

SUCH AS THESE: INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN  
IN THE CHURCH

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Summary:

This paper proposes that intergenerational worship is the best way to integrate children into the community of faith. It suggests that generational segregation is counterproductive to this goal. Included is a an intergenerational musical production written for the small church context: Meaningful to Me: The Story of Christmas. If you wish to perform this play, please email the CCWS site moderator ([dale@ccws.ca](mailto:dale@ccws.ca)) for permission. Please use songs according to CCLI and other copyright guidelines.

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Western culture is rapidly changing. The younger generations have a much different worldview than their grandparents, parents, and sometimes even older siblings. Modernity is waning away, leaving in its wake a new era referred to as postmodernity. Emphasis on human reason and understanding is being replaced by an authentication of feelings and an acceptance of mystery.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of postmodern thought involves deep, penetrating changes to the way modern culture has understood knowledge, truth, humanity, and faith. The reality of this newly emerging postmodern era can seem ominous, overwhelming, and even frightening, especially for those in the church who interpret the changes as a threat to their faith. Many modern-thinking Christians would prefer to ignore the obvious changes taking place in both the culture at large as well as within the church. Difficult as it may be for them to admit though, modern-minded Christians have much to learn from the postmodern generations, and postmodernity is no more a threat to the Christian faith than was modernity.

The ending of the modern era has enabled the study of its influences through a more objective lens. The ability now exists to study our culture prior to and during modernity, as well as to glimpse ahead to an emerging era. The church has been influenced by modern thought patterns more than it would probably like to admit.<sup>2</sup> A more objective examination of modern ways of worshiping and ministering will enable the church to identify inconsistencies with biblical models and develop more authentic ways of living as the body of Christ.

One aspect of church life which must be re-examined in light of these cultural changes is the way the church ministers to the different generations in its midst, especially the children and youth. Popular church practice involves separating the congregation into age-homogeneous

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<sup>1</sup> Phill Hill, *The Church of the Third Millenium* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1999), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 22.

groups for education and ministry.<sup>3</sup> While these groupings make sense in terms of targeting identified needs and educational levels, they can also lead to problems. The trend for teenagers to leave the church at age eighteen,<sup>4</sup> after they graduate from youth group, indicates that they rarely transition well into the adult body of believers. Church life has been centered on their styles and preferences for as long as they can remember, from nursery all the way up to youth group, and they feel alien in a corporate gathering amidst the other generations. To compound the issue, many church services are designed to be meaningful to modern people, which alienates the postmodern-minded youth.

Does the church have a responsibility to help the youth recognize their place within the corporate body of the church? It is this author's conclusion, and the thesis of this paper, that all generations within the church should worship, serve, learn and grow together as a unified body, recognizing and celebrating their unique values primarily within that body and secondarily through age-specific groupings when necessary. This paper examines the issue of generational integration in ministry from a historical and biblical perspective, identifies reasons for and against this model of ministry, as well as discusses issues surrounding its implementation within a small rural church ministry context. As it is most often the children who are excluded, the focus will be on integrating them back into the corporate worship gathering. It must be recognized however, that age-segregated activities such as Sunday School, kids clubs, and youth groups, held either before or after the corporate worship gathering, or on a different day altogether, can be both appropriate and necessary to children's and youth's education and Christian formation. Appendix A includes a script for an intergenerational Christmas program,

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<sup>3</sup> Lynn M. Thompson, "Intergenerational Ministry: Breaking Down Barriers, Creating a Family Model," *Focus Over Fifty*, 2003 [document on-line]; available from <http://www.family.org/focusoverfifty/articles/a0025230.cfm>; Internet; accessed 14 Jan. 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Mike Breaux, "A Mad Multi-gen Strategy that Works, Dude," *Leadership* 26, 2 (Spring 2005): 44.

which can be used as an outreach tool as well as a community and faith-building project for the people involved in its production.

Information about how children's ministry was done in the early church is scarce. The Scriptures do not address the question in any depth, and so much of our understanding is "drawn from inferences or from passing references".<sup>5</sup> A look at a few glimpses we are offered will help us identify a historical foundation for understanding generational integration in ministry today.

The early church was formed on the foundation of Jewish culture. In the Jewish tradition, the children's asking of the important questions in the Passover celebration is a beautiful illustration of their inclusion in the faith traditions. Fathers took the responsibility to teach their sons seriously, and by age thirteen, boys assumed their own responsibility for following the Torah. Young boys participated with the men in temple feasts and rituals.<sup>6</sup>

Likewise, the early Christians followed the precedent of each family teaching their own children. This seems to have been the model exemplified by Jesus, as He usually related to children through their parents. Children in their encounters with Jesus are spoken for, rather than speaking for themselves.<sup>7</sup> Jesus affirmed their role as children,<sup>8</sup> as well as their parents' responsibility towards them. While affirming the children's place under their parents' care, Jesus also ascribed to children a new significance and dignity both by using them as an example of discipleship,<sup>9</sup> as well as through His own experience of childhood.<sup>10</sup>

The early church expected that children would be present at worship gatherings.<sup>11</sup> Paul directly addresses the Ephesian children in his letter to the Ephesians, chap.6:v.1, indicating their

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<sup>5</sup> W.A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996), 66.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72.

inclusion in the congregation. In 1 Timothy 3:4 however, he firmly delegates the responsibility of teaching the children to the family.<sup>12</sup> While a full discussion of children and the sacraments is beyond the scope of this paper, evidence points towards infant baptism being permissible but not required, and that participation in the Eucharist is assumed to have been the norm for children in the early church.<sup>13</sup>

Sunday Schools were initiated in England in the late 1700's to teach poor children reading and writing (from the Bible), and proper behavior. Their popularity spread to America, where in 1811, a Presbyterian named Robert May began using Sunday School to teach religious doctrine to the children of the unchurched poor.<sup>14</sup> Although still valuable as a teaching resource for otherwise unchurched children, Sunday Schools have largely become the primary method of teaching and passing along the faith to children from both Christian and non-Christian families. Churches that heavily promote children's programming today essentially portray the idea that they can spiritually form children better than the parents can, thus essentially taking this responsibility away from the parents to own it for themselves.<sup>15</sup> This notion can be harmful, as "family is the most important arena for a child's spiritual development and soul care."<sup>16</sup> By "usurping ...a parent's God-given responsibility and gift: to care for the souls of their own children..., [churches] are taking on a responsibility no program can ever fulfill."<sup>17</sup>

There are benefits to targeting specific age and interest groupings for ministry and education in order to achieve increased effectiveness in evangelism.<sup>18</sup> People, especially children and teens enjoy being with their peers, and often learn well from one another. The

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>21</sup> Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 106.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Garth Bolinder and James Emery White, "Should the Church Target Generations?" *Leadership* (Spring 1999): 104.

ability to adapt material and teaching styles to match specific stages of growth and development, to address unique personal and social issues, and to grade activities to match the participants' abilities are advantages of homogeneous-age education.<sup>19</sup> This Sunday School-type approach often results in successful learning of facts, or cognitive learning, which is useful, especially if the children are not taught this information at home. Add to this the fact that some parents and kids cherish the time apart on Sunday mornings, and the feeling that incorporating children in worship with the adults will result in unfairness to either the children or the adults.<sup>20</sup> The result can be heavy pressure to continue the status-quo methodology of separating children from adults during church. Perhaps the most weighty argument for the more focused teaching enabled by age-homogeneous teaching, is that although the "traditional teaching of the early church was that the child would be nurtured within the family, spiritually as well as physically,... today family itself is in need of nurture".<sup>21</sup> Relegating the responsibility for teaching the children back to the family can only be successfully done when the parents take their responsibility seriously and also when they themselves have the faith and knowledge to impart to their children.

While there are good reasons for age-homogeneous education within the church, there is also overwhelming support for the integration of all generations, including children, within the main worship gathering of the church. The exclusion of children is largely a modern phenomenon, with its focus on the individual over the corporate, reason and understanding over experience, and the market-driven rather than the mission-minded approach. The generationally

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<sup>19</sup> Allen G. Harkness, "Intergenerational and Homogeneous-Age Education: Mutually Exclusive Strategies For Faith Communities?" *Religious Educatio*, 95,1 (Winter 2000): 54-55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>21</sup> Strange, 117.

integrated church is closest to the New Testament pattern of worship,<sup>22</sup> and as this paper suggests, may be the most effective way to connect postmodern people with Jesus.

