

2-2020

## Intergenerational Formation as a Tool for Main Line Protestant Revitalization

Scott Crane

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin>

 Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

---

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

INTERGENERATIONAL FORMATION AS A TOOL FOR  
MAIN LINE PROTESTANT REVITALIZATION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

SCOTT CRANE

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2020

Portland Seminary  
George Fox University  
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

---

DMin Dissertation

---

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Scott Crane

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 21, 2020  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Phil Newell, DMin

Secondary Advisor: Ekaterina Lomperis, PhD

Lead Mentor: MaryKate Morse, PhD

Copyright © 2020 by Scott T. Crane  
All rights reserved worldwide.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Dissertation Writing Studio facilitator Donna K. Wallace and my editor Cierra N. Wallace both of Mere Images, Inc. Thank you Trout Lake First Presbyterian Church for the freedom to pursue these studies. You continue to inspire me with your spiritual journey with the hope that in Christ all might make a positive difference in the world.

Many thanks to my faculty advisor for this work, Phil Newell, who pointed me in good directions as I embarked on this writing, and to MaryKate Morse, Cliff Berger, Loren Kerns and my cohort of LSF 3 at Portland Seminary. Thank all of you for all that you have done to encourage our writing and ongoing formation as spiritual leaders.

I also thank my small group, Pastors Michelle, Joshua, Susan, and Paulette, who have met faithfully for a number of years now. Each of us has come to crossroads and challenges, achievements and callings, mountains and valleys in our support of one another, our lives, and our ministries. Each of you is a gift.

Thanks to my brother-in-law Brian for the occasional calls at odd times (me) and your patient responses, and to “Grandpa Crow,” my father, who every now and then surprised me with a bag of coffee beans to keep me going. I also wish to thank and acknowledge my mother Wendy and sister Kristin for being sounding boards throughout the writing of this piece. Someday I would like to stand with you in your continued journeys, too—like the poster that was on my wall for so many years: “Do not walk before me, I may not follow. Do not walk behind me, I may not lead. Walk beside me and be my friend.” Finally, to my wife and children: all I hope for and all I wish to pass on with this work I hope will touch your lives for good, for others, and for God.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |      |
|---|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....   | iii  |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS .....   | iv   |
| LIST OF TABLES .....  | vii  |
| GLOSSARY .....  | viii |
| ABSTRACT.....   | x    |
| <br>  |      |
| CHAPTER 1: A SMALL CHURCH CONTEXT – A BIG CHURCH PROBLEM .....  | 1    |
| A Story .....   | 1    |
| Who is Missing in the Church and Why? .....                     | 4    |
| The Blueprint Moving Forward.....                               | 7    |
| <br>  |      |
| CHAPTER 2: A CLOSER LOOK AT GENERATION THEORY .....             | 9    |
| An Overview of Current Generations in Church.....               | 9    |
| Going Deeper: Generation Theory .....                           | 21   |
| Stages of Life.....   | 24   |
| Generation Types.....   | 26   |
| Faith Transference, Generation Theory, and the Digital Age..... | 32   |
| Leadership, Turnings, and Passing on the Faith.....             | 35   |
| Turnings and Religious Formation: Lessons From History.....     | 36   |
| “Awakenings” and Religious Emergence .....                      | 37   |
| Conclusion .....  | 41   |
| <br>  |      |
| CHAPTER 3: LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP THEORIES IN THE CHURCH.....  | 42   |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| An Evolution of Christian Education.....  | 44  |
| Applied Learning Theories by Generation.....  | 48  |
| A Review of Traditional Learning Theories .....   | 55  |
| Religious Socialization Through Relationship.....   | 69  |
| Generational Leadership Characteristics and the Relational-Spiritual Context..                    | 72  |
| The Little White Church's Family .....  | 73  |
| Generational Characteristics For Current Midlife Leaders and Rising Leaders .                     | 74  |
| Conclusion: The Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest.....                           | 83  |
| <br>  |     |
| CHAPTER 4: SPIRITUAL, BIBLICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS<br>IN CHRISTIAN FORMATION .....       | 89  |
| Spiritual Community: A Personal Journey.....  | 92  |
| Biblical Foundations in Age-segregated and Intergenerational Formation .....                      | 94  |
| Conclusion.....   | 100 |
| <br>  |     |
| CHAPTER 5: AT THE CROSSROADS: APPLIED LEADERSHIP THEORIES FOR<br>INTERGENERATIONAL FORMATION..... | 102 |
| Leading Change in the Church .....  | 102 |
| Christian Leadership .....  | 104 |
| Tools for Transformation .....  | 106 |
| Spiritual Formation Redefined .....   | 112 |
| Intergenerational Christian Formation.....  | 114 |
| Intergeneragogy: The Art of Science of Teaching Intergenerationally .....                         | 115 |
| Congregational Steps Toward Intergenerationality .....  | 125 |
| <br>  |     |
| CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY AND CONCLUSION.....   | 129 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Process for Implementing IG Experiments .....   | 131 |
| Applied IG Experiments Described .....          | 132 |
| Methodology.....                                | 133 |
| Alternative Experiments In Other Contexts ..... | 147 |
| Critical Summative Analysis.....                | 153 |
| Conclusion.....                                 | 158 |
| <br>  |     |
| APPENDIX A: SUPPORTING MATERIALS .....          | 162 |
| APPENDIX B: SUPPORTING MATERIALS.....           | 163 |
| <br>  |     |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY .....                              | 164 |



