

FAMILY MATTERS

resources for homes

Inter-generational class curriculum

Until now, we have had two choices. We can divide the church by age groups, sending everyone off to age-appropriate classes for Christian education. Or we can teach everyone together, trying to keep childish restlessness under control

and hoping the children will “get something” out of a lecture designed for adults. Typically, we choose the former, with fairly satisfactory results. Now, however, we have a third choice. Have you considered what might be gained by offering an intergenerational class, where children and adults learn together and encourage each other?

For one thing, we would have the opportunity to be the church—a body, united, not divided. This is what Pastor Dale Cuer watched happen last summer in West Middlebury Baptist Church in East Bethany, New York. Pastor Cuer led his church through a new curriculum produced by Desiring God Ministries and designed specifically for mixed-age groups. As all ages met together weekly, the awkward barriers between adults and children, teens and seniors, crumbled. Families got to know other families. Even better, these budding relationships were based on far more than small talk. Michelle Roberts helped her church (First Evangelical Presbyterian in Renton, Washington) use the same curriculum. Mrs. Roberts says, “It has been a delight to sit in groups of mixed age and discuss how God’s Word applies to our lives.”

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith (by Sally Michael) provides thirteen lessons designed to challenge people of all ages. Presented clearly and simply, the overarching themes are law and grace as seen in the Ten Commandments. Like the Westminster and Heidelberg Catechisms, the lessons look in detail at what each commandment requires and forbids. Thus, also like the catechisms, they expose the foolishness of our assumptions that, of course, we keep the Ten Commandments. The material keeps coming back to the person and work of Christ as God’s provision for our failure. The lessons also highlight the work of the Spirit in transforming a believer so that the Ten Commandments “[become] the expression of a redeemed heart.”

The studies begin with a concrete illustration of a key truth. The teacher explains this illustration and continues to teach using simple visuals. Small group discussion around key Bible passages alternates with the whole class instruction. Some of the discussion questions train students to carefully examine Bible texts. Others call for very pointed applications. Adults find it much harder to dodge

the practical implications of Scripture when they are discussing it with children who are known for their concrete way of thinking. Said Mrs.

Roberts: “Everyone has squirmed at one point or another as the Holy Spirit has convicted us in new ways.” By means of a game board and cards for each small group, the session concludes with additional opportunity to discuss and apply.

But that’s not all! An intergenerational class not only unifies a church, it strengthens the family. Pastor Cuer watched parents learn to discuss spiritual things with their children in the class—a kind of hands-on training. Parents could then practice these developing skills at home, since the curriculum provides a book of family devotions. The devotions complement class material without repeating it. Each week, the devotional includes the Westminster Larger Catechism examination of the commandment being studied. A daily Scripture passage and questions follow. Supplemental material includes related activities for a family night and lists of books on the Ten Commandments both for adults and for children.

First Evangelical Presbyterian and West Middlebury Baptist used *The Righteous Shall Live by Faith* as a summer Sunday school class. That would be one solution for the smaller Sunday school classes that result from the typical church’s summer slump, as well as a way to give regular teachers a little break. But this curriculum could work equally well as an innovative small group or as an engaging family camp.

Starr Meade is author of *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds: Family Devotions Based on the Shorter Catechism* (Peop Publishing, 2000).