The heartbeat of God is for one, unified church.<sup>23</sup> Even though people may initially perceive that their needs are not met as well through a generationally integrated approach, it is important to realize that Jesus, although He was aware of people's felt needs, did not let them determine His agenda. Rather, he uncovered needs that the people themselves were unaware of, and even then, He did not meet all of these needs of all of the people.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to the popular market-driven approach to church, "it should not be the customer who determines the agenda of the church, but the Lord, whom the church is called to worship and obey." and "the gospel is more concerned with people's holiness than their happiness."<sup>25</sup> Psalm 145 v.4 states that "one generation will commend your works to another" (NIV). In Deuteronomy 6:7 God tells his people to "impress [the commandments] upon your children." Generational integration in the church can prepare the way for these instructions to be followed. It can meet the people's unrecognized needs, and help them move closer to holiness. Even though including children in the church can sometimes be uncomfortable, messy (literally and figuratively), and noisy, it may well be the best way to build disciples amongst both the young and the old within the church in the postmodern era.

In terms of effective evangelism, it has been shown that the most important relationships for witnessing and evangelism are family relationships.<sup>26</sup> Generational integration can be used to help foster these relationships and equip people for ministry within the family unit. Parents can be helped to understand their responsibility to teach their children, and be equipped with the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>23</sup> Breaux, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Gibbs, 46.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Rainer, *Surprising Insights From the Unchurched: and Proven Ways to Reach Them* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001) 49.

knowledge and tools to do so effectively. The church needs to position itself as a supplement to rather than a replacement for parents' roles in the spiritual formation of their children.<sup>27</sup>

Although people argue for age-homogeneous groups for easier lesson planning and activities, every Sunday School teacher knows that it is impossible to relate to each person's level all the time even within such groups.<sup>28</sup> Within a class of children the same age, there can be vastly different educational needs: from a child who is hearing about the Bible for the first time, to the pastor's child who has more Biblical knowledge than the teacher; from home-schooled children who have been protected from the influences of media and secular culture, to those who are struggling with and need to talk about those very issues the home-schoolers' parents most want to protect their children from.<sup>29</sup> Often a child's educational needs for basic, simple explanations are more similar to the needs of an adult first exploring Christianity than they are to those of a similar aged child who has received Biblical teaching from infancy. Age-segregation does not always create the optimum learning environment one would expect. Young people today learn best by doing, being, and participating.<sup>30</sup> Rather than receive information, they want to participate in formation.<sup>31</sup> They value the intrapersonal learning<sup>32</sup> and authenticity which comes from hearing other people's stories. Spectatorism, which has been a tool often resorted to in children's ministry, quickly becomes boring to them.<sup>33</sup> They are inundated with

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<sup>27</sup> Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 151.

<sup>28</sup> Harkness, 57.

<sup>29</sup> David Elkind, "Generation X Papers: Postmodern Families and the Church" from *Children's Ministry Magazine* Sep/Oct 1996 [document on-line]; available from <http://www.tomorrowtoday.biz/generations/xpaper2001.htm>; Internet; accessed 14 Jan. 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Neil Cole, "What About Kids in Organic Church? Part One: Integration is Better Than Segregation." 2003 [document on-line]; available from <http://www.cmaresources.org>; Internet; accessed 14 Jan. 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 164-165.

<sup>32</sup> Harkness, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Gibbs, 154.

entertainment from every direction, and are not seeking more of it from the church. An alternative to the instructional, spectator style, same-age Sunday School class needs to be found.

Today's youth experience constant upheaval.<sup>34</sup> They need and crave the stability, consistency,<sup>35</sup> and sense of family which can be experienced through generational integration in the church. Many children live in single-parent families, and are in need of relationships with other adults. Surrogate grandparents from within the congregation can be an enormous blessing for many children who don't often see their biological grandparents. The wisdom and experience of the older generations can help satisfy some of the intense spiritual hunger of the younger ones.<sup>36</sup> With shrinking, less stable families, teens are seeking a larger sense of home, more similar to the sense of home one's village or region would have given the previous generations.<sup>37</sup> The church needs to be willing to provide that sense of home and family to its youth. The church also needs to be prophetic about being together as a family in a culture of such hectic lifestyles that many families seldom spend time together during the week.<sup>38</sup>

The millennial generation, which refers to people born after 1982, values generational integration.<sup>39</sup> They value the unity and community<sup>40</sup> that can come when people of different backgrounds worship and learn together. Bringing Christians together in the spirit of family<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Krenda Creasy Dean, "introduction" in *Growing Up Postmodern: Imitating Christ in the Age of 'Whatever'*, Institute for Youth Ministry (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999), i.

<sup>35</sup> Kimball, 215.

<sup>36</sup> Erik Johnson, "Stepping Over the Gap," *Leadership* (Spring 1999): 107.

<sup>37</sup> Sharon Daloz Parks, "Home and Pilgrimage: Deep Rhythms in the Adolescent Soul" in *Growing Up Postmodern: Imitating Christ in the Age of 'Whatever'*, Institute for Youth Ministry (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999), 60.

<sup>38</sup> Abba, Evan, "Step Up to Intergenerational Ministry," [document on-line]; available from <http://www.Wordaction.com/nphweb/html/waol/printerFriendly.jsp?mediaID=2369006>; Internet; accessed 14 Jan. 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Webber, 46.

<sup>40</sup> Harkness, 56.

<sup>41</sup> Thompson

will result in healthier, more vibrant congregations.<sup>42</sup> Children will be blessed by seeing their parents worshipping God, and adults will be blessed and moved by witnessing the children's child-like faith<sup>43</sup> and the youth's exuberant worship.<sup>44</sup> Through worshipping and learning together, a new depth and breadth of understanding<sup>45</sup> of each other, and ultimately of God, can be achieved. By forming shared memories, stable communities can emerge.<sup>46</sup>

Generational integration will look different in each setting, based on the ideas, preferences, and needs of each congregation.<sup>47</sup> It is important to realize that successfully integrating the generations involves more than just allowing the children to stay in the regular service and even more than accommodating them with a children's time in the midst of the adult directed service.<sup>48</sup> The commitment to generational integration must be "reflected in a way that permeates all aspects of congregational life".<sup>49</sup> In preparation for the changes which must occur, the recognition needs to be made that the adults in the congregation can learn from the children as well as the other way around.<sup>50</sup> The values of humility, mutual submission, respect for different strengths and passions, and commitment to straight talk must be taught and modelled by the leaders of the church.<sup>51</sup> These leaders must make a "conscious effort to help everyone see the advantages of getting along",<sup>52</sup> and of being the body of Christ together.

Although the changes which will need to be made to switch to generational integration in worship can be uncomfortable for some people, the realization that church is not about getting

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<sup>42</sup> Mike Collison "The Intergenerational Church" in "Seven Youth Trends to Watch in the Next Decade," *Youthspecialites*, 2000 [document on-line]; available from: <http://www.youthspecialties.com/articles/topics/culture/seven.php>; Internet. accessed 14 Jan. 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Cole

<sup>44</sup> Bolinder and White, 106.

<sup>45</sup> Harkness, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Gibbs, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Beckwith, 164.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>49</sup> Thompson

<sup>50</sup> Abla

<sup>51</sup> Breaux, 46.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, 108.

their needs met, or as Kimball describes it, the move from a consumer to a missional model,<sup>53</sup> is a necessary step for Christian maturity. A certain selflessness is needed on everyone's part to make generational integration successful, but the achieving of that selfless attitude itself can be hallmarked as an important step in Christian maturity. Perhaps by not aiming to satisfy people's self-interests, the church can help people become better disciples.

Parks asks the church: "Do we model a gracious anticipation of who our youth are becoming and provide real space for them at the center of our common life?"<sup>54</sup> Some practical ways of moving the answer to this question towards an enthusiastic "yes!" are discussed below.