## LIST OF TABLES

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Turnings, generation type, and current iteration's dates of birth ..... | 22 |
| Table 2: Stages of life and prime focus in each .....                            | 22 |
| Table 3: Millennial constellation .....  | 27 |
| Table 4: Membership trends 2008-2017, Presbytery of the Cascades .....           | 68 |
| Table 5: Age as of report of official membership to presbytery .....             | 68 |
| Table 6: Age as of report of Sunday School attendance .....                      | 69 |

## GLOSSARY

- Adolescence.** Previously considered between the ages of 10 and 19, now brain researchers consider this stage to be roughly 12 to 27 years old.
- Adulthood.** In generation theory, the period of life from around 44 to 62 years of age.
- Alpha Generation.** (also *Alphas or Alpha Gen.*) Individuals born around 2011 and later.
- Andragogy.** For this paper, the art, science, or profession of teaching adult learners.
- Boomers.** Members of the Baby Boom generation; individuals born roughly between 1943 and 1965, depending on the theorist.
- Church.** The organized, institutional, and regular meeting together of Christians for worship, fellowship, growth, and service.
- Christian education.** See also faith formation and spiritual formation. The professional field incorporating pedagogy in the traditional sense of “teaching” with Christian formation in mind.
- Elderhood.** In generation theory, those persons aged 62 and older, with some literature suggesting a second period of this life stage called “Late Elderhood,” consisting of persons aged 84 and older.
- Faith Formation.** See Spiritual Formation. Often referring to being “formed in the faith,” for this paper it implies the process of shaping one’s being into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
- Faith Transference.** Any faith-related activity or formation occurring between generations resulting in the faith of the older generation being passed on and accepted by a younger generation.
- Generational personality.** Also *peer personality*, the portion of the Strauss-Howe Generational Theory that says individuals that share common age location, beliefs and behavior, and perceived membership in a common generation will also share a common temperament.
- Generation X.** Also *Gen X* and *X’ers*, individuals born roughly between the years of 1961 and 1982. Some slight discrepancies among theorists exist.
- GI Generation.** Also referred to as GI’s, the GI Gen., or the “Greatest,” Those born roughly between 1901 and 1922.
- iGen.** Also referred to as *Gen Z* in literature, individuals born roughly between 2001 and 2011 or 2012, with some slight discrepancies among theorists.

**Intergeneragogy.** Term coined by the author, the art, science, or profession of teaching intergenerationally.

**Millennials.** Also referred to as *Generation Me* or *Generation Y* in literature, individuals born between the years of 1982 and 2004 with some discrepancies among theorists.

