

Child-Friendly Churches: Moving from a Categorical to an Intergenerational Approach

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ABSTRACT

Worship lies at the heart of church life, with the entire community participating in the adoration of God. The church is essentially an intergenerational community where all members share in a fellowship that grows in the knowledge of Christ. Ongoing changes compel the church to adapt and continuously innovate in its internal life and ministry. This study aims to analyze the church's transition from a categorical approach specifically regarding children to an inclusive intergenerational model, seeking to create a worship environment that empowers children to participate actively in all aspects of church life in a holistic and sustainable manner. The greatest challenge in implementing intergenerational worship lies in building a "bridge" to connect generations within the congregation generations previously separated by categorical ministry structures. Findings indicate a shift from categorical to intergenerational approaches. A child-friendly church is fostered through cross-generational collaboration, the strengthening of faith, and the creation of an inclusive community that supports the spiritual growth of all family members. Thus, a child-friendly church is not merely a program but a calling to build an intergenerational community. Children are not merely the future; they are an integral part of the present, deserving to be treated as equals, heard, and actively involved in the full dynamics of worship and ministry.

Keywords: Intergenerational, Worship, Children, Church.



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INTRODUCTION

The church is a diverse community of people of all ages, bound together by the blood of Christ's redemption to form the family of God. Throughout the history of Christianity, the entire body of Christ that is, people of all generations has gathered together, both to serve and to worship. Unfortunately, in recent decades, the church has also tended to segregate people by age group (Kaseh, 2026). These changes have compelled the church to adapt and continually innovate in its structure and ministry. The dominance of age-based ministry in the church is deeply entrenched, yet several problems have emerged, namely: the church is fragmented, and congregants do not know one another; issues with generational transition or movement to the next age group; and family members being separated (Hale, 2023). This prevents the service from operating holistically.

Categorical ministry, which is currently carried out primarily by the church, faces various challenges. Among the shortcomings of categorical ministry are frequent tensions between categories caused by a lack of synergy and program continuity, making it difficult to achieve the church's vision and mission specifically, building a missionary congregation (Ibu, 2022). Speaking of intergenerational ministry, James White defines it as an effort undertaken by individuals from two or more age groups who decide to learn and grow through shared faith experiences, in which all participants can contribute and share openly with one another. Based on this, discussions regarding intergenerational ministry have received special attention recently. This has emerged due to a growing awareness of the importance of involving all elements of every community, particularly the church congregation.

In the context of such a Christian congregation, intergenerational worship is essential. At its core, intergenerational worship provides an opportunity for generations that have not been involved in decision-making to participate together. This is important because there are various generations in the church, and intergenerational worship is one of the efforts made to create space for relationships between these generations. This ministry is not merely a joint worship service across generations or the elimination of age-based segregation in ministry. Hallerman explains that worship, in principle, is not only an individual activity but also a communal one because it involves a shared experience among all members (Joseph H, 2009). This demonstrates that within the church community, the individual and communal aspects cannot be separated from one another.

The inseparable fellowship referred to here also pertains to the role of children. When we speak of intergenerational worship, we are speaking of trust—trust in God, who provides opportunities and has the power to enable anyone to serve Him, including children (Lim, 2022). These days, ministry to children tends to be overlooked. The presence of children sometimes does not receive much attention from the church. In fact, children's ministry is also a duty of the church. Children's ministry is not merely a routine activity or simply following a program; it includes facilitating children's participation in congregational worship (Samosir & Parhusip, 2022). The Minahasa Evangelical Church (GMIM), recognized nationally as a model "Child-Friendly Church" (Presya, 2019), has a vision set by the GMIM Synod Children's Ministry Commission (KPAS): "Reaching All Children, Reaching All Through Children." This grand vision also illustrates just how important it is to involve Sunday School children in various aspects of church ministry, including intergenerational worship services.