Abla states that by "using video, images, music, storytelling, drama, and even sensory lessons in your church's worship you can capture the hearts and imaginations of everyone present from the womb to the tomb".<sup>55</sup> Incorporating different learning styles, will be appreciated by adults in the congregation as well as children and youth. Something as simple as providing paper and crayons to the children, and asking them to draw on a theme related to the sermon can help them actively participate in worship. Messages within a generationally integrated service could be delivered on more than one level, so that children could learn alongside adults. Disney movies and Veggie Tales videos are successful examples of this multi-level communication style. Pastors can include children and youth during the message by providing illustrations that will be meaningful to them, asking them questions, or summarizing the points he makes in the sermon in a simple way as he goes along. Visual aids can also help keep children engaged. Parents can be encouraged to discuss the lesson with their children after

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<sup>53</sup> Kimball, 95.

<sup>54</sup> Sharon Daloz Parks, "Faithful Becoming in a Complex World: New Powers, Perils, and Possibilities," in *Growing Up Postmodern: Imitating Christ in the Age of 'Whatever'*, Institute for Youth Ministry (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999), 51.

<sup>55</sup> Abla

the service, and to help them apply it to their lives during the week. Resources can be provided such as supplementary stories and devotional activity ideas to them with this task.

Creating space for children in the front rows rather than partitioning them off in the back, or even providing room for them to sit on the floor or at small tables can help them feel welcomed and important, not to mention be more engaged in the worship being led from the front.<sup>56</sup> Members of the congregation should be encouraged to offer help to parents with young children, either by holding babies, or sitting with preschoolers during the service. Any children that attend without their parents should be welcomed and invited to sit with other families.

Stories are important and engaging to all ages, and can be used both for Biblical teaching, as well as to help generations learn to relate to each other.<sup>57</sup> Intentional effort is required to encourage people to share their stories, but the results of people understanding more about the work of God in the world, and of connecting with one another, are well worth the effort. One church made a congregational time-line, inviting people to write their memories of the church on the line, and then tell the stories to help develop a shared history and understanding of God's work within the church.<sup>58</sup> Sharing such stories provides youth with the "gift of being led into the future strengthened by the stories of God's people from the past."<sup>59</sup>

It is important to model respect by honoring the older generations in front of the children. Children and youth need to be encouraged to minister to the older people, rather than just to be ministered to by them. One way to do so is by putting aside their personal musical preference and embracing the inclusion of more traditional hymns along side the newer choruses.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Beckwith, 156.

<sup>57</sup> Rick Richardson, "Preaching Across the Great Divides," *Leadership* (Spring 2005): 48.

<sup>58</sup> Karen Rask Behling and Carol J. Rask, "Ordinary Time: Intergenerational Ministry," in *Ordinary Ministry, Extraordinary Challenge*, ed. Norma Cook Everist (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 79.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>60</sup> Kimball, 150.

Setting up pen-pals and prayer partners, facilitating family camps, old-time movie nights, back to school events involving reflection on historical school days, short term mission trips,<sup>61</sup> and community service events,<sup>62</sup> are some ideas for promoting generational integration. Events for all ages to celebrate the church calendar can occur outside of the regular worship time, such as Shrove Tuesday pancake suppers, and Advent craft making sessions.<sup>63</sup>

Breaux suggests including the youth in visible ways, even in leadership.<sup>64</sup> Collison promotes intergenerational leadership, stating that the planning, promotion, and execution of ministry activities should be intergenerational.<sup>65</sup> Bolinder is also committed to trans-generational leadership, stating that “when the generations lead together...there is a wonderful synergy of ideas, mentoring, and spiritual refreshment.”<sup>66</sup> Incorporating this will allow people to work together on common goals that address each others values. Including youth in leadership roles in the church may be the most effective way of helping them feel ownership of the church and thus reduce their mass exodus from the church upon graduation from youth group.

In my prior context of a small rural congregation, children are already present during the main worship gathering; however they are present primarily as spectators in that the service is not altered in any way by their presence. Therefore, the above changes of moving towards a more participatory rather than spectator style of gathering, incorporating multi-sensory and child-inclusive learning and response opportunities, the sharing of stories, and the inclusion of children and youth in active ministry roles are all important suggestions for that church. Powerful generational integration opportunities already exist outside of the worship service, such as older adults’ involvement in children’s ministry, intergenerational church picnics and social events,

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<sup>61</sup> Thompson.

<sup>62</sup> Johnson, 108.

<sup>63</sup> Beckwith, 115.

<sup>64</sup> Breaux, 46.

<sup>65</sup> Collison

<sup>66</sup> Bolinder, 106.

potluck dinners, and smaller group functions. Therefore this paper will discuss implementation of an inclusive worship service style, involvement of youth and children in active church ministry, and youth in leadership roles.

The structure of worship in the specific church being studied varies little from week to week. Singing, Scripture reading, announcements, sharing time, prayer, and the sermon, are all completed in one hour. Communion occurs once a month. Minimal coordination and communication about the service occurs. The songs are unrelated to the sermon, and are not usually practiced by the musicians as a group prior to the service.

In order to change to a more multi-sensory, inclusive style of worship gathering, there would need to be more people involved in planning, setting up, and implementing the service. It would be unfair and unrealistic to expect the pastor to coordinate everything. Including children in active ministry roles both visible; such as reading Scripture, being involved in music ministry, and greeting people; as well as behind the scenes; such as library administration, Sunday School coordination, cleaning and yard care, would also involve more planning, and coordination, and essentially, time.

Although it sounds reasonable that this time be put into the service preparation and the involvement of children in ministry, having been an active part of that church, I know it is easier said than done. The pastor only works part-time for the church, and the lay-ministry workers are on the verge of burn-out at any given time. The church runs an active midweek children's ministry and youth group, supports a Bible camp, coordinates special outreach events, and participates in informal community outreach. Requiring people to put more time into the Sunday morning service would likely mean eliminating other meaningful ministries. The primary

obstacle to trying a multi-sensory and participatory style of worship, and including young people in active ministry, is that more time and energy would be required than is currently available.

The third idea of having youth involved in leadership roles is different in that some people in the church would have theological objections. One possible way to prevent youth from leaving however, is to enable them to be involved in every aspect of the church. To have their voice heard and valued will give them a sense of ownership and belonging. To provide them with challenging and creative tasks will help them develop skills and confidence to continue participating in ministry as adults. Establishing one or two church board positions, (voting or non-voting) for a youth representative would speak volumes to the importance of youth in the church. Having interested youth pair-up with adults to perform leadership roles, such as worship leading, teaching Sunday School, hospital visitations, even giving the message, with the potential of the youth performing some of these tasks independently, would provide them with a sense of accomplishment and worth. It would provide them roles within the church which could continue on after graduation. Involving the youth in leadership however would raise theological concerns within the church because of the perception that they would not meet the specific qualifications regarding deacons which Paul outlines in 1 Timothy chap. 3. In the past the church has avoided discussion on the issue of women in leadership, and there has been an unspoken understanding that only men will deliver the message and lead worship. This issue would likely be raised anew by the girls in the congregation, who may be confused by an allowance of boys in certain ministry roles in which they themselves would be denied opportunity to participate.

Historically change has occurred within this church through an idea either generated by or brought to the pastor, which was either approved or rejected by him, or brought to the board. As the board meets infrequently, ideas are often brought individually to board members rather

than presented at a meeting. When an idea was brought before the board it would usually either be unanimously approved, or quickly abandoned if met with even slight disapproval

Minor changes were often made spontaneously by people in the congregation. People would fix things that were broken, purchase and donate necessary equipment and supplies, clean things that were dirty, and so-on. The benefits to this system are that it feels quite family-like. People take ownership of the church. The change process is usually gradual, and evolves with the congregation. Unity is valued and preserved. Drawbacks to this system are that it can lead to frustration in that some concerns which need to be addressed are not adequately discussed; some changes that could be beneficial to the congregation are not considered; and there is a lack of commitment to dialogue. The system is dependent on a loving and respectful attitude amongst the congregation as a whole, and on a wise, considerate pastor, and could quickly break down should controversy occur. Most of the changes made in the church are fairly superficial. Core beliefs and values, or significant changes in the direction of ministry, are seldom discussed.

