

As our family has served in different communities in different parts of the one city we have been struck by some radical differences in culture around hospitality. In particular, when ministering in a very affluent community we found that we were invited to homes far more infrequently than when we were part of a working class community.

The more affluent had higher expectations of the quality of what would be offered. As this takes time and energy, sharing a meal was out of reach. In other places, the culture of picking up some bread and sharing salad rolls together was common and easily done.



Sometimes, I think we imagine that preparing a multi-age service will be like organising a gourmet dinner for adults, ordering in pizza for the teenagers and serving hot dogs and ice-cream for the kids - all in the same room on the same table, with the silver service, balloons and streamers and the stereo on 11. Even I am struggling to summon enthusiasm for that event!

In structuring and resourcing a gathering for a diverse community, we are often overwhelmed by how much work we think it will entail.

STOP!

Before you go any further, get out your pencil and paper and a calculator and run a little tally of how many people-hours are currently invested in 'doing the stuff' to set up your weekly worship service.

A few common stats might include

Sermon preparation:	6-8 hours
Music selection	1 hour
Band rehearsal	2 hours x 4+ people
Kids program prep.	2 hours x 3 people
= Upwards of 20 hours!	

Obviously it's a reasonable expectation that any way in which we gather will require preparation time.

So how is it meant to work? How is a multi-age feast on the goodness of God cooked up?

What are the resources and energies, priorities and processes that make gathering as the whole family life giving, hopeful and missional?

God is the provider

If we think that creating a worship experience is lots of work that we have to do, we have missed the point of God's call to worship him as the one Lord. Worship is the space in which we recognise that we are empty handed and it is God who is creator, giver, sustainer, provider, blessing.

The Holy Spirit is the stirrer

The Spirit is cooking up all manner of flavours, giving gifts that will serve and strengthen the saints. Find out what gifts the Spirit has gifted your community with, and use them. These gifts (not some others that we saw on a DVD once and wish we could have) are the ones the Spirit has given us. These gifts are the instruments and implements, the platters and the vessels of our ministry with one another.

Jesus is the substance

The content of the church is Jesus: we are his body. The action of the church is to be the action of the body of Christ. This gives us a liberating way to understand what may or may not be important in gathering. Living the life of the body of Christ here and now -and into God's future of hope - is the primary shaper for the church.

Against this, all of our credal and liturgical formulations, denominational quirks of history, political allegiance, phantasms of tradition, cultural habits, sensitivities of etiquette, enslavements of fashion and style are relativised.

As Bonhoeffer asked, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"

Who is

Jesus
Christ

for us

Today?

Because we are concerned mostly with being the body of Christ, not with what needs to be done, one of the lovely gifts of a multi-age gathering is that the resources are built in already.

When your children are **included** in the multi-age gathering, your team is **already there** in the congregation – sure they will need coaching – but with encouragement and empowerment you will find things easier than you think.

Leaders can give helpful and encouraging cues and clues to help the community recognise the opportunities for ministry with one another.

These brief speeches made openly and naturally and often in the facilitation of worship can help a community manage the changes in culture that may accompany a multi-age gathering.

“We have our children among us – they are a responsibility for all of us and a great joy to all of us.”

“If there’s a little one near you, take time to share in their joy of being in the family of God. Share a smile with them.”

“Most of us don’t feel properly equipped to nurture our children. That’s normal – and that’s why we do it together in the community of faith, love and grace.”

“The noise anyone makes here is no problem – this is a place of grace – where we are all free to express our thanks and joy and praise – and our tears and griefs to God. It’s all welcome here.”

“No one here will judge anybody for making noise or moving around – the Bible is absolutely clear on the deal with judging – just don’t do it!”

“We are here for one another – to encourage and strengthen one another in the faith, to minister to one another, to serve one another. Nothing could glorify God more than those humans that he has made in his image using the gifts he’s given them by the Spirit to build one another up. “

Here are some ways that you can minister to one another as we meet today:

Smile at one another!

If someone smiles at you, smile back at them. God is delighting over both of you – so join in with his joy.

Stop and listen to someone.

Share your story with one another – it may seem mundane and ordinary to you, but it may be used by God to bless beyond your boundaries.

Stop and help someone. Allow someone to help you. Accept the gifts that are offered.

Don’t be anxious about what anyone else is thinking of you, or about what anyone else is thinking about what is going on. Jesus doesn’t encourage this kind of anxiety. He knows it will sap our joy and freedom.

Listen for the voice of God, ignore the voice of the accuser.

Risk being yourself.