As part of realizing this grand vision, the Children's Ministry Commission of the GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland congregation has established a program that combines the Sunday School service with the general worship service at the end of each month. This initiative aims to familiarize Sunday School children with the liturgy and the context of congregational worship from an early age. Furthermore, the program is designed to foster a sense of togetherness among children, their families, and the congregation as a whole during worship. It serves as a crucial initial step toward fully realized intergenerational ministry within the Evangelical Christian Church in Minahasa (GMIM).

There are several previous studies that serve as the foundation for this discussion. First, Marensiana Hale's study, titled "The Foundations of Intergenerational Christian Education in the Church" (Hale, 2023) yang berfokus pada gagasan Pendidikan dengan pendekatan intergenerasional. which focuses on the concept of education through an intergenerational approach. Next is Budianto Lim's article, titled "Toward an Integrative Church Rooted in Intergenerational Worship: The Realization of a Reconciliatory Community as the Church's Epiphany," which focuses on efforts to realize an integrative concept of worship in which all parties are involved (Lim, 2022). Next is an article by Kukuh Purwidhianto titled "Intergenerational Worship and Motivation to Worship Amid the Challenges of Individualistic and Consumerist Church Practices," which focuses on the proper motivation for worship as well as how to organize intergenerational worship for all members of the congregation (Purwidhianto, 2022). Based on this, the purpose of this study is to examine the services provided by the church to Sunday School children during congregational worship services as well as their involvement in these services. Specifically, this study will examine efforts toward inclusive worship ministry at GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland and assess the extent to which the church is striving to become a child-friendly church particularly by fostering intergenerational fellowship within the GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland congregation in the Manado Winangun region.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research was designed as a qualitative study aimed at exploring in depth the meanings, experiences, and dynamics of children's ministry practices in the church, particularly in the transition from a segregated, categorical approach to an inclusive, intergenerational model. A descriptive approach was adopted because this study does not seek to test hypotheses or identify causal relationships; rather, it focuses on a rich, contextual understanding of how key actors interpret and implement the concept of a child-friendly church in their daily settings (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015). The descriptive approach was chosen because it allows researchers to capture social reality as it is, without intervention, and to present a comprehensive picture of the perspectives, attitudes, and strategies employed by church educators.

To collect relevant and in-depth data, semi-structured interviews served as the primary research method. The key informants in this study were eight Sunday School teachers, three parents, and a special minister from GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland in the Manado Winangun region, who were selected through purposive sampling—meaning they were not chosen at random but based on specific criteria aligned with the study's objectives. These

selection criteria included a minimum of three years of service as a Sunday School teacher, active involvement in planning children's activities, and representation from various local church backgrounds to ensure a variety of perspectives. Of the eight teachers, four came from urban churches with large numbers of children, two from suburban churches, and the remaining two from churches in semi-rural areas, ensuring that the collected data reflected the diversity of challenges and opportunities across different geographic contexts (Yusuf, 2017). The interviews were conducted in person, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes per participant, using a flexible set of open-ended questions to allow the teachers to spontaneously share their experiences in creating child-friendly worship spaces that also bridge the generational gap.

After all the data were collected, the analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of qualitative data analysis, which comprises three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction was carried out by selecting, focusing, and simplifying the interview transcripts into main themes such as understanding of child-friendliness, structural barriers, and intergenerational collaboration practices. The data presentation was then organized in the form of thematic narratives and summary matrices to make it easier for researchers to identify recurring patterns. Final conclusions were drawn inductively, always comparing findings across participants to ensure that the resulting interpretations were truly grounded in the field data (Huberman, 2014).

To ensure the validity or credibility of the data, this study employed several triangulation strategies. First, source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from eight teachers from different church contexts, so that the findings would not rely on a single perspective. Second, the researcher conducted member checking, which involved reconfirming the summary of the interview results with each participant to ensure that the researcher's interpretation of the meaning aligned with the participants' intentions. Third, the researcher extended their field engagement through informal observations of several church activities before and after the interviews, thereby gaining a stronger contextual understanding of the teachers' statements. Fourth, the researcher also engaged in discussions with peers who are experts in the field of religious education to verify the saturation and consistency of the thematic categorization (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009). All of these efforts were carried out systematically so that the research results would not only be narratively descriptive but also scientifically reliable and accountable, serving as a foundation for practical recommendations in the development of intergenerational church ministry.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Worship