The implementation of a more integrated generational ministry within this context would require an increased commitment to discuss issues and learn from one another. Education would need to be done regarding the postmodern culture and the church's need to reach out to the people within it. People would have to be able to objectively examine their faith, and recognize tradition apart from biblically mandated practices. Resources would need to be obtained in terms of time and energy for increasing the planning time and coordination of worship services, which would likely need to involve a calling into active ministry of more people in the congregation. This would need to be done carefully, not to draw people away from non-traditional ministry roles they may be participating in, possibly without realizing it, such as community involvement in sports or other activities where their lives may be an active witness to non-Christians around

them. Bringing in new adults and youth to ministry, would necessitate an openness to allowing mistakes to happen, and a willingness to try doing things in different ways.

Should the church choose to incorporate women and youth in leadership, there would be potential for some members to feel unheard or unrespected, or even to leave the church. With the change to a multi-sensory worship style, too much pressure could be placed on the pastor to plan and coordinate the service. The increased demands on time and energy may cause some families to burn out and drop out of ministry altogether, or to neglect their own children to their detriment.

The potential benefits however largely outweigh these risks. Providing the youth, both male and female, with a significant role that they can learn and grow in will go a long way towards helping them feel part of the church body as they make the transition into adulthood. Encouraging the congregation to let go of their preferences in order to serve each other and the community at large is an important step in Christian maturity. Helping the church to develop a commitment to dialogue will eventually strengthen it and equip it to be able to withstand hard times. Providing more opportunities for creative ministry involvement will assist people on their personal faith journeys. Including and celebrating the children in a holistic way in the faith community will help them engage in a lifelong process of deepening faith and discipleship.

Appendix A:

Meaningful to Me: The Story of Christmas  
*An intergenerational musical production*

by Dani Harris

The Characters:

BRANDON: [*teenage boy*]

MARK: [*teenage boy*]

ED: [*white-haired man*]

HELEN: [*Ed's wife; also an ANGEL*]

ZOE: [*teenage girl*]

BECKY: [*teenage girl*]

NARRATOR 1:

NARRATOR 2:

NARRATOR 3:

NARRATOR 4:

NARRATOR 5:

NARRATOR 6:

*[The narrators should be a mix of men, women, boys and girls. Small children could deliver one or two of the narrator lines, using one of the narrator parts as a rotating part. The narrators should be dressed in Bible time costumes, and kids who are sheep, shepherds, angels, magi, camels, or Herod, can also rotate through the narrator part.]*

MARY: [*young lady, able to sing solo, sings with choir when able*]

JOSEPH: [*young man, able to sing solo, sings with choir when able*]

SHEPHERDS: [*men and boys, sing as part of the choir*]

SHEEP: [*small children, sing as part of choir*]

ANGELS: [*women and girls, sing as part of the choir. One angel will play the part of Gabriel.*]

MAGI: [*3 or more, male or female, young or not so young, able to sing short solo, sings with choir when able.*]

CAMEL: [*optional, sings with choir when able*]

HEROD: [*man or boy, sings with choir when able*]

Act 1

Scene One

*[The stage has two rear exits, stage R and stage L. Off stage L to the front a curtain covers a door which allows actors to exit the sanctuary, and re-enter from the back. A Christmas tree with lights and snowflakes sits on the stage, which could be either an outdoor or an indoor tree.]*

*[Brandon runs onto stage from behind the curtain. He dodges a snowball, skidding to the floor. Mark runs on stage after him. Both boys are laughing. Mark helps Brandon up.]*

MARK:

Hey, what are you doing tonight?

BRANDON: [*surprised by the question and avoiding a straight answer*]

Tonight, well it's Christmas Eve.

MARK: [*persistently*]

I know, what are you doing?

BRANDON: [*quietly*]

I'm going to church [*the word church is mumbled*]

MARK:

What?

BRANDON: [*Pauses and looks around to see if anyone else is listening.*]

Okay, it's like this. My grandma has two stockings ready to put out for me tonight, one if I go to church, and one if I don't. I'd rather have the first one, if you know what I mean.

MARK:

Yeah, I get you. [*pause*] Does she go with you?

BRANDON:

Usually, but this year she's got a bad knee and can't come. I guess I'm going solo.

MARK: [*pauses, then quietly*]

I'll go with you.

BRANDON:

What?

MARK: [*looks around to see if anyone's listening,*]

I said I'll go with you.

BRANDON: [*incredulously*]

But it's Christmas Eve!

MARK:

Yeah, but I don't really feel like sitting around watching my Dad and his girlfriend string popcorn and sing goofy Christmas Carols, if you know what **I** mean.

BRANDON:

Yeah, I got you. Meet you here at 6:30?

MARK:

See you then!

[*Both boys exit, Brandon off stage R, Mark off stage L.*]

## Scene Two

[*A coat rack with a coat and hat on it have been placed on the rear of the stage.*]

[*Enter Helen, from stage R.*]

HELEN:

Are you ready to go?

ED: [*from off stage, cautiously*]

No.

HELEN: [*exasperated*]

What do you mean, No?

ED: [*enters from stage R. Nervously pleading*]

Well, I thought maybe I'd just stay home tonight, [*hopefully enthusiastic*] so I can have the hot chocolate ready for you when you get home.

HELEN: [*convincingly*]

Ed, I know going to church isn't your favorite way to spend the evening, but this is really important to me. I'd sing with more confidence if I could imagine I was singing to the man I love.

ED: [*grumbling acceptingly*]

When you put it that way, I don't have much choice, do I?

HELEN: [*grabbing his hat and coat from the rack and handing it to him, cheerfully*]

Nope.

[*Ed and Helen exit together, through curtain.*]

### Scene Three

[*Brandon enters from stage R, waits, whistling, just a few moments*]

[*Mark enters from stage L*]

MARK:

Hey.

BRANDON:

Hey.

[*Brandon and Mark exit together, through curtain*]

### Scene Four

[*Zoe enters from stage L, looks impatiently at her watch*]

ZOE:

Becky, come on! All the good seats will be taken!

[*Becky quickly enters from stage L*]

BECKY: [*apologetically*]

Sorry Zoe, I just wanted to make sure this Christmas program was bathed in prayer, you know, [*becoming more dramatic*] that people's hearts would be touched by it, that someone would hear the story of Jesus and it would become real for them for the first time, that lives would be forevermore changed, that the Holy Spirit would descend upon all those present and show them the way, the truth, and the life ...

ZOE: [*grabbing Becky's hand and pulling her along towards the curtain*]

Becky, you can tell me more on the way!

[*Zoe and Becky exit through the curtain*]

### Scene Five

[*Brandon and Mark enter from the back of the church. A spotlight shines on them*]

BRANDON:

Okay, let's sit here in the back row, that way we can slip out early if need be.

MARK:

I get you.

*[Brandon and then Mark enter the back pew, which has been raised up on a platform so the audience can see them. They sit down and start looking through a bulletin.]*

*[Ed enters from the back of the church]*

ED:

Hey fellas, is there any room back here for me?

MARK:

Sure.

*[Mark and then Brandon stand up as Ed passes through and sits down. Spotlight turns off.]*

Act 2  
Scene One

*[The coat rack has been removed from the stage. Narrators 1, 3 and 5 are standing at front stage R, sharing one mike. Narrator's 2, 4, and 6 are standing at front stage L, sharing another mike. After one speaks, the mike is passed along so the next person is ready to speak at their turn without delay.]*

NARRATOR 1:

Good evening. We are so pleased to have you all here with us to help us celebrate the incredible event of Jesus' birth. Tonight we want to explore together what Jesus' birth meant to people that first Christmas, and also what His birth, death and resurrection mean to each one of us, here today.

MARK: *[whispering, spotlight remains off]*

I can't imagine what difference the birth of a baby 2000 years ago could possibly make to me today.

BRANDON:

Me neither.

NARRATOR 2:

Some of you may be wondering what difference Jesus' coming 2000 years ago could possibly make in your lives today.