**Pedagogy.** For this paper, the art, science, or profession of teaching specifically youth and children.

**Rising Adulthood.** In generation theory, the period of life including persons aged 22 through about 44.

**Silent Generation.** Also simply referred to as the *Silents*, the generation consisting of persons born roughly between 1922 and 1944.

**Spiritual formation.** Any faith-related activity that has at the center of its mission the transformation of one's heart, mind, body, and spirit, going beyond the simple transmission of facts, data, or the belief systems of the parent, church, synagogue, or temple; to permanently shape one's being into more godliness; within the Christian context: in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

**Turning.** In generation theory the transition from one generation's leadership years to the next, usually precipitated by a major event that divides those born before/after the occurrence.

**Youth.** In generation theory, the period of life that includes childhood, early and middle adolescence, through about age 22.

## ABSTRACT

Generations X (“Gen X”), Y (“Millennial”), and Z (“iGen”) are not being formed in the faith by many mainline protestant congregations, such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest, as evidenced by their absence. Practices of applied intentional intergenerational Christian formation are vital for being formed in and passing on the faith to subsequent generations. This can take place in worship, Christian education, spiritual formation activities and missional service.

Foundational for the author’s approach to the problem is how shifts in culture, theology, learning theories, and spiritual formation intersect with the cyclical pattern of generation theory, including related life stages, cultural Turnings, and intergenerational relationship challenges between some of the repeating generation types. Introducing all of the above in the context of a small rural congregation sets the stage in chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides a summary of generation theory. Undergirded by generation theory insights, chapter 3 addresses the influence and impact of religious education and leadership theories that inform spiritual formation as a whole. Intentional integration of Intergenerational Christian Formation (IGCF) practices is introduced.

In chapter 4, Biblical and theological foundations for IGCF are addressed. In chapter 5, the intersection of generation theory, learning theories, and leadership theories are woven together to undergird development of applied intergenerational Christian formation. Finally, in chapter 6, examples of applied intergenerational Christian formation experiences are offered for experimentation moving forward, with some critical analysis of experiments undertaken in the small church context introduced in the first chapter.

CHAPTER 1:  
A SMALL CHURCH CONTEXT—A BIG CHURCH PROBLEM

**A Story**

Beneath the shadow of a tall and snowy mountain at the edge of the Northern Cascades, a little white country church listed on the historic site registry sits embraced by pine trees along a short one-block street. At the dead-end just north of the church, a wild rushing creek splashes over several small cascades where, once upon a time, a bridge spanned the creek between farms. The congregation here initially organized and formed in 1904. In 1905, these pioneering farm families applied to become a member of the local regional body of the Presbyterian Church and became a chartered worshiping community. One year later they had built their church—the same structure that stands to this day.

In recent history, the congregation has maintained a membership role of twenty-three; the last several pastors being temporary part-time stated supply pastors with annual contracts. Over the course of the last two decades, only one of the pastors actually lived in the community. A previously retired clergy before coming to serve in this mountain farming community, the part-time capacity available was a perfect fit.

In broader contexts, the membership has shifted away from the historic pioneering farm families of the valley to more recent arrivals. These include young and middle-aged families escaping the “city” and “city life,” or those who have retired to the country to enjoy their remaining active years away from urban pressures, concerns, issues, and

traffic of an increasingly complex time. One of the reasons they come to the valley is that time still seems to stand still here, echoes of an earlier era.

Descendants of the pioneering families still operate dairies and farms in this fertile volcanic land. Children grow, play, and explore along the creeks crisscrossing the valley as snow-melt waters sometimes rush, sometimes meander through on their way to a wild and scenic river that later joins the mighty waters of the Columbia. Along the valley floor, these same waters are harnessed for “flood irrigation” through a complex network of irrigation ditches as well as localized pumping of water into fields.