Worship is the heart of church life, and the entire community participates in worshipping God. Worship is a fundamental aspect of human life, and as such, it is also part of human nature, which is God's creation (Manafe, 2014). Worship is the congregation's response to God for His work of salvation. This response is manifested through worship, service, and devotion that involve the heart, mind, and all aspects of life (Gulo & Angelina, 2026). Worship concerns not only the vertical aspect (relationship with God) but also the horizontal aspect

(relationship with fellow human beings) (Santo et al., 2021). According to Augustine, human beings were created for communion with God, and we remain restless until we find peace in Him (Manafe, 2014). Worship is an integral part of human life. According to Tozer, worship is the effort made by humans to feel in their hearts and express in appropriate ways with humility and accompanied by awe at God's wonders (Manafe, 2014). Ultimately, when it comes to worship, what matters most is not the rituals or routines performed during it. The most important aspect of worship is how, when people leave the place of worship, they can live lives that are a form of service to others and devotion to God.

In current developments, categorical ministry has become one of the aspects being developed in congregational worship. This type of ministry, which is increasingly practiced by the church, faces various challenges. Among the shortcomings of categorical ministry is the frequent occurrence of tension between categories caused by a lack of synergy and program continuity, making it difficult to achieve the church's vision and mission specifically, building a missionary congregation (Anouw et al., 2026). According to Christiani, for nearly 19 centuries, the church has essentially been an intergenerational community. Furthermore, according to Christiani, efforts to develop categorical ministries within worship cannot be separated from the Sunday school movement pioneered by Robert Raikes (Christiani, 2022). This movement arose from Raikes's concern over the practice of imprisoning children at that time; consequently, Raikes decided to open special Sunday classes for these children, where they were taught Bible stories, writing, reading, and proper conduct (Christiani, 2022). Eventually, Sunday school became a movement adopted by all churches, specifically to provide children with specialized instruction regarding their faith. This also marked the beginning of generational segregation in congregational worship, which led to ministry being compartmentalized solely based on age categories.

Therefore, the church today needs to focus on the spiritual growth of every member particularly the younger generation, who represent the future. In this digital age, the church's youth especially Sunday School children need to possess a resilient spirituality to face the various challenges brought about by changing times. The progress and development of a church require the contribution and involvement of all generations, including children as the next generation ensuring the church's continuity. The church must educate children to have faith in Christ and instill positive values aligned with biblical truth. In this regard, intergenerational worship needs to be developed as a means of providing an opportunity for everyone including children to participate.

Intergenerational Worship

Worship in the Bible encompasses the entire community of God's people, regardless of age. From the very beginning, the church has also been referred to as an intergenerational community. In this intergenerational fellowship, teaching takes place through worship (Christiani, 2022). Intergenerational worship is one of many creative forms of worship in which all generations within the congregation can play their respective roles. Intergenerational worship also accommodates the needs of all generations in the congregation so that they may be well served. According to Holly Catterton, intergenerational worship helps build a more inclusive faith community, where every generation can learn from one another, share experiences, and grow together (Allen & Ross, 2015) In intergenerational worship, the

emphasis is not on division based on ministry categories but on togetherness and unity as a single, cohesive church community. Catterton and Ross argue that the unique spiritual benefits of worship across all ages are lost when congregants worship exclusively or are separated based on age categories. Therefore, intergenerational worship is important to practice (Allen & Ross, 2015).

In practice, intergenerational worship involves all members of the congregation from children to the elderly without the segmentation currently practiced in categorical ministries (Lim, 2022). When we speak of intergenerational worship, we are speaking of trust. Trust in God, who provides opportunities and has the power to enable anyone to serve Him including children. At its core, intergenerational worship gives generations that have traditionally been excluded from decision-making the chance to participate together. This is important because there are diverse generations in the church, and intergenerational worship is one effort to create space for relationships across these generations. This ministry is not merely a combined worship service across generations or the elimination of age-based segregation in ministry. The intergenerational approach is based on the theory that interaction between different generations enriches faith learning. In the context of the church, children can learn from the faith examples of adults through worshiping together.

