



## Intergenerational Relationships—Our Secret Superpower

Brooks Berndt  
Minister for Environmental Justice

Earlier in the year, I had a call with Liam McMahon, the Civic Engagement Director for a highly effective advocacy organization in Minnesota called [ISAIAH](#). As McMahon explained his approach to voter turnout efforts, he made the observation that one of the greatest assets that each of us has is our relationships with others. A good voter turnout strategy leverages this asset. One might say it's our secret superpower.

I have been able to witness this superpower at work in the United Church of Christ's [Vote for Climate Hope campaign](#). I have seen church members draw upon relationships within their congregations when encouraging others to vote their values on election day by having them take the [Climate Hope Voter Pledge](#). I have also seen the unique power of intergenerational relationships within these same congregations.

Over this past summer, a team of young adults spoke at churches across the country about the Vote for Climate Hope campaign, and the most common feedback I received from both the young adults and the churches was how connecting across the generations gave hope to both the young and the old alike. The young adults did not feel so alone in their struggles as the older generation engaged them with gratitude and commitment. At the same time, those of the older generations felt energized by the passion of the bright and gifted younger generation.

As we approach the upcoming election, there is a powerful potential role to be played by intergenerational relationships—whether that entails conversations between generations about plans to vote or different generations actually heading

to the polls together on election day.

A range of articles and studies can be found online related to the influence of intergenerational relationships on voting. One [study](#) found “evidence of significant trickle-down (mother-to-child) and trickle-up (child-to-mother) relationships in civic education and engagement.” Not only are civically engaged parents who vote more likely to have children who do likewise as adults, but there is also evidence that the reverse can happen as adult children influence their parents. Additionally, an organization called Kids Voting USA [found](#) that communities that use their curriculum to foster “lifelong voting habits in children” witnessed a spillover effect as voter turnout among adults increased by as much as five percent.

Ready to make the most of intergenerational relationships this election season? On a practical level, organizations like Girl Scouts provide [tips](#) for taking one’s child with you to vote on election day, while organizations like the YMCA provide [tips](#) for navigating political differences within families.

In the next month, start to think about how you can leverage one of your greatest assets in making a difference. What conversations can be had? What plans can be made? Our values can come to life in meaningful ways when we connect with those close to us. Make the most of your secret superpower in the days and weeks ahead!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Dr. Brooks Berndt is the Environmental Justice Minister for the United Church of Christ and the author of [Cathedral on Fire: A Church Handbook for the Climate Crisis](#).

LEARN [ucc.org/justice](http://ucc.org/justice)

DONATE [ucc.org/donate](http://ucc.org/donate)

ARCHIVE [bit.ly/witness4justice](http://bit.ly/witness4justice)

*The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.*

