



Worship Books and Intergenerational Ministry

Shaping vibrant, active, and creative intergenerational worship

When mainline Protestants think about liturgical service books (such as the *Book of Common Worship*), they tend to see them as large collections of optional—and often lengthy—prayers. From this point of view, it is hard to imagine how a service book could be of much use in planning and leading intergenerational worship.

However, there are many features of a liturgical service book (and the 2018 *Book of Common Worship* in particular) that, although they are often overlooked, can help to shape vibrant, active, and creative intergenerational worship. Here are a few of them:

- ***Theological and pastoral commentary.*** Understanding the “why” of a particular service—whether one of the festivals of the Christian year, a pastoral liturgy (such as healing and wholeness), or a service of daily prayer—is essential for planning and leading in a way that will engage people of multiple intelligences, personality types, age levels, and experiences in public worship.
- ***Orders of worship.*** The shape of Christian worship shapes Christian faith and life. A consistent and thoughtfully structured order of worship (such as those provided in liturgical service books) has a huge part to play not only in teaching young people (or new believers) to worship, but also in their formation in our theological tradition and practices of discipleship.
- ***Common responses.*** Phrases such as “Lord, have mercy,” “Thanks be to God,” or even “And also with you” are miniature lessons in the basics of Christian faith—themes like confession, gratitude, and communion. The standardized language connects us with Christians across the ecumenical church. And these phrases are easy for people of all ages to learn and internalize. As such they are not only useful in public worship but can become part of our vocabulary of prayer in daily life.
- ***Other (brief) repeated texts.*** Young children love the feeling of knowing prayers or creeds by heart, empowering them to join in the work of the people. As vision fails, older adults appreciate being able to pray and proclaim the faith from memory. But this isn’t possible when most or all of the liturgy is newly created for every service. Liturgical service books are a good place to find texts worth memorizing, that will bear the weight of the gospel and stand the test of time.
- ***Rubrics.*** We worship a God made known to us in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. Rubrics (instructions for liturgical action, often in red print) are provided to make the liturgy an embodied event, not merely a public recitation of prayers. As the saying goes, “actions can speak louder than words.” This is especially true when it comes to engaging young worshipers.
- ***Prayers and practices for lifelong discipleship.*** A hymn memorized in Sunday school takes on new meaning in the midst of a life crisis. A baptismal vow has resonance with the promises made in confirmation, ordination, or marriage. A family prayer at mealtime evokes the church’s eucharistic meal. An image from evening prayer springs to mind when death is near. Liturgical service books are designed to cultivate these connections.

Writer: Rev. Dr. David Gambrell, Office of Theology and Worship

Office of Theology and Worship: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/theology-and-worship>

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