Currently, intergenerational worship is essential. To facilitate its implementation, a worship liturgy must be designed in accordance with the very purpose of intergenerational worship itself. An intergenerational worship liturgy can be structured to involve participants ranging from children to the elderly. This includes the selection of songs, the leaders guiding the service, and a sermon that speaks to all generations. In this regard, the support of parents and the entire congregation is essential, particularly in explaining the meaning of the service to children. Intergenerational worship can serve as a relevant approach to increasing the participation of Sunday School children in congregational worship. This approach aligns with the biblical principle of the unity of the body of Christ and offers opportunities for a more holistic faith education. Intergenerational worship can be a relevant approach to increasing the participation of Sunday School children in congregational worship. This approach aligns with the biblical principle of the unity of the body of Christ and offers opportunities for a more holistic faith education.

The Church's Paradigm Shift from Categorical to Intergenerational

The transformation of the church's paradigm from a categorical model to an intergenerational one reflects a profound theological and pastoral shift in congregational life (Lindawati, 2023). Although ministry based on age categories has its benefits such as enabling teaching materials tailored to each group's developmental stage this model often leads to fragmentation within the congregation (Aprilia, 2023). The separation between age groups indirectly limits cross-generational interaction, which ultimately hinders the exchange of values, experiences, and wisdom among church members (Wiratama, 2024). This situation leads to a weakening of overall spirituality and social cohesion within the faith community.

As an alternative, the intergenerational approach introduces a more integrative community dynamic by encouraging the involvement of all age groups in church life. In this paradigm, every generation from children to the elderly is viewed as a complementary element within the body of Christ. This model creates space for a two-way learning process: older

generations share their experiences and spiritual maturity, while younger generations contribute their enthusiasm, innovation, and fresh perspectives. This reciprocal relationship enriches individuals' spiritual experiences while strengthening the unity of the community (Hale et al., 2024). The intergenerational approach aligns with church doctrine, which views the community of faith as a single body with diverse yet interdependent members. The Bible, particularly in Paul's writings, emphasizes the importance of unity amid diversity in functions and roles (Sarubang, 2024). Therefore, the shift toward an intergenerational model is not merely a reorganization of ministry programs but a theological act that affirms the values of unity and inclusivity within the church. This approach requires the church to create an environment where all members, regardless of age, can make significant contributions and feel valued.

In addition to theological aspects, the intergenerational model has also been shown to have a positive impact on the formation of faith identity, particularly among the younger generation. When churches segregate age groups, young people often lose adult role models, and conversely, older adults lose insight into the challenges faced by the younger generation. A cross-generational approach enables the transfer of values through role modeling and provides older generations with the opportunity to understand the contemporary context that influences the faith lives of the younger generation (Purwanta et al., 2024). This process creates a mutually enriching and reinforcing cycle of learning across generations.

According to the authors, the shift from a categorical to an intergenerational approach represents a significant advancement in the church's understanding of itself and its mission in the world. This change not only addresses structural fragmentation but also revives the biblical vision of an interdependent and interconnected community. By implementing an intergenerational model, the church can become more effective in fulfilling its prophetic and pastoral roles as a representation of the Kingdom of God, bringing together all generations to grow together in love and faith.

The Concept of a Child-Friendly Church from a Theological Perspective at GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland

The concept of a child-friendly church in the realm of theology emphasizes that the church's responsibility is not limited to providing physical facilities or special programs for children, but also to building a community culture that fully includes them in congregational life (Hia & Zega, 2022). A child-friendly church is not limited to providing Sunday School or a separate worship space, but rather creates a community atmosphere that recognizes children as an integral part of God's people. In this regard, an inclusive theological approach to children serves as the primary foundation a perspective that views children as spiritual subjects with an active role in church life, rather than merely as objects of ministry.