One other Christian church exists in the valley, a more recent addition that began, as the story is told, as a theological disagreement between a pastor and a Sunday school teacher in the Presbyterian Church. One of the pioneering farm families gave a bit of land right off the main crossroads in town to build the second church, which has maintained its religious identity as Baptist since its founding three generations ago. The details of the story remain either lost to memory or intentionally forgotten since the disagreement began. One aspect that is apparent on any given Sunday morning is the fact that the parking lot at the Baptist church is quite often full. Meanwhile the somewhat older, “hidden” church has a much smaller group of dedicated churchgoers, almost all of them retirees.

Sometimes, on special occasions, members from one another’s church will attend events together. One such example is the community-wide Christmas Eve Candlelight Service offered every year in the Presbyterian Church. Other gatherings (for adults) happen during the week, the Presbyterian Church hosts community interest forums about once a month (the last one was a visiting author of a book outlining the lives of two

members of a Holocaust-surviving family, the author the child in the story). The Quilters' Guild, made up of members from both churches and other persuasions, meets in the Grange once a week when the daylight shrinks to eight or nine hours in a day, roughly October through April. The Fair (July 4<sup>th</sup> every year) board and the Foundation Sale (benefiting scholarships for high school graduates) are made up of participants from all over the valley, all walks of life. Both are institutions in the valley that were started by members of the Presbyterian Church.

Some newcomers are occasional visitors to the Presbyterian Church, while others have not set foot in any church. Some of the younger families have not committed themselves long-term to any group but have sampled a little of everything. More often, they might engage in a Yoga class at the Grange, or attend parties for one another on special occasions such as Cinco de Mayo or the winter solstice. There is a Buddhist Abbey and Druid compound that offers stories and beliefs of a kind other than the predominantly Christian perspectives that have been prevalent in the United States during the last three-quarters of a century.

For such a rich history and diverse present, why have the historic pioneering multi-generational families left the Presbyterian Church to newcomers of a more retirement-aged demographic? Is it because the Presbyterian Church has invited the Chief Druid to come and share an occasional story in the spring in the fellowship hall? Not as an attempt to be culturally relevant, but rather in the sense of a topical interest in Celtic tales and to kick off the once-a-month special gatherings that happen during a program year, except in the winter once the several feet of snow fall, making travel more difficult. Or is it symptomatic of a larger issue in society today?

When snows do begin to fall, the Presbyterian Church—mostly retirees—loses regular attendance of several couples in the winter months as they travel to warmer climates to await the return of spring. This leaves the question, how might this small rural Presbyterian Church (USA) acquire and retain membership from younger generations in such an eclectic and spiritually diverse time and place? More importantly, despite its small rural nature, why does this congregation represent demographic trends for the Presbyterian Church (USA) as a whole?

### **Who is Missing in the Church and Why?**

Denominational decline has been a keen topic in US-American mainline Protestant churches in recent years. The Religious Landscape Study conducted in 2014 by the Pew Research Center recorded a nearly 3.5 percent drop between 2007 and 2014 for mainline Protestant denomination families.<sup>1</sup> Five years later, that number has more than doubled to 8 percent.<sup>2</sup> Looking at one denomination in particular, the largely white Presbyterian Church (USA), this translates to a drop in sixty thousand members a year. Projecting forward, this could mean there will be no Presbyterians by the year 2042.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> “Mainline Protestants Make Up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults,” Pew Research Center, May 18, 2015, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

<sup>2</sup> “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Religion and Public Life Project, Pew Research Center, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Heron, “Holy Breadcrumbs, November 6, 2019,” *Holy Breadcrumbs* (blog), accessed November 7, 2019, <https://holybreadcrumbs.org/>.



Described by one study, the reason for mainline Protestant decline is as an overall shift to more conservative or fundamental theological perspectives.<sup>4</sup> More conservative faith traditions tend to give simple, short, directive answers to life's increasing complexity instead of embracing the ambiguity of the modern age. In another publication, religious decline is a "problem of reproduction," where, "the faith of grandparents and parents is neither passed on to, nor embraced by Millennials and younger generations."<sup>5</sup> Twining the two together, the emerging picture is one of generational inability to pass on moderate to progressive Christian faith perspectives.

