

CHURCH TOGETHER

An Essential Guide to All-Age Ministry

A Four-Week Book Study

Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer Initiative — Clergy & Laity Cohort

About This Study

The September 2026 Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer Initiative Book Study will be devoted to a four-week study of *Church Together: An Essential Guide to All-Age Ministry* by Traci Smith and David M. Csinos (Chalice Press), beginning the week of [Sept. __, 2026]. This study is designed for clergy and laity across the Initiative's cohort churches to explore practical, field-tested ideas for bringing children, youth, and adults together in worship and community life.

The book is organized in three parts: Part 1, Understanding All-Age Ministry, lays theological and pedagogical groundwork; Part 2, Worship for All Ages, walks through eight worship elements (gathering, singing, praying, reading, preaching, giving, remembering, and sending); and Part 3, Community for All Ages, offers seven community practices (inviting, serving, feasting, celebrating, creating, playing, and learning) — each with several field-tested, ready-to-use ideas.¹ Cohort teams are encouraged to read the book together and leave the study with one concrete practice to pilot in their own congregation.

This course follows the discussion-group format used by Hood Theological Seminary's Messenger-Williams Community Education Initiative²: independent reading with distributed guides, the option to gather your own group, or joining a facilitated one-hour weekly discussion — offered here on Zoom and/or in person.

Participation Options

1. Read independently — Use the weekly reading guides in this packet to work through Church Together on your own, at your own pace.
2. Organize your own discussion group — Use the same reading guides to explore the book with your church staff, ministry team, or an intergenerational group from your congregation.
3. Join a cohort discussion group — Join a group led by [Facilitator Name], meeting one hour per week for four weeks. Groups are offered on Zoom and in person (see options below).

¹Traci Smith and David M. Csinos, *Church Together: An Essential Guide to All-Age Ministry* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2026), Table of Contents. Publisher listing: [Google Books](#)

²Format inspired by the Messenger-Williams Community Education Initiative discussion-group model, [Hood Theological Seminary, Current Course Offering](#)

Discussion Group Options

Fill in the confirmed days, times, and locations once scheduling is finalized. Add or remove rows as needed for your cohort's size and geography.

Day / Time	Format	Location / Link	Session Dates
[Day] [Time] ET	Zoom	[Zoom link — add once scheduled]	[4 weekly dates]
[Day] [Time]	In Person	[Church name, city]	[4 weekly dates]
[Day] [Time]	Hybrid	[Church name + Zoom link]	[4 weekly dates]

Four-Week Reading & Discussion Schedule

Each week pairs an assigned reading with a facilitator guide: an opening reflection question, discussion questions for the group, and a "try this in your context" action step that connects the reading directly to the Initiative's goals.

Week One: Understanding All-Age Ministry & Gathering Together

Suggested dates: *[Sept. __–__, 2026]*

Read: Foreword, Introduction (p. xiii), Part 1: Understanding All-Age Ministry (Ch. 1–2, pp. 3–18), and Part 2's opening chapter, Ch. 3 "Gathering" (pp. 35–48), including its five practices:

- Ch. 1, "All of the Above: Coming to Terms with All-Age Ministry" (p. 3)
- Ch. 2, "Making Melodies: Principles to Guide All-Age Ministry" (p. 4)
- Ch. 3, "Gathering" (p. 35): Liturgy Leader Grab Bag (39); Laying Down Our Burdens (40); Reimagined Processionals (42); Light, Breath, and Silence (44); Repeated Elements in Calls to Worship (46)

Focus: Naming why our churches separate generations, the theological and pedagogical principles Smith and Csinos offer instead, and how a worship service's opening moments can welcome every age.

Opening reflection (5 min):

"Think of a time your church tried to bring generations together in worship or community life. What worked? What felt awkward?"

Discussion questions:

- What assumptions about children, teens, or older adults show up in how our church currently structures worship and programming?

- Chapter 2 offers "principles to guide all-age ministry." Which principle most challenged or affirmed your own view of who worship is "for"?
- Look at the five Gathering practices (Liturgy Leader Grab Bag, Laying Down Our Burdens, Reimagined Processionals, Light/Breath/Silence, Repeated Elements in Calls to Worship). Which could work in your worship space with the volunteers and resources you already have?
- What does it currently look like when your congregation gathers for worship — and who feels immediately welcome, and who seems unsure they belong?
- What is one fear or practical obstacle (space, volunteers, tradition, theology) that keeps your church from moving toward all-age ministry?

Try this in your context:

Before next session, notice one moment in your church's current worship or programming where generations are separated by default rather than by intention. Bring one observation to share.