This understanding is based on a theological interpretation of biblical texts, such as Matthew 18:1–6 and Psalm 8:2, which explicitly highlight the important role of children in the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 18:1–6, Jesus emphasizes that welcoming a child is equivalent to welcoming Him, meaning that children possess spiritual value on par with adults. This statement is not merely symbolic but also constitutes a theological affirmation of children's status as agents of faith (limbong, 2020). Meanwhile, Psalm 8:2 affirms that children's praise possesses spiritual power capable of silencing God's enemies, thereby recognizing that their

voices carry significant spiritual weight (Bram M et al., 2025). On this basis, the church is called to adopt a holistic approach in involving children in church life. Children's participation is not limited to being recipients of instruction but also includes active involvement in liturgy, decision-making, and the practice of faith. For example, children can be given the opportunity to read the Bible, share their testimonies, and even participate in church discussion forums (Sanjaya et al., 2025). Furthermore, the church is called to create a safe and supportive environment where children feel valued, included, and not viewed as spiritually immature individuals.

This approach is based on the belief that a child's faith is not an immature or imperfect faith, but rather a complete and authentic faith (Priyono et al., 2026). Therefore, it is important for the church to foster a proper theological understanding among adults regarding the presence and role of children in the faith community. A perspective that views children solely as "the church of the future" often overlooks the reality that they are part of the church today. The Bible itself does not distinguish the quality of faith based on age in terms of salvation and one's relationship with God. The discussion regarding a child-friendly church at GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland begins with the fundamental understanding that children are not passive objects in worship, but rather active subjects of faith. In an interview with Mrs. R, a senior Sunday school teacher, she emphasized that a child-friendly church is not merely a play area or a comfortable facility, but a theological calling to recognize children as an integral part of the congregation. She cited Jesus' words about letting children come to Him as the foundation of ministry. Theologically, this perspective aligns with the theology of the child developed by Marcia Bunge, which emphasizes that children possess dignity and spiritual agency from an early age. Children are not "adults in the process of development," but rather whole creations in the sight of God (Bunge, 2006). According to the author, the foundation of a child-friendly church rests on the theological recognition of children's dignity, which then serves as the basis for all ministry practices.

Furthermore, the interview with Mrs. M highlighted the aspect of inclusivity in worship. She explained that a child-friendly church means children are not completely separated from the main service but are involved in the liturgy in ways appropriate to their age. At GMIM Yesus Memberkati, children are often given the opportunity to bring offerings, read Scripture, or sing at the pulpit. The theoretical analysis draws on John Westerhoff's participatory theology, which asserts that faith grows through communal experiences and meaningful rituals. This active participation is not merely entertainment but the formation of an authentic Christian identity (Westerhoff, 2000). Children learn that the church is their home, not a foreign place. According to the author, liturgical inclusivity is a concrete practice of participatory theology, which strengthens children's sense of belonging and involvement in church life.

Mr. A, a Sunday school teacher who is also an educator, explained that a child-friendly church requires a friendly and contextual pedagogical approach. He uses picture stories, skits, and interactive songs to convey Gospel values. He emphasized that the Word of God must be "translated" into children's language without compromising its essence. Theoretically, this is analyzed through James Fowler's theory of cognitive-religious development, which divides the stages of faith into levels. Young children are in the intuitive-projective stage of faith, so they learn through imagination and stories (Fowler & Dell, 2006). According to the author, a

multisensory approach is highly effective because children absorb meaning through concrete experiences. A child-friendly teaching method is not a simplification of theology, but rather the incarnation of the Word in a form accessible to the world of children.

The main challenges raised by Mrs. D are children's behavioral issues and space limitations. She explained that not all children receive the same upbringing at home, leading to difficulties in managing a heterogeneous class. However, she sees this as an opportunity to put grace into practice. From a theological perspective, this approach can be linked to the theology of forgiveness and patience taught by Dietrich Bonhoeffer regarding life in community. A child-friendly church does not mean creating a problem-free zone, but rather a space where children are accepted with all their strengths and weaknesses. A teacher's patience reflects God's long-suffering patience toward His people (Kaseh, 2026). According to the author, a child-friendly church is a practice of mercy, where classroom management is viewed as part of the formation of a compassionate character.