Before moving to address the problem and issues surrounding this gap in main line Protestantism and specifically the Presbyterian Church (USA), it has to be noted that for this study, the context is largely homogenous. Additional issues outside of the scope of this paper include a lack of diversity of member church constituents. There is some support that local church revitalization is contingent on growth in a more racially diverse direction. One corollary would be denominational revitalization is also contingent on diversifying membership of member churches; again this is outside the immediate scope of this paper.

What has caused this generational gap in faith formation? Is it a break in relationship between older and younger generations? Is it models of religious education that are outdated? Does it have to do with models of church leadership or church leaders

---

<sup>4</sup> Kevin N. Flatt, D. Millard Haskell, and Stephanie Burgoyne, "Secularization and Attribution: How Mainline Protestant Clergy and Congregants Explain Church Growth and Decline," *Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 1 (February 28, 2018): 78–107, <http://academic.oup.com/socrel/article/79/1/78/4563828>.

<sup>5</sup> Lia McIntosh, Jasmine Smothers, and Rodney Thomas Smothers, *Blank Slate: Write Your Own Rules for a Twenty-Second Century Church Movement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), viii.

themselves? Are Christian formational practices no longer relevant for young people's spiritual journeys today? Is it a combination of these?

This dissertation specifically explores declining membership in the mostly white, mainline protestant churches of the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest. Based on a ten-year stretch of demographic data, this decline suggests, by their absence, that Generations X ("Gen X"), Y ("Millennial"), and Z ("iGen") have walked away from the church and are not being formed in the Christian faith as expressed by the Presbyterian Church (USA).<sup>6</sup> A wider related course of inquiry would ask if this is the same across all mainline Protestant expressions of Christianity. If mainline churches wish to fulfill their historical mission to, "Go therefore and make disciples ... and [*teach them*] to obey everything that [*Christ*] commanded...to the end of the age"<sup>7</sup> (emphasis added), addressing discipleship practices and spiritual formation between older and younger generations is critical. This study asks three questions in light of generational faith transference.

First, would a more intentional intergenerational Christian formation style of engagement develop a stronger body of Christ and a deeper developing faith for all ages? Second, could more intentional intergenerational Christian formation experiments in small church contexts, if successful—meaning congregations engage in more effective ministry forming life-long disciples of all ages—be applied to larger church contexts? Third, would intentionally integrating more intergenerational Christian formation

---

<sup>6</sup> Data and discussion will be addressed in chapter 3. It is currently too early to tell if the declining trend in younger generations will continue for the youngest to arrive, the Alpha generation—those seven or eight years of age and younger. They will come to rising adulthood during an "Awakening," in generation theory (see chapter 2), which has the potential to boost renewed interest in spiritual communities such as mainline churches.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 28:19–20.

practices result in higher retention rates for younger generations in membership of mainline Protestant churches such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest?

Ultimately, applied intentional intergenerational Christian formation practices in worship, in Christian education, in acts of missional service, and in the family are vital for being formed in and passing on the faith to subsequent generations. If intergenerational faith experiences are significant, they will stick from one generation to the next. Otherwise, moderate to progressive mainline Protestant expressions of Christianity such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) will continue to decline.

### **The Blueprint Moving Forward**

Succeeding chapters approach the problem of retention through examination of how shifts in culture, learning theories, theology, and spiritual formation intersect with the cyclical pattern of generation theory. Chapter 2 provides a more in-depth look at generation theory. Related life stages and cultural Turnings from the theory have an especially important role as they cross over into religious leadership and the culture of the church.

Undergirded by generation theory insights, chapter 3 addresses the influence of Christian education and leadership theory in relationship to ecclesiastical circles, as well as how social science insights inform spiritual formation as a whole. Together, impact of these on younger life stages, as they relate to the current “Fourth Turning” in generation theory, provide a construct moving forward. Partnered with wider theological and

cultural shifts underway, a greater understanding of the current state of perceived crisis<sup>8</sup> in the church are identified.

