

Caribou Coffee Café

Creating Meaningful Intergenerational Connections in Your Church

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing many churches today is the disconnect that often exists between generations. Students and adults may worship in the same building each week, yet rarely have meaningful opportunities to truly know one another. At the same time, many adults desire to encourage and invest in the next generation but feel uncertain about how to connect naturally with students.

Caribou Coffee Café was designed to help bridge that gap. This experience creates a relaxed, welcoming environment where youth and adults can engage in intentional conversations, share stories, reflect on life and faith, and build authentic relationships across generations. What begins as a simple coffeehouse-style evening often becomes something much deeper—a catalyst for connection, encouragement, mentorship, and belonging within the life of the church.

Over the years, Caribou Coffee Café became one of the most meaningful intergenerational experiences within our ministry. Adults who once felt disconnected from students began greeting them on Sundays, serving alongside them in ministry, and investing in their lives. Students likewise began seeing adult church members not as strangers, but as people who genuinely cared about them and wanted to know them personally.

The beauty of Caribou Coffee Café is its simplicity. It is inexpensive, reproducible, relational, and highly adaptable for churches of various sizes. Most importantly, it creates space for meaningful conversations that remind students and adults alike that the church is strongest when generations grow together.

The Purpose of Caribou Coffee Café

Caribou Coffee Café is designed to:

- Create meaningful intergenerational relationships
- Help students and adults learn from one another
- Encourage authentic storytelling and vulnerability
- Foster a stronger sense of church community
- Build bridges between generations within the church
- Create natural opportunities for mentorship and discipleship
- Help adult leaders feel more comfortable connecting with students

- Encourage students to feel seen, heard, and valued
-

How the Experience Works

Caribou Coffee Café is designed to function within approximately a 90-minute timeframe.

Participants are assigned a number upon arrival (example: 1.5). The first number indicates which table they begin at, while the second number identifies their seating position. Participants keep the same number throughout the evening.

The room is arranged with round tables, typically seating five to eight participants per table. Each rotation introduces participants to a new group of people, creating fresh conversations throughout the evening.

Questions are projected on a screen one at a time. Each participant is given up to two minutes to answer the question. Participants are encouraged to answer honestly and thoughtfully while respecting the time limit so everyone has opportunity to share.

After each round (10-16 minutes depending on the number of participants around each table), participants rotate to new tables according to the rotation chart. This process continues through four to five rotations, allowing students and adults to interact with a wide variety of people throughout the night.

The evening concludes with a group debrief where participants reflect on what they learned, experienced, and appreciated during the process.

Suggested Timeline

0:00–0:20

Coffee & Connection Time

Provide a relaxed environment where participants can:

- enjoy beverages
- casually interact
- settle into the atmosphere
- begin forming connections

Have your students working the machines and serving the adults as they arrive.

0:20–0:25

Welcome & Instructions

Moderator explains:

- purpose of the evening
- rotation process
- discussion guidelines
- time expectations

0:25–1:25

Four to Five Rotations & Discussion Questions

Each rotation:

- lasts approximately 10-16 minutes
- includes one discussion question
- allows each participant up to 2 minutes to respond

Allow brief transition time between rotations.

1:25–1:35

Group Debrief

Facilitator leads reflection and discussion.

Supplies & Setup

Recommended Supplies

- Coffee machines or Keurig machines
- Assorted coffee flavors
- Hot chocolate

- Hot cider
 - Creamer and sugar
 - Bottled water
 - Cold beverages
 - Snacks or light refreshments
 - Name tags (optional)
 - Projector or screen
 - Timer or clock
 - Round tables
 - Chairs
-

Room Setup

- Arrange round tables throughout the room
 - Number each table clearly
 - Prepare seating numbers in advance
 - Create a warm, relaxed coffeehouse atmosphere
 - Use soft lighting or background music if desired
-

Group Guidelines

Participants should understand the following expectations:

- Everyone participates
 - No one dominates conversation
 - Responses should remain respectful
 - Participants listen without interrupting
 - Avoid debating or correcting others
 - Affirmation and encouragement are welcomed
 - Honesty and authenticity are encouraged
-

Rotation Structure

The rotation system intentionally places participants with different people throughout the evening. This prevents cliques and creates broader relational interaction across generations.

Your original rotation chart and table assignments can be inserted directly into this section. Here is a table assignment grid based on five tables with five participants at each table. Should you

expect a larger group, you'll need to expand this, possibly moving to eight participants around a table. Make sure this is clearly visible on a screen each time a rotation occurs.

Sample Rotation and Questions

Rotation #1

Table #1 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5

Table #2 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5

Table #3 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5

Table #4 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5

Table #5 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 4.4

Question #1 – Tell us about your favorite memory growing up and why?

Rotation #2

Table #1 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1

Table #2 1.2, 2.2, 3.2, 4.2, 5.2

Table #3 1.3, 2.3, 3.3, 4.3, 5.3

Table #4 1.4, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4, 5.4

Table #5 1.5, 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5

Question #2 – Name someone who has influenced your faith. How?