BRANDON AND MARK *[quietly astonished]*

Hey!

NARRATOR 3:

Our hope is that by the end of the evening you will have a fresh understanding of the significance of that night so long ago.

NARRATOR 4:

We invite you to sing along with the choir during the songs, the words are printed in your bulletin, along with notes letting you know who sings at what time.

NARRATOR 5:

Or if you prefer to sit and listen, you're welcome to do that.

NARRATOR 6:

Let's imagine ourselves back at the time of Jesus' birth.

NARRATOR 1:

In order to understand what the people at this time were thinking and feeling, we need to fill in some gaps.

NARRATOR 2:

We need to go back,

NARRATOR 3:

Way back,

NARRATOR 2:

to the beginning,

NARRATOR 3:

The very beginning.

NARRATOR 4:

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

NARRATOR 5:

And He saw that they were good.

NARRATOR 6:

He had given Adam and Eve a good place to live, in the Garden of Eden.

NARRATOR 1:

God created people in His image.

NARRATOR 2:

He wanted them to love Him.

NARRATOR 3:

In order for that to happen, He gave them a choice.

NARRATOR 4:

He warned Adam and Eve not to eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

NARRATOR 5:

You see, up to that point, they'd only known good.

NARRATOR 6:

They thought that by knowing good and evil, they'd be more like God.

NARRATOR 1:

So they disobeyed God,

NARRATOR 2:

and ate the fruit.

NARRATOR 3:

Well as soon as they did, I imagine they'd wished they hadn't.

NARRATOR 4:

After that, they couldn't be in God's presence any more.

NARRATOR 5:

The choice they made got them, and all their children after them, evicted!

NARRATOR 6:

They had to leave the garden, but that wasn't all!

NARRATOR 1:

People were made to live forever, and they would have, had they stayed in the Garden.

NARRATOR 2:

After leaving the Garden, it was different.

NARRATOR 3:

People got sick.

NARRATOR 4:

People got hurt.

NARRATOR 5:

People died.

NARRATOR 6:

They had to work very hard to get food.

NARRATOR 1:

And they brought forth children

ALL MOMS IN CAST: [*loudly and emphatically*]

In pain!

NARRATOR 2:

But God gave them a promise.

NARRATOR 3:

He said that one day, one of Adam and Eve's offspring would overcome the evil, and would bring the people back into relationship with Himself.

NARRATOR 4:

Boy were the people looking forward to that day!

NARRATOR 5:

God kept sending messages to the people through the prophets, telling them what it would be like when the Savior came.

NARRATOR 6:

The people called the Savior-to-come the Messiah, or Christ.

NARRATOR 1:

Hundreds of prophecies, or messages from God about what was going to happen would be fulfilled by Jesus' birth,

NARRATOR 2:

death,

NARRATOR 3:

and resurrection.

NARRATOR 4:

So the people were waiting for the day when God would send the Savior.

NARRATOR 5:

They studied the Scriptures, and tried their hardest to follow the laws God had given them.

NARRATOR 6:

But they knew there was better to come. They waited expectantly for the coming Christ.

## Scene Two

*[Multi-generational choir, women and girls dressed as angels, men and boys as shepherds, young children as sheep, etc. enter front stage from where they've been sitting in the front pews. Helen is at one end of the choir, a pretty, teenage girl at the other.]*

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

[Everyone sings]

O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel;  
That mourns in lonely exile here, Until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Though Dayspring, come and cheer  
Our spirits by Thine advent here;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,

And death's dark shadows put to flight

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heavenly home.  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

### Scene Three

*[spotlight on back pew]*

MARK:

This is going to be okay! The angel on the end is pretty cute!

ED:

Hey watch it, that's my wife you're talking about!

*[Choir returns to front rows of pews but Mary, Gabriel, Joseph exit to stage R]*

*[Enter Becky and Zoe from back of church]*

ZOE:

Oh Man, Are we ever late!

BECKY:

Sorry, Zoe. *[looks around and sighs]*

I guess we get the back seats here.

ZOE:

It's okay. Excuse me, *[to Mark, Brandon, and Ed as they squeeze past them to sit in the last row. Spotlight turns off]*

### Scene Four

*[Mary enters stage from stage L and sits down. The Angel Gabriel appears from stage R. Bright light shines on Mary from behind the angel as she covers her eyes. Mary listens incredulously as Gabriel pantomimes speaking, then leaves. Mary sits, looking bewildered.]*

NARRATOR 1:

When Mary found out that she would have a son who would be the Messiah, you could say it was the surprise of her life!

NARRATOR 2:

She was just an ordinary young lady of no special status. I bet she thought the angel was making a mistake when he first told her.

NARRATOR 3:

Especially considering she was not even married yet!

NARRATOR 4:

With the visit from the angel and the conception of the baby in her womb, her whole life was changed.

NARRATOR 5:

To begin with, she probably was too shocked for the news to register.

NARRATOR 6:

Then, she would have likely felt honoured, privileged, and excited.

*[Mary rises, and begins to walk around, head held high, smiling, even laughing.]*

NARRATOR 1:

Put yourself in her place, and imagine an encounter with an angel of God, the light, the warmth, the mystery, and excitement of it all.

NARRATOR 2:

And what news! That out of her womb would come the Savior of the world.

NARRATOR 3:

But later, after the angel had left, and she was alone with her thoughts, I can't help thinking she must have felt a little frightened.

*[Mary slows down and begins to look concerned and then worried, and finally frightened.]*

NARRATOR 4:

After all, she was not yet married!

NARRATOR 5:

To be pregnant without being married was not acceptable.

NARRATOR 6:

What would Joseph think?

*[Mary kneels on the floor, and holds her head in her hands]*

NARRATOR 1:

Would anyone understand? Would anyone believe her?

NARRATOR 2:

Would she be stoned? That was the customary punishment for women in her predicament. Would she be killed?

NARRATOR 3:

But no, she wouldn't be killed if she was going to bear the Messiah.

*[Mary slowly sits up and moves her hands away from her face]*

NARRATOR 4:

She didn't know what the months ahead would hold for her,

NARRATOR 5:

But she knew that she had a part to play in God's redemption of the world.

*[A peaceful expression on Mary's face now, she raises her hands in worship]*

**Solo: sung by Mary**  
**Breath of Heaven, by Amy Grant**

I have traveled many moonless nights,  
Cold and weary with a babe inside,  
And I wonder what I've done.  
Holy father you have come,  
And chosen me now to carry your son.

I am waiting in a silent prayer.  
I am frightened by the load I bear.  
In a world as cold as stone,  
Must I walk this path alone?  
Be with me now.  
Be with me now.

Breath of heaven,  
Hold me together,  
Be forever near me,  
Breath of heaven.  
Breath of heaven,  
Lighten my darkness,  
Pour over me your holiness,  
For you are holy.  
Breath of heaven.

Do you wonder as you watch my face,  
If a wiser one should have had my place,  
But I offer all I am  
For the mercy of your plan.  
Help me be strong.  
Help me be.  
Help me.

Breath of heaven,  
Hold me together,  
Be forever near me,  
Breath of heaven.  
Breath of heaven,  
Lighten my darkness,  
Pour over me your holiness,  
For you are holy.

Breath of heaven,  
Hold me together,  
Be forever near me,  
Breath of heaven.  
Breath of heaven,  
Lighten my darkness,  
Pour over me your holiness,  
For you are holy.  
Breath of heaven.

Breath of heaven.  
Breath of heaven.

NARRATOR 6:  
She trusted God.

*[Joseph enters stage L, Mary pantomimes telling him the news. Joseph reacts by drawing away from her, finally turning his back to her, sad and defeated. Mary is obviously disappointed but accepting of his reaction, she slowly walks away and exits behind the curtain. Joseph then turns around to face the audience, a shocked and confused expression on his face.]*

NARRATOR 1:  
Joseph was shocked when Mary told him about the news.

NARRATOR 2:  
It seemed too far fetched to be true, that his bride to be would be the mother of the Messiah!

NARRATOR 3:  
He wondered if she could be making the story up, in order to cover up for some mistake she had made. Could Mary be lying?