In chapter 4, spiritual formation is defined, and biblical and theological foundations underlying Christian formation in both age-segregated and intergenerational contexts are addressed. Chapter 5 addresses the crossroads of applied leadership, generation theory and intergenerationality, and are woven together to undergird development of applied intergenerational formation. With the resulting interdisciplinary tapestry, one possible course for paradigm shift as a means for structural/cultural change in the church is explored.

In conclusion, chapter 6 offers practical intergenerational Christian formation experiences as one avenue to address the gap in faith formation from generation to generation. Applied intergenerational Christian formation experiments described in a small church context are offered for analysis and ongoing discussion for larger church experimentation moving forward. The goal is spiritual formation of missing younger generations in the Christian faith as expressed by the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest. One hoped-for, long-term marker of that goal being realized is an increase in congregational vitality fueling a reversal of congregational decline.

---

<sup>8</sup> “Perceived crisis” is intentional in this case. Reviewing larger, 500-year cycles, patterns of religious emergence, reformation, and adaptation reveal that each period of decline in the past has led to a rejuvenated faith, although one that is markedly different than the preceding era. For an excellent summary, see Richard Rohr, “Rummage Sales,” Center for Action and Contemplation, last modified October 27, 2019, <https://cac.org/rummage-sales-2019-10-27/>.

## CHAPTER 2: A CLOSER LOOK AT GENERATION THEORY

Recall the small rural church described above in chapter 1. The fact that more than 85 percent of the membership of the church are all from one life stage does in fact have direct bearing on whether or not younger generations feel implicitly welcome or able to express themselves spiritually in the context of the style of worship favored by most of the membership. Despite the fact that the youngest generations have a multitude of “grandparents” they could adopt who would love to pass on their faith, it is still difficult to keep their parents, and thus the children, in the church.

This chapter examines influences from generation theory as it relates to faith transference between generations. This is particularly related to life stage foci, cultural Turnings, and specific intergenerational relationship challenges between the “Idealist” generation type and others. The next section briefly identifies which generation types, and their current titles, are actively in the church. It identifies their life stages and the focus of their life stages, using elements from generation theory.

### **An Overview of Current Generations in Church**

Today, in early 2020, the oldest members in churches are from the Silent generation, along with a very few GI generation members at 96 years or older. Generation theory defines all people aged 66 years and older in the “Elderhood” life stage. In Elderhood, leadership roles are given up and stewardship becomes their main

life stage focus.<sup>1</sup> Leadership roles in society and the church are usually passed on to the next youngest generation somewhere at the beginning of Elderhood. Those taking up leadership roles are considered to be in their prime of life, able to take the load and lead with confidence. Generation theory terms this stage of life “Midlife,” usually 44–66 years of age.<sup>2</sup> The cyclical nature of the theory impacts leadership of the church, and thus how leadership impacts constituents. Taking a closer look at the oldest generations currently living allows insight for how generational styles of leadership are impacting the church as experienced today.

Each generation is influenced by the preceding one; i.e., the GI generation, which was a “Civic” generation type influenced the Silent generation, an “Adaptive” type. Silents in turn impacted the next youngest group, the Baby Boomers, neither a Civic nor Adaptive type but an “Idealist” type. Boomers, on the other hand, have impacted the following two generations as well as their predecessors. Examining relationships between Idealist Boomers and the other generation types reveals why.

For a Civic generation type, (GIs) conformity was rewarded—think of their military training and experience during WWII—so practice of membership<sup>3</sup> of congregations was encouraged to maintain this sense of communal conformity.<sup>4</sup> The Silent generation maintained this system, albeit adding their adaptations. The Boomer

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl G. Eeman, *Generations of Faith: A Congregational Atlas* (Bethesda, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America’s Future 1584 to 2069* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 56.

<sup>3</sup> Committed congregants, usually adults, who willingly place their names on the membership role of the congregation and participate in regular tithing of time, talents, and personal finances.