Week Two: Singing, Praying, Reading, and Preaching Together

Suggested dates: [Sept. __–__, 2026]

Read: Ch. 4 "Singing" (pp. 50–59), Ch. 5 "Praying" (pp. 60–76), Ch. 6 "Reading" (pp. 77–88), and Ch. 7 "Preaching" (pp. 89–99):

- Ch. 4, "Singing" (p. 50): "Joyful Noise" Basket (51); Somebody's Favorite Song (53); Making Music Together in a Band, Choir, or Orchestra (54); Singing in Worship Accompanied by Boomwhackers (56); Understanding the Backstory (58)
- Ch. 5, "Praying" (p. 60): Brick Prayers (61); Salt Prayers (63); Bandage Prayers (65); Pouring Out Our Prayers (67); Prayers for Our Neighbors (69); Silent Prayers (71); Building a Cairn (73); The Lord's Prayer with Symbols (75)
- Ch. 6, "Reading" (p. 77): Echoes of Scripture; Bible Sound Effects; Scripture Symbols; Pass the Present; Scripture That Moves; Bible Margin Notes
- Ch. 7, "Preaching" (p. 89): Crowdsourcing the Message; Preaching with Pictures; Talking the Message Out; Sharing Faith Stories; Forgiveness Hearts; "Just Because" Cards

Focus: How music, prayer, Scripture, and preaching can become entry points every generation helps lead — not just receives.

Opening reflection (5 min):

"What song, hymn, or prayer practice from your childhood still shapes your faith today? Who taught it to you?"

Discussion questions:

- Which Singing practice stood out as realistic for your congregation's size, musical resources, or worship style — and which would be a bigger stretch?
- How do current prayer practices in your church make room (or not) for children, youth, and older adults to lead rather than simply observe? Which Praying practice (Brick Prayers, Salt Prayers, Building a Cairn, etc.) could you picture using this fall?
- Chapter 6 offers hands-on ways to engage Scripture (Bible Sound Effects, Scripture Symbols, Bible Margin Notes). What would change if reading Scripture together became something everyone did with their hands, not just their ears?
- Chapter 7 reframes preaching as something the whole congregation can help shape — "Crowdsourcing the Message," "Talking the Message Out," "Sharing Faith Stories." What would it take for your preacher(s) to try one of these approaches?
- What pushback might you anticipate from your congregation for any of these four chapters, and how would you respond using the book's theological grounding?

Try this in your context:

Choose one practice from Singing, Praying, Reading, or Preaching. Sketch a one-paragraph plan for trying it in an upcoming worship service or small group, and note who you would invite to help lead it across generations.

Week Three: Giving, Remembering, and Sending; Beginning Community Through Inviting and Serving

Suggested dates: [Sept./Oct. __—__, 2026]

Read: Ch. 8 "Giving" (pp. 100–111), Ch. 9 "Remembering" (pp. 112–123), Ch. 10 "Sending" (pp. 124–136), and Part 3's opening chapters, Ch. 11 "Inviting" (pp. 138–148) and Ch. 12 "Serving" (pp. 149–162):

- Ch. 8, "Giving" (p. 100): One Hundred Envelopes; Canned Food Sculptures; Noisy Offering; Quiet Offering; Giving Tree; Mitten Tree
- Ch. 9, "Remembering" (p. 112): Prepare the Feast Together; Share Bread from Around the World; Use a Special Plate; Serve One Another; Remembering (with) the Saints; Wash One Another's Hands
- Ch. 10, "Sending" (p. 124): Sing Your Way Out; Ribbon Reminders; Blessing of the Bags; Blessing Balloons; Remembering Our Belovedness; "Go and Do Likewise" Board
- Ch. 11, "Inviting" (p. 138): Prayer Mailbox (139); Stones of Kindness (141); Share Fair (142); Grace Garden (143); Pumpkin Labyrinth (145); Chalk Art (147)
- Ch. 12, "Serving" (p. 149): Blessing Bags (150); Cozy Comforts (152); Fill the Freezer (154); Random Acts of Kindness Day (156); Card-Making Party (158); Native Plant Restoration (160); Filling the Stable for Christmas (161)

Focus: Completing the worship-element practices (giving, remembering/communion, sending) and crossing into Part 3's community practices of inviting others in and serving together.

Opening reflection (5 min):

"Describe a time your church took up an offering, observed communion, or sent people out in a way that included every generation. What made it work?"

Discussion questions:

- How does your church currently involve children and youth in giving and the offering? What would change if you tried the Giving Tree, Mitten Tree, or a Noisy/Quiet Offering?
- Chapter 9's "Remembering" practices connect closely to communion and the saints. Which one (Prepare the Feast Together, Wash One Another's Hands, Remembering with the Saints) feels most aligned with your tradition's theology of the table?
- Sending practices like "Blessing of the Bags" and "Ribbon Reminders" turn the end of worship into commissioning for everyday life. What does your congregation currently do — if anything — to send people out together?
- Part 3 shifts from worship to community life. How is "Inviting" (Prayer Mailbox, Share Fair, Grace Garden) different from typical evangelism or outreach efforts at your church?
- Which Serving practice (Blessing Bags, Fill the Freezer, Random Acts of Kindness Day) could pair a youth or children's ministry with an adult or older-adult ministry team in your context?