*[An angry look crosses Joseph's face]*

NARRATOR 4:  
It wasn't like Mary to lie. Could she be crazy?

*[The angry look turns to concerned confusion]*

NARRATOR 5:  
She didn't seem crazy. In fact, she seemed to have a peacefulness and wisdom that she didn't have before.  
*[Joseph shakes his head]*

NARRATOR 6:  
She didn't apologize, she didn't beg, she didn't cry,

NARRATOR 1:  
She just asked him to trust God.

*[Joseph looks up, questioningly]*

NARRATOR 2:  
Why would God do this to him?

NARRATOR 3:  
He can't marry her if she is carrying someone else's child.

*[Joseph looks down again, and seriously, determinedly, shakes his head]*

NARRATOR 4:

Yet, if he doesn't...

*[The determined look fades, replaced by a look of despair]*

NARRATOR 5:

He couldn't bear to let her be killed.

*[Joseph resumes his determined look again, but this time with more compassion]*

NARRATOR 6:

As confused as he was, he did know that he loved her.

*[Joseph's face relaxes momentarily, possibly a weak smile]*

NARRATOR 1:

But he could not marry her.

*[Joseph again, looks determined, begins pacing as he thinks]*

NARRATOR 2:

He would have to call off the wedding.

NARRATOR 3:

But quietly, so not to draw any attention.

NARRATOR 4:

Maybe, if people didn't notice, Mary would not be punished.

NARRATOR 5:

He would do what he could, but in the end,

NARRATOR 6:

It was not his problem.

*[Joseph removes his headcover and cloak, sits down resignedly, then lies down and goes to sleep.]*

NARRATOR 1:

But as he slept, God spoke to Joseph in a dream!

*[spotlight shines on Joseph, symbolizing the dream. Joseph continues sleeping]*

NARRATOR 2:

He told Joseph that everything Mary had said was true!

NARRATOR 3:

It was God's child within her womb.

*[the spotlight turns off, Joseph rises, smiling]*

NARRATOR 4:

Mary had been faithful!

[ *Joseph raises his arm and mimes a “yes!”*]

NARRATOR 5:

Mary, oh, what had he put poor Mary through?

[*Joseph looks concerned*]

NARRATOR 6:

Joseph could marry Mary! In fact, God told him to!

NARRATOR 1:

Joseph couldn't wait to see Mary.

[*Excitedly and hurriedly, Joseph puts on his headcover and cloak, fumbling due to his impatience*]

NARRATOR 2:

He wanted to tell her that he believed.

NARRATOR 3:

He wanted her to know that they would still be married.

NARRATOR 4:

that he would never doubt her again, that he would take care of her and the child.

[*Joseph stops suddenly*]

NARRATOR 5:

With that thought, Joseph stopped.

NARRATOR 6:

What would it mean to take care of this child?

NARRATOR 1:

This was not an ordinary baby.

NARRATOR 2:

Conceived by God,

NARRATOR 3:

Born to be Savior of the World.

NARRATOR 4:

How could Joseph take care of a baby that is supposed to take care of him?

[*Joseph sits down again, deep in thought*]

NARRATOR 5:

There was a lot to think about.

NARRATOR 6:

How could a poor carpenter possibly provide food, shelter, and clothing worthy of the King of the World?

NARRATOR 1:

This was a big responsibility.

NARRATOR 2:

Huge.

*[Joseph gets up, and starts pacing]*

NARRATOR 3:

Part of Joseph wanted to run away from it.

*[Joseph looks up again]*

NARRATOR 4:

But God knew what he was doing.

NARRATOR 5:

He must've thought that Joseph could do it, or else He would have chosen someone else.

*[Joseph kneels down and prays]*

JOSEPH:

I'm going to need your help with this God! But I'm willing to do whatever you ask of me.

NARRATOR 6:

Joseph trusted God.

*[Joseph runs to the curtain, pantomimes a call to Mary. Mary comes out, and they fall into each others arms, relieved and weeping. After a long embrace, they walk off stage, down the aisle, Joseph pantomiming telling her all about his dream. They exit the back of the church]*

#### Scene Four

NARRATOR 1:

And so, the baby was born. God poured himself into human form, and entered the world as the man, er, baby, Jesus the Christ.

*[Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus enter via the back. Mary carries Jesus. Joseph pulls a wagon filled with straw and a wooden manger. Mary and Joseph sit on high stools which have been placed in the center of aisle, facing the back of the church.]*

Solo, sung by Joseph *[walks around as he sings, so all can see him]:*

Christmas Lullaby, by Dale Harris

Little perfect newborn hands so tiny and pure  
Reaching for your mother's face, clutching at her hair  
One day they will clutch the cross and bear it to the hill  
Reach out to embrace the nails

Let them pierce that perfect palm  
O little tiny newborn hands, born to do the father's will

Little perfect newborn feet so gentle and warm  
Kicking on your mother's knee, swaddled safe from harm  
One day they will walk the waves and make them calm and still  
And stand in that forsaken place  
And let them pierce that holy hand  
O little tiny newborn feet, born to do the father's will

You were born to live, born to die  
Three days later you would leap up on high  
O little hands of God, born to beckon me  
Rest now on your mother's knee, rest now on your mother's knee

Little wrinkled newborn brow crowned with a wisp of hair  
Cradled in your mother's arms, quiet and fair  
One day they will sweat forth blood and bear a crown of thorns  
Twisted out of sin and shame  
To break and mock your holy name  
O little wrinkled newborn brow, born to bear our sin alone

Little crying newborn eyes so dark and so deep  
Seeking for your mother's breast for comfort and sleep  
One day they will see the grave and weep on that morn  
Weep for our helplessness  
Weep in your love for us  
O little crying newborn eyes, born to bear our sin alone

You were born to live, born to die  
Three days later you would leap up on high  
O little eyes of God, born to seek for me  
Sleep now on your mother's knee, Sleep now on your mother's knee

### Scene Five

*[As the song ends the shepherds quietly gather on the stage and lay down]*

NARRATOR 1:

Boy were the angels glad to see this day!

NARRATOR 2:

They'd been waiting as much as the people, maybe more so, as they knew a little bit more of the plan.

NARRATOR 3:

They knew what Jesus would do for his people.

NARRATOR 4:

And they anticipated the returning of the people into relationship with God.

NARRATOR 5:

Those angels were so excited and full of joy, they couldn't stop singing!

*[Angels enter stage, and surround the shepherds, with the children in the front and down the steps, so as to not completely block the audience's view of the shepherds. The angels are visibly excited, laughing, smiling, jumping, dancing, a few may clap]*

NARRATOR 6:

They appeared to a group of shepherds, out watching their sheep, to tell them the good news!

NARRATOR 1:

Imagine how they must have felt, after waiting these thousands of years for this day. Feel their excitement and joy.

*[The music begins to play. A spotlight shines on the shepherds. The shepherds look around, with stunned expressions]*

*[the Angels turn to face the audience, some behind and some in front of the Shepherds]*

### While Shepherd's Watched Their Flocks by Night

*[angels sing]*

While shepherds watched their flocks by night,  
All seated on the ground  
The angel of the Lord came down,  
And glory shone around, and Glory shone around.

*[music continues softly]*

NARRATOR 1:

The Shepherds were stunned.

NARRATOR 2:

Nothing like this had ever happened to them before.

NARRATOR 3:

What was all this light? Where was this amazing music coming from?

NARRATOR 4:

They thought they were dreaming

NARRATOR 5:

And yet, somehow they knew it was real, more real than anything they'd ever known.

*[Shepherds cover their faces, or otherwise look afraid]*

NARRATOR 6:

At first they were afraid.

*[angels sing]*

"Fear not," said he, for mighty dread  
Had seized their troubled mind;  
"Glad tidings of great joy I bring  
To you and all mankind."

*[Shepherds uncover their faces, listening eagerly to the angels, still shading their eyes]*

NARRATOR 1:

Then they became too interested in the message the angels were telling them to be afraid.

*[angels sing]*

“To you in David’s town, this day  
Is born of David’s line  
The Savior who is Christ the Lord,  
And this shall be the sign:”

“The heav’nly Babe you there shall find  
To human view displayed,  
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands  
And in a manger laid.”