Finally, a comprehensive theological reflection by the eight teachers reveals that the child-friendly church at GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland is not merely a modern adaptation, but a return to the essence of the Gospel humility and acceptance. They agree that Jesus Himself is the primary model for embracing children. The concluding analysis draws on the theology of the kingdom taught by Stanley Hauerwas, which holds that the church is a narrative community that shapes the character of its members through customs and rituals. A child-friendly church is a manifestation of the kingdom of God, where the small, the weak, and the powerless are given a place of honor. The final conclusion of the entire discussion is that the concept of a Child-Friendly Church from a theological perspective is not merely an additional program, but rather a confession of faith that children are the heirs of God's promises, and the church is called to be a place where they grow in love, truth, and joy.

Intergenerational Worship in the Context of Creating a Child-Friendly Church at GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland

Children are the present and future of the church. Therefore, children's ministry is not merely a routine activity or simply a matter of following a program; it also involves facilitating children's participation in congregational worship (Samosir & Parhusip, 2022). Children are often viewed as an important part of the church community, but their participation in congregational worship is frequently less than optimal. Intergenerational worship offers an opportunity to actively involve children not merely as passive participants, but as integral members of the congregation who bring their unique perspectives. John Westerhoff argues that worshiping together with children creates a space for learning about faith through direct experience, strengthening spiritual intimacy across generations (Westerhoff, 2000). This is also in line with efforts to create a child-friendly church.

The intergenerational worship service at GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland began with an awareness of the disconnect between children and adults in worship. Based on an interview with the first teacher, Mrs. M, she stated that, until now, children have felt alienated from adult liturgy, while adults view children's worship as merely a play activity. The second teacher, Mr. S, added that this separation causes children to lose a sense of the sacred and adults to miss the opportunity to serve as role models of faith. In theory, this approach aligns with Holly Catterton Allen's concept of intergenerational worship, which emphasizes that

intergenerational worship builds a collective identity of faith (Allen & Ross, 2015). Intergenerational worship serves as the foundational starting point for creating a Child-Friendly Church, as it acknowledges that every generation plays an active role in worship.

Implementation of intergenerational worship through liturgical planning that actively involves children. Mrs. D explained that children are involved as scripture readers, psalmists, and offering bearers not merely as spectators. Mr. Y explained that sermon content is simplified with visual illustrations and interactive stories so that both children and adults can fully grasp it. The theoretical analysis draws on James Fowler's concept of faith development (Fowler & Dell, 2006), which states that children aged 7–12 are in the mythic-literal faith stage, meaning they require tangible symbols and narratives. In this worship service, liturgical symbols are translated into language accessible to children without losing their theological depth (Simanjuntak et al., 2025). Liturgical planning that is inclusive both cognitively and symbolically serves as a bridge so that children feel they are an integral part of the congregation, not merely an afterthought.

The roles of educators and parents as facilitators in intergenerational worship. Mrs. R explained that parents were initially hesitant because they felt ill-equipped to guide their children during joint worship services. However, Mr. T added that after several training sessions, parents actually learned to listen to their children's questions about faith and respond with love. Children learn about faith by observing the consistent behavior of adults. When adults actively pray and sing, children imitate and internalize these values (Ranting et al., 2025). The transformation of the roles of parents and teachers from instructors to facilitators who provide emotional and spiritual support is the key to the success of child-friendly worship services.

Intergenerational worship at GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland has had a positive impact on intergenerational relationships and the understanding of faith. Among the eight Sunday School teachers, a common thread emerged: a child-friendly church is not merely a program, but a shift in theological and pedagogical paradigms. Worshiping together fosters empathy, patience, and joy that transcend age differences. The theory of intergenerational Christian education asserts that when children and adults learn from one another, the church becomes a psychologically and spiritually healthy community. GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland has been moving toward becoming a child-friendly church, but it still requires ongoing strengthening in facilitator training, liturgical curriculum, and periodic evaluation so that intergenerational worship can truly become the lifeblood of an inclusive and transformative congregation.