Try this in your context:

Identify one Giving, Remembering, Sending, Inviting, or Serving practice from this week's reading and draft a simple plan to pilot it, naming which generations you would involve in leading it — not just attending.

Week Four: Feasting, Celebrating, Creating, Playing, and Learning Together — and What's Next

Suggested dates: [Oct. __–__, 2026]

Read: Ch. 13 "Feasting" (pp. 163–175), Ch. 14 "Celebrating" (pp. 176–188), Ch. 15 "Creating" (pp. 189–199), Ch. 16 "Playing" (pp. 200–211), Ch. 17 "Learning" (pp. 212–222), Frequently Asked Questions (p. 223), and What's Next? (p. 225):

- Ch. 13, "Feasting" (p. 163): Picnics in the Park (164); Prayer and Popsicles (166); Potluck Passport (168); Snack Bar Feast (170); Church Food Book (172); Grace Café (174)
- Ch. 14, "Celebrating" (p. 176): Monthly Birthday Celebration (177); Blessing the Animals (179); Silly Sock Exchange (181); Countdown to Noon Year's Eve (183); Happy Birthday to the Church; Memorial Hearts

- Ch. 15, "Creating" (p. 189): Circle Mosaics; Gratitude Tree; Weaving Wall; Community Mosaic; Imagination Wall; Time Capsules
- Ch. 16, "Playing" (p. 200): Paper Airplane Night; Café au Play (202); Sixty-Second Challenge Night (203); Quick Connections (205); Giant Games Night (207)
- Ch. 17, "Learning" (p. 212): All-Age Vacation Bible School (214); Room for All in God's Kingdom (215); Picture Book Party (217); Tacobout It (219); Busy Box (221)

Focus: Table fellowship, milestones, creativity, play, and learning as culminating all-age practices — and turning four weeks of study into a concrete next step for each church.

Opening reflection (5 min):

"Whose table have you felt most fully welcome at — in church or otherwise? What made that possible?"

Discussion questions:

- Why might feasting (Potluck Passport, Grace Café, Picnics in the Park) be one of the most naturally intergenerational practices already available to most congregations?
- Chapter 14's celebrations (Monthly Birthday Celebration, Blessing the Animals, Happy Birthday to the Church) mark milestones together. What milestones does your church currently celebrate — and who gets left out?
- Creating and Playing (Ch. 15–16) treat art-making and games as spiritual practices, not just "kids' activities." How might that reframing change who is invited to participate?
- Chapter 17's "Learning" practices (All-Age Vacation Bible School, Room for All in God's Kingdom) reimagine Christian education as something the whole church does together. What would it take to pilot one at your church?
- Looking back over all four weeks, which single practice from Church Together felt most transferable to your specific church context, and what does the "What's Next?" section suggest as a first step?

Try this in your context:

Each participating church team leaves with one written commitment: a single all-age ministry practice from the book (worship or community) they will pilot in the next 60 days, plus who is responsible and how it connects to the Initiative's goals.

Facilitator Notes

Before the Study Begins

- Order and distribute copies of Church Together to cohort churches 3–4 weeks before the start date so participants can read Week One material in advance.

- Invite each church to send an intergenerational team — at least one clergy/staff member, one lay leader, and, where possible, a youth or young adult — rather than a single representative.
- Confirm Zoom links and in-person room reservations at least two weeks out, and share both options with every registrant so they can choose or switch as needed.

Suggested Session Structure (60 minutes)

- Opening prayer / centering — 5 minutes
- Check-in on last week's "try this in your context" commitment — 10 minutes
- Discussion of the week's reading, using the provided questions — 35 minutes
- Naming this week's "try this" commitment and closing prayer — 10 minutes

Sustaining the Learning

- Keep a shared "Idea Bank" document across the cohort so churches can see what others are piloting — useful both for peer learning and for Initiative grant reporting.
- Consider a short check-in (Zoom or email) at the 60-day mark to hear how each church's pilot practice is going.
- If recording Zoom sessions for those who miss a week, let participants know at the first session and store recordings securely.

Appendix: Full Table of Contents

For facilitators distributing reading guides — the complete chapter list with page numbers from the print edition.

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Registration & Contact

Facilitator: Rev. Toni Taylor, Director, Connecting Children in Worship and Prayer Initiative

Questions: [Email address]

Ready to register?: [Registration link or sign-up sheet]

Suggested book source: Church Together: An Essential Guide to All-Age Ministry, Traci Smith & David M. Csinos, Chalice Press, 2026 (ISBN 9780827207592)