ones so that we can ensure that everyone is able to worship God in a way that suits them?

Prayer - prayer is simply conversing with God and please note I said conversing not just speaking as it involves listening as well as talking. While many of us have an individual routine of prayer, how do we pray as a church? While the words vary depending on the service, they tend to be the same method, one person saying the prayers on behalf of everyone and while they may include individual requests, they are in the same style, and not all services have a period of quiet to enable us to listen to God – those services that do are the 8am Book of Common prayer and the Contemplative Evening Prayer services. While every so often we may do more creative prayers, it is not routine, are our prayer styles intergenerational and variable depending to different people with different prayer habits and styles? How much do we encourage people to try a different form of prayer?

Caring for those in need - in addition to the foodbank collection point where we encourage people to donate food, as a church we support several

charities corporately, as well as having presentations about the various charities and including them in our prayers, and while at the Christingle service we included a presentation on the work of The Children's Society, these are usually aimed at adults and generally only in the 9:30 service and this is an area where we "could do better" in respects to being an intergenerational church. How do we encourage everyone, young and old to show that they care for others?

Our theme today is "**Reaching Out Together**" and caring for those in need is an essential aspect of this, our challenge as a church is how do we encourage children and young people to care and support those in need in our community, both our local community, but also our wider community of those in our country and those in the world.

However there is a second meaning to "**Reaching Out Together**", it can refer to telling others about Jesus and while we can all do this by having conversations with family and friends, as a church we tell others about Jesus, especially through services, if you think of some of our services that we hold throughout the year, where a large proportion of the congregation are not regular church attendees, you may be thinking of one of the Christmas services such as the Carol Service or the Memorial Services, and one thing that these services have in common is our choir! The choir is an excellent example of working intergenerationally and reaching out as a group to tell people about Jesus through the music that they sing.

However we can't leave this aspect to the choir, we all can tell other people about Jesus and it doesn't have to be through music! We can all talk to our family, friends, neighbours about our faith, especially when opportunities arise in conversation but to do this we need to have the courage and the knowledge that God will guide us to answer any questions that may come up in conversation. How do we as a church equip all members, both young and old, to have the confidence about our faith so we can talk to others about it?

During this sermon series, we have looked at how we can be an intergenerational church and ensure that every part of the body of Christ is welcomed and valued, but this is not just a responsibility that falls to John, the churchwardens, the PCC, we all have a part to play and I want to leave you with these two questions?

What one action can you do to make sure that we are an intergenerational church?

And

What one action should we do as a church to make sure that we are all welcomed and valued?

Amen