<sup>4</sup> John R. Mabry, *Faithful Generations: Effective Ministry across Generational Lines* (New York: Morehouse, 2013), 26.

generation, however, chafed a bit with the institutional nature of the “sameness” of the establishment; leading to challenges in passing on ecclesiastical leadership roles, models, and even “traditional” faith expressions intact as developed and maintained by the preceding generations.

During peak leadership years, again termed “Midlife” by generation theory (roughly 44–66 years of age), evolving church culture during the GI generation revolved around a post-World War II reality. This included impact of the huge influx of “Rosie the Riveter” roles for women in the work force. Originally designed to be “temporary until the men came home,”<sup>5</sup> when the men did come home, those women who left the workforce for household management dominated many ministries the church wished to carry out. Those who remained in the workforce with a new-felt sense of independence and freedom gave rise to the growth of the feminist movement.

Never-the-less, soldiers coming home from the war had expanded opportunities to throw themselves into civic duties, expansion of the United States’ capitalist economy, and, consequently, starting families. A baby boom ensued, which subsequently peopled an entire generation—the one “Baby Boomers” are named after.<sup>6</sup> Sunday School and suburban church plants expanded in the United States during this time and were heavily

---

<sup>5</sup> “Rosie the Riveter,” History, accessed October 30, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/rosie-the-riveter>.

<sup>6</sup> “Preparing for the Citizen Soldier’s Return: The GI Bill of 1944,” The National WWII Museum | New Orleans, accessed October 30, 2019, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/preparing-citizen-soldiers-return-gi-bill-1944>.

impacted by the shift toward family life.<sup>7</sup> This was the last peak of mainline religious expression within this particular iteration of generation theory.<sup>8</sup>

The Silent generation, successors to the GI generation, began to adjust and fine tune earlier GI ecclesiastical arrangements while still believing them to be important,<sup>9</sup> fulfilling their “Adaptive” generation type. This means during *their* peak leadership years, again termed Midlife at 44–66 years of age, they maintained, polished, and slightly tweaked the earlier GI established communities of faith. This corresponded with 1960s–1980s renovations in suburban neighborhood churches with slightly less formal structures, again reflecting their “Adaptive” type.

When the Boomers, children of the mid 1940s–1950s, reached their young adulthood, or “Rising Adulthood” during the 1960s–1970s the need for adaptations to accommodate their youth precipitated even further adaptations to church structure and programs in efforts to retain an increasingly restless population. There are many reasons the Boomers’ restlessness can be traced to the current iteration of this Idealist generation type,<sup>10</sup> but as one Boomer author summarized it, “We were promised the American Dream growing up, and we’re still looking for it.”<sup>11</sup> As the Silent generation moved into the later half of their leadership years and entered Elderhood, their life stage focus shifted

---

<sup>7</sup> “The 1950s: Powerful Years for Religion,” *USC News*, last modified June 15, 1997, <https://news.usc.edu/25835/The-1950s-Powerful-Years-for-Religion/>.

<sup>8</sup> J. Tobin Grant, “Measuring Aggregate Religiosity in the United States, 1952–2005,” *Sociological Spectrum* 28, no. 5 (July 31, 2008): 473, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02732170802205973>.

<sup>9</sup> Mabry, 42.

<sup>10</sup> See characteristics below.

<sup>11</sup> Patti Huck, “Baby Boomers: The Restless Generation. 9 Reasons to Love Us. 9 Traits That Mirror The Years We Grew Up In,” *Women Over Fifty Network*, July 3, 2017, <https://www.womenoverfiftynetwork.com/baby-boomers-restless-generation-9-traits-of-years-we-grew-up-in/>.



to stewardship, handing off leadership roles to the next generation, the leading edge of the Baby Boomers.

Boomers have influenced all sectors of society,<sup>12</sup> including leadership of congregations, for roughly the last twenty years. Being idealists, they typically looked outside previous accepted ways of doing things to find their own path, both in secular and spiritual endeavors. Today the final members of this generation are now retiring to the tune of 10,000 per day in the United States, set to increase to 12,000 by 2030;<sup>13</sup> by generation theory's reckoning, this means they have either left or are leaving their Midlife stage to join