The Response of the GMIM Yesus Memberkati Citraland Congregation to Children in Intergenerational Worship

One of the key components in making intergenerational worship a reality is the congregation. The congregation must collaborate with specialized ministers, parents, and Sunday School teachers in efforts to open up to children's participation in worship and to realize a shared purpose in conducting the service. Realizing this shared purpose demonstrates that all parties have their respective roles. The same applies to life within the congregation. All members must be aware of their functions and roles within the community. These roles and functions must be carried out collectively so that ministry can run smoothly, including the

participation of children. Participation is a process of sharing in decisions that affect a person's life and the life of the community in which they live (Juk et al., 2024). Based on this, it becomes clear that participation is also related to environmental conditions that influence a person's decision-making. Environmental factors are fundamental elements that significantly influence a person's decision-making process. This is consistent with what Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross have stated regarding children's involvement in worship. According to them, as individuals created by God who are of equal value to adults, children need to be present and have the right to take part in decision-making and express their opinions. Therefore, there needs to be a participatory space for children in worship activities (Allen & Ross, 2015). The church must strive to create these participatory spaces as a way of valuing all generations within the congregation, especially children.

Based on interviews with Sunday school teachers, the informants do not yet fully understand the differences between intergenerational and multigenerational approaches. While "intergenerational" refers to the presence and participation of all members specifically in the context of congregational worship the term "multigenerational" simply refers to a setting where all generations are present during congregational worship, even if they are not actively involved or participating in the service. Ultimately, this lack of alignment creates a disconnect in the goals for developing intergenerational worship among both ministry staff and the congregation.

In the context of ministry at the Minahasa Evangelical Church (GMIM), as part of the effort to realize the vision of the Children's Ministry Commission "Reaching All Children, and Reaching All Through Children" this intergenerational worship must continue to be developed. This can be achieved by giving children the opportunity not merely to attend congregational worship but to actively participate in it such as serving as greeters, reading Scripture, playing music, or, more broadly, engaging with the sermon content and liturgy. Occasionally, Sunday school songs can be incorporated for the congregation to sing together during worship. Therefore, in implementing intergenerational worship, it is necessary to involve all generations in the church.

In practice at GMIM Yesus Memberkati, children's involvement in ministry remains very limited. Specifically during Sunday worship, children are merely present and are simply "forced" to follow the established worship format. Furthermore, there is a lack of effort on the part of parents to teach their children about the importance of attending congregational worship. Ultimately, for children, worshipping together with the congregation is no longer a "worship service" because it feels disconnected from their world. This issue requires serious attention to ensure that ministry to children is not neglected.

The greatest challenge in conducting intergenerational worship is building a "bridge" that can connect all generations within the church community generations that have long been separated by categorical ministries. Based on the interview findings, one approach to bridging this divide is to create a liturgy that involves families not just individual children, but children and their families. In addition, another effort that can be made to bridge existing intergenerational differences is to equip oneself or ensure the presence of leaders who understand the importance of intergenerational worship. This can be achieved by ensuring that, during the last week of each month when children worship together with the congregation, the

worship leader provides teaching materials that children can understand. Therefore, the effort to create a child-friendly church through intergenerational worship is a collective effort by all parties involved in ministry.

CONCLUSION

From its very inception, the church has truly been an intergenerational community where all members are united in fellowship and grow in their knowledge of Christ. Segregation resulting from categorical ministry ultimately makes the church seem no longer a unified whole, as it is divided along age lines. Consequently, it becomes difficult to provide holistic ministry to the entire congregation. Intergenerational worship can be a relevant approach to address this issue. Furthermore, intergenerational worship can also increase Sunday school children's participation in congregational worship. This approach aligns with the biblical principle of the unity of the body of Christ and offers opportunities for a more holistic faith education. Intergenerational worship is also one way the church can become a child-friendly church. This is important because children are the present and the future of the church. Therefore, the church needs to strive for a comprehensive ministry to children. Children are not merely the smallest entities in ministry; without them, ministry will ultimately fall short of its full potential. Furthermore, if these youngest members are not well served, it is not impossible that the future of the church could be in grave danger.

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