

Small things

By [Diane Roth](#)

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Recently a grandmother told me how much her fourth grade granddaughter already loves a new three-year-old in our congregation. Their family just started visiting, and when the children, all ages, come together for to play and draw and wonder about the scripture readings, the little girl sings her own song about how much she loves Jesus. They are making a connection, beginning a relationship, not based on being in the same grade, but based on being in the same body of Christ.

A teenager in our congregation recently expressed a similar feeling about a four-year-old boy who is new to our congregation. Well, actually her college-age sister told me, "My sister just LOVES him."

They are small moments, I know, not grand programs with scads of children and bells and whistles. We are a smallish congregation, with just a few children right now, but we are beginning to grow, to see more families with young children coming and worshiping and even coming back.

And I have to admit that I am tempted to try to group them by age, because I am trying to build a program for children and youth, and in the past you needed a certain number in every grade who liked each other and were friends and were developing significant relationships with children their own age. That's how you did it.

Not that there's anything wrong with that.

We put a lot of stock in large, age-segregated programs for children and youth. In fact, for many churches, the ability to offer that package is the definition of success. Parents gravitate to churches with those programs. But I can't help noticing something, particularly in my congregation: there are so many people who have a significant relationship with one of our charter members, who is 96. It doesn't matter that they are nowhere near her age. They value their connection with her in the body of Christ and feel enriched by her presence.

Programs can be good things, don't get me wrong. Even programs tailored for one specific age group can be good things. But programs don't transform us. Relationships, as in our relationship with Jesus, as in our relationships with one another—these God uses to form us into people who will go out and share grace with the world. The fourth grader with the three-year-old, the teenagers and the preschoolers, the 96-year-olds and the babies and the empty nesters and the college students—we sing each others songs, put up with each other's blind spots, learn each other's passions and gifts—and love each other.

Love one another as I have loved you, he said. And I catch a glimpse of it, before any program can be planned, or any grand ideas can be implemented: love one another. The 96-year-old and the baby. The three-year-old and the fourth grader. The preschooler and the high school student.

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