Rotation #3

Table #1 1.1, 2.2, 3.3, 4.4, 5.5

Table #2 1.2, 2.3, 3.4, 4.5, 5.1

Table #3 1.3, 2.4, 3.5, 4.1, 5.2

Table #4 1.4, 2.5, 3.1, 4.2, 5.3

Table #5 1.5, 2.1, 3.2, 4.3, 5.4

Question #3 – What is your greatest fear? How are you overcoming that fear?

Rotation #4

Table #1 1.1, 2.3, 3.5, 4.2, 5.4

Table #2 1.2, 2.4, 3.1, 4.3, 5.5

Table #3 1.3, 2.5, 3.2, 4.4, 5.1

Table #4 1.4, 2.1, 3.3, 4.5, 5.2

Table #5 1.5, 2.2, 3.4, 4.1, 5.3

Question #4 – What do you appreciate about your church? What would you change about your church and why?

Rotation #5

Table #1 1.1, 2.4, 3.2, 4.5, 5.3

Table #2 1.2, 2.5, 3.3, 4.1, 5.4

Table #3 1.3, 2.1, 3.4, 4.2, 5.5

Table #4 1.4, 2.2, 3.5, 4.3, 5.1

Table #5 1.5, 2.3, 3.1, 4.4, 5.2

Question #5 – What is your purpose in life? How are you seeking to live that out?

Suggested Question Progression

One of the keys to a successful Caribou Coffee Café experience is using questions that gradually move from lighthearted conversation toward deeper reflection and meaningful connection.

Begin with easier relational questions before moving into more personal or spiritual topics.

Lighthearted Questions

- What is one of your favorite childhood memories?
 - If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?
 - What is your favorite family tradition?
 - What was your first job?
 - What hobby do you enjoy most?
 - What is your favorite movie or book?
 - If you could relive one day in your life, what would it be?
 - What is one item on your bucket list?
 - What is one food you could never give up?
 - What was your favorite subject in school?
-

Relational & Personal Questions

- Describe the ideal best friend.
 - What quality do you most admire in others?
 - Who has influenced your life the most?
 - What is one challenge that shaped who you are today?
 - What is something people often misunderstand about your generation?
 - What is one lesson life has taught you recently?
 - What is one fear you have had to overcome?
 - What brings you the greatest joy?
 - What does encouragement look like to you?
 - What is one thing you hope people remember about you?
-

Faith & Spiritual Growth Questions

- What is your favorite Scripture verse and why?
 - Describe a time when your faith was tested.
 - Who has influenced your faith journey the most?
 - When have you felt closest to God?
 - What is one question you hope to ask Jesus someday?
 - What spiritual practice has helped you grow most?
 - What role has prayer played in your life?
 - What has God been teaching you recently?
 - What gives you hope during difficult seasons?
 - How can churches better support the next generation?
-

Identity & Purpose Questions

- What do you believe your purpose in life is?
 - What motivates you most?
 - What is one dream you hope to pursue?
 - What legacy do you hope to leave behind?
 - What is one mistake that taught you an important lesson?
 - What strengths has God given you?
 - What kind of person do you hope to become?
 - What challenge are you currently navigating?
 - What does success mean to you?
 - What gives your life meaning?
-

Church & Community Questions

- What do you appreciate most about your church?
 - What would strengthen relationships between generations in the church?
 - What helps students feel welcomed in church?
 - What role should mentoring play in discipleship?
 - What is one thing churches can do better for families?
 - How can adults better encourage students?
 - What makes a church feel like family?
 - What is one thing your generation needs from the church?
 - What is one thing your generation can offer the church?
 - Why do intergenerational relationships matter?
-

Debrief Questions

At the end of the evening, gather everyone together for reflection.

Suggested debrief questions include:

1. What is one thing you learned about someone tonight?
 2. How did this experience make you feel?
 3. Why do you think we created this event?
 4. What surprised you most tonight?
 5. What was your favorite conversation?
 6. What is one takeaway you'll remember from this experience?
-

Facilitator Tips

Create a Welcoming Atmosphere

Warmth and hospitality matter. Friendly greeters, music, refreshments, and intentional leaders help set the tone. Prepare your youth to serve in these roles. Likewise, don't hesitate to invite one or two young people to serve as the facilitator/moderator.

Keep the Evening Moving

Maintain clear timing so the event remains energetic and engaging.

Encourage Vulnerability

Leaders should model authenticity and openness.

Protect the Environment

Keep conversations respectful and emotionally safe.

Use Humor Naturally

Some of the most memorable moments often come through laughter and surprising discoveries.

Why Intergenerational Ministry Matters

Healthy churches are not built around isolated age groups. They are built around relationships, shared discipleship, and a sense of belonging across generations.

Students need caring adults who know their names, listen to their stories, and walk alongside them spiritually. Adults likewise benefit from the passion, honesty, energy, and perspective of younger generations.

Intergenerational ministry reminds the church that discipleship was never intended to happen in isolation. The church becomes strongest when generations learn from one another, serve together, and grow together in Christ.

Caribou Coffee Café creates one practical pathway toward building that kind of church culture.

Final Encouragement

You do not need a large budget or a perfect program to create meaningful relationships within your church. Sometimes all it takes is intentional space, thoughtful questions, good coffee, and a willingness to listen.

Our prayer is that Caribou Coffee Café becomes more than just an event in your ministry—that it becomes the beginning of deeper connection, stronger community, and lasting intergenerational impact within your church.