Thus spake the seraph, and forthwith  
Appeared a shining throng  
Of angels praising God, who thus  
Addressed their joyful song:

“All glory be to God on high  
And to the earth be peace;  
Good will henceforth from heav’n to men  
Begin and never cease.”

*[Angels exit, small ones to their parents, Adults and older children to the outsides of the rows of pews, where they have seats reserved. After the angels leave, the shepherds pantomime talking to each other excitedly]*

NARRATOR 2:

The Savior born? In Bethlehem? This was good news.

NARRATOR 3:

Even the shepherds had been waiting for the Messiah.

NARRATOR 4:

It seemed like the angels were inviting them to go see Him.

NARRATOR 5:

But how could they go, dirty and smelly as they were.

*[Shepherds examine their dirty clothes and hands, maybe smell each other, look dejected]*

NARRATOR 6:

No King would allow them into His presence. They were not worthy.

NARRATOR 1:

Yet somehow, though it made no sense, they wanted to go.

*[Shepherds hold heads up, a new sense of determination]*

NARRATOR 2:

Even just to see the city He was born in.

NARRATOR 3:

And so, they packed up their meagre belongings, and began their journey.

*[Shepherds gather their staffs and sheep, and exit stage R]*

NARRATOR 4:

Imagine their excitement

NARRATOR 5:

and apprehension

NARRATOR 6:

as they walked to Bethlehem that night, full of wonder, and sing along with them.

*[Shepherds enter again from stage L and line up to sing:]*

Angels We Have Heard On High

*[Shepherds sing]*

Angels we have heard on high, Sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains;  
Gloria In excelsis Deo  
Gloria In excelsis Deo

*[congregation sings to shepherds (will be written in the program)]*

Shepherds, why this jubilee?  
Why your joyous strains prolong?  
What the gladsome tidings be,  
Which inspire your heavenly song?

*[Everyone sings the chorus]*

*[Angels, standing outside the rows of pews, sing]*

Come to Bethlehem and see  
Him whose birth the angels sing.  
Come adore on bended knee  
Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

*[ Everyone sings the chorus]*

*[Shepherds make their way down the aisle to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus. Mary and Joseph move their stools to the other side of the manger, turning to face the front of the church, to allow the shepherds access to the baby]*

NARRATOR 1:

Imagine their wonder, as they realized that Joseph, Mary, and even Jesus were just as dirty and smelly as they were!

NARRATOR 2:

This Savior really was born for them, even for them!

*[Shepherds fall to their knees around Jesus]*

NARRATOR 3:

They fell to their knees and worshipped their king.

NARRATOR 4:

Let's all rise and worship with them.

*[Angels, from outside pew, shepherds from manger, and congregation sing]:*

O Come All Ye Faithful

O Come, all ye faithful, Joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye, to Bethlehem.  
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels.  
O come let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,  
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels,  
Sing in exultation,  
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above:  
Glory to God in the highest. (chorus)

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee,  
Born this happy morning;  
Jesus, to Thee be all glory giv'n.  
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing. (chorus)

### Scene Six

*[a bright star, hanging from the ceiling, is lit up]*

NARRATOR 4:

That night, in a land far away in the East, a brilliant star appeared.

*[Magi enter stage from front stage L, studying the star. They may have a camel with them, and are carrying gifts.]*

NARRATOR 5:

Astrologers there recognized it as a sign of the Savior's birth.

NARRATOR 6:

They too started on a long journey to meet their Savior.

NARRATOR 1:

They must have wondered, along the way, if the Savior would accept them. After all, they were not Jews. The Messiah was a Jew.

NARRATOR 2:

And yet, something told them that this Savior had come for *them* just as much as He had come for the Jews.

NARRATOR 3:

But would the Jews drive them away? Would they allow them to present the gifts they had chosen to bring the baby?

NARRATOR 4:

These astrologers, magicians, wisemen, had power and prestige among their people.

NARRATOR 5:

Yet as they walked along, they pondered the reality that all the wisdom and power available in the world was nothing compared to the power of the new baby.

NARRATOR 6:

They would submit their lives to Him as soon as they saw Him.

We Three Kings of Orient Are

*[Magi sing]*

We three kings of Orient are, Bearing gifts we traverse afar,  
Field and fountain, moor and mountain, Following yonder star.

*[Everyone sings]*

O star of wonder, star of night, Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading still proceeding, Guide us to Thy perfect light.

*[Solo for Magi carrying gold]*

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain, Gold I bring to crown Him again,  
King forever, ceasing never, Over us all to reign.

*[Everyone sings]*

O star of wonder, star of night, Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading still proceeding, Guide us to Thy perfect light

*[Solo for Magi carrying frankincense]*

Frankincense to offer have I, Incense owns a Deity nigh.  
Prayer and praising, all men raising, Worship Him, God most High.

*[Everyone sings]*

O star of wonder, star of night, Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading still proceeding, Guide us to Thy perfect light

*[Solo for Magi carrying Myrrh]*

Myrrh is mine, its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom  
Sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone cold tomb.

*[Everyone sings]*

O star of wonder, star of night, Star with royal beauty bright,  
Westward leading still proceeding, Guide us to Thy perfect light

*[Magi exit behind curtain. Star lights go out.]*

*[King Herod enters stage R.]*

NARRATOR 1:

The Magi had asked King Herod for directions, and so he became aware of the Messiah's birth.

*[The Magi enter from behind the curtain, and pantomime asking Herod for directions.]*

NARRATOR 2:

He was a power hungry man, and did not want to share his throne with anybody!

*[Herod becomes visibly angry.]*

NARRATOR 3:

He didn't recognize Jesus as his Savior, in fact, he saw Him as a threat!

NARRATOR 4:

He tried to get the Magi to tell him where the baby was,

NARRATOR 5:

But they were too wise for that!

NARRATOR 6:

Yes, they were wise men.

*[The Magi exit behind the curtain again, looking back at Herod and shaking their heads, once they are a safe distance away and he's not watching them!]*

NARRATOR 1:

Herod hated this baby, and wanted Him dead!

NARRATOR 2:

But that was not God's plan.

NARRATOR 3:

At least, not yet.

### O Little Town of Bethlehem

*[Herod on stage, holding his ears, wincing and agonizing during the first verse, then exits stage L. Song led by shepherds in middle of aisle and angels outside pews. As all sing, the star lights up again above Jesus, brighter this time, and the magi slowly enter from the back of the room]*

[Everyone sings]

O little town of Bethlehem, How will we see thee lie!  
Above thy deep and dream-less sleep, The silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth The everlasting Light;  
The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, And gathered all above,  
While mortals sleep, the angels keep  
Their watch of wond'ring love.  
O morning stars, together Proclaim the holy birth!

And praises sing to God the King,  
And peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently,  
The wondrous gift is giv'n!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of His heav'n.  
No ear may hear His coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive Him, still,  
The dear Christ enters in.

O holy child of Bethlehem! Descend to us we pray.  
Cast out our sin and enter in, Be born in us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell;  
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel!

*[Magi, who have been singing from the back of the church, come forward down the aisle to kneel before Jesus. Mary and Joseph part, each moving to one side of the manger, to allow the Magi access to Jesus.]*

NARRATOR 3:

What joy and wonder the magi felt when they finally arrived!

NARRATOR 4:

They'd travelled a long way to see and worship this child.

NARRATOR 5:

And the journey had been worth every step.

NARRATOR 6:

They too, like the shepherds before them, fell on their knees to worship. Let's worship with them.

What Child is This?

*[Everyone sings]*

What Child is this, who laid to rest, On Mary's lap is sleeping?  
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, While shepherds watch are keeping?  
This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;  
Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The Babe the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate  
Where ox and ass are feeding?  
Good Christian, fear for sinners here  
The silent Word is pleading (chorus)

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,  
Come, peasant, king, to own Him,  
The King of kings salvation brings,  
Let loving hearts enthrone Him. (chorus)

NARRATOR 1:

Mary, Joseph, the angels, the shepherds, and the magi all recognized the significance of Jesus' birth.

NARRATOR 2:

Jesus grew up, and was an example of righteous living for all people. He taught them how to follow God.

NARRATOR 3:

Then he was killed on a cross, to take the punishment of the sins, or evilness of the world.

NARRATOR 4:

Through His death, people's sins were paid for, and they could be in relationship with God again.

NARRATOR 5:

After His death, Jesus rose again, and continued to teach His followers for a short time before ascending to Heaven.

NARRATOR 6:

His promise to all people, including us today, is that if we call on His name, believe in his death and resurrection, and proclaim his Lordship over our lives, our sins will be forgiven.

NARRATOR 1:

The Spirit of Jesus will come into our hearts to lead us and guide us.

NARRATOR 2:

And when our lives on earth are over, He will bring us into heaven with him for eternal life.

NARRATOR 3:

Now that, is good news!

NARRATOR 4:

Let's light our candles and sing together.

*[During the song, candles which were placed in the pews are lit]*

Silent Night  
*[Everyone sings]*

Silent night, holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright,  
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child,  
Holy infant so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,  
Shepherds quake at the sight.  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia.  
Christ the Savior is born!  
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night,  
Son of God, love's pure light.  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face,  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.

NARRATOR 5:

Thank you all for coming, Merry Christmas Everyone! May the peace of Christ be with you.

*[Stage lights turn off, and spotlight goes on to rear pew. Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, magi, and angels, all quietly exit to the front of the church where they sit in the front pews. Joseph pulls the wagon with straw and baby Jesus to the front of the center aisle and leaves it there.]*

Act 3

Scene One

MARK:

Hey, that was pretty deep.

BRANDON:

Yeah, lots to think about.

ED:

I sure understand the Christmas story better. I'd never really put it all together before, you know, how Jesus' birth and death opened the way for us to be with God. Now if you'll excuse me, boys, I'm going to go see if that cute angel will come home with me for hot chocolate!  
*[moves out past boys and exits out the back of the church.]*

BRANDON:

Do you know what he meant, the part about calling on His name, and proclaiming, oh, I can't remember.

MARK:

Not really.

BECKY:

Excuse me, I couldn't help overhearing. Would you like me to try to explain it to you the way I understand it?

BRANDON: *[hesitatingly]*

Sure

BECKY:

Okay, well, basically, our sin, or all of the things we do that are wrong, separates us from God.

MARK:

okay,

ZOE:

And we're all guilty of sin, the only person who wasn't was Jesus himself.

BECKY:

That's why he was able to take the punishment for ours, because He was innocent.

Jesus hears us when we pray to Him. He wants us to talk to Him. He wants to have a relationship with us, because He loves us. After all, He made us, and knows us better than we even know ourselves.

MARK:

That's a scary thought!

ZOE:

It seems scary, but it's not really, because after we've asked for forgiveness, he doesn't hold our sins against us anymore. Think about it this way, He loves us so much that He willingly went to the cross for us. How do you think He feels when we don't even appreciate that enough to bother talking to Him about it?

MARK:

I'd be pretty put-out if I were Him!

BECKY:

He's pretty patient, He keeps giving second chances, but eventually, each person needs to make a choice.

BRANDON:

What do you mean by choice?

BECKY:

Well, either to follow Jesus or not. God gave Adam and Eve a choice in the Garden of Eden, to either follow Him and love Him, or not. They chose to disobey Him, which meant their close relationship with Him was destroyed.

BRANDON:

Yeah, they talked about that at the beginning of the play.

BECKY:

I think of it like this, through Jesus, we are each given the opportunity to make our own choice, to follow and obey, or not.

BRANDON:

What happens if we choose not to?

BECKY:

I don't like talking about that. Basically, we cut ourselves off from a relationship with God, and when we die, well, we can't be in heaven with Him.

BRANDON:

Oh, I got you. Well, what if we choose to follow Him?

BECKY:

Then the angels rejoice! For me, choosing to follow Jesus has meant that my life has meaning and purpose. I talk to Him all the time, and He speaks to me through the Bible, and through my thoughts and feelings. He leads and directs my life, and makes me feel full of peace and joy. He's helping me to become a better person. And I know that whatever happens, I've always got heaven to look forward to. It gives me perspective, you know.

MARK:

That sounds good.

BECKY:

It is good. Oh, there's certain things He expects of me of course, things like behaving in a way that will bring honor to Him rather than disgrace, but it's all been worth it.

BRANDON:

So how does a person make a choice to follow Jesus? Is there some kind of religious ceremony?

ZOE:

There's no specific way. When I made my choice, I was alone, sitting outside under a tree. I just prayed, and told Jesus that I believed in Him, that He was God, and that His death held the power to pay the penalty for my sin. I asked him to forgive me for all the things I'd done that had displeased Him, and then I told Him that I would do all I could to follow Him, and I asked Him to help me to do that.

BECKY:

I did it in the car on the way home from church one day. I said Thank you to Jesus for loving me, and for dying for me, and I asked Him to be the Lord of my Life. It's a bit different for everybody.

MARK:

Cool. Hey, would you girls like to go for a hot chocolate?

BECKY AND ZOE [*look at each other*]

Sure.

[*All four stand up and exit the pew. Mark, Becky and Zoe walk towards the rear door.*]

BRANDON:

Hey, I'll catch up!

MARK:

That's cool.

## Scene Two

[*Brandon looks around, then walks up front and kneels by the manger.*]

BRANDON [*hesitant*]

God, Jesus, Dear God, Father, I don't know the words to say, but I realized something tonight for the first time. I don't completely understand it, but somehow I know that you are real, and that you were born, and that you died, in some mysterious way, for me. Will you please help me understand? I feel your presence around me, and I like it. I want you to stay with me. I want to have a relationship with you, like the girls were describing. I want you to help me be a better person. I've done some pretty dumb things in my life, will you please forgive me for them? Will you please lead me and guide me? I promise to do everything I can to follow you, but like Joseph, I know I'm going to need your help. Will you help me? Will you be my Savior? Thanks God. I'll be talking to you again soon.

[*Brandon exits out the rear door of the church, smiling, and stepping lightly*]

[*Mary rises and picks up Jesus. Joseph joins her at the front of the church, along with the angels, shepherds, magi, and sheep*]

## Christmas Lullaby, by Dale Harris

[*Mary sings the verses solo, everyone joins on the chorus*]

Little perfect newborn hands so tiny and pure  
Reaching for your mother's face, clutching at her hair  
One day they will clutch the cross and bear it to the hill  
Reach out to embrace the nails  
Let them pierce that perfect palm  
O little tiny newborn hands, born to do the father's will

Little perfect newborn feet so gentle and warm  
Kicking on your mother's knee, swaddled safe from harm  
One day they will walk the waves and make them calm and still  
And stand in that forsaken place  
And let them pierce that holy hand  
O little tiny newborn feet, born to do the father's will

[*Everyone sings*]

You were born to live, born to die  
Three days later you would leap up on high  
O little hands of God, born to beckon me  
Rest now on your mother's knee, rest now on your mother's knee

[*Solo*]

Little wrinkled newborn brow crowned with a wisp of hair  
Cradled in your mother's arms, quiet and fair  
One day they will sweat forth blood and bear a crown of thorns  
Twisted out of sin and shame  
To break and mock your holy name  
O little wrinkled newborn brow, born to bear our sin alone

Little crying newborn eyes so dark and so deep  
Seeking for your mother's breast for comfort and sleep  
One day they will see the grave and weep on that morn  
Weep for our helplessness  
Weep in your love for us  
O little crying newborn eyes, born to bear our sin alone

[*Everyone sings*]

You were born to live, born to die  
Three days later you would leap up on high  
O little eyes of God, born to seek for me  
Sleep now on your mother's knee, Sleep now on your mother's knee

O Holy Night

[*Everyone Sings*]

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,  
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.  
Long lay the world in sin and error pining,  
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.  
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.  
Fall on your knees, Oh hear the angel voices! O night divine,  
O night when Christ was born! O night, O holy night, O night divine.

NARRATOR 1:

Thank you all for coming. Please be sure to join us for refreshments in the basement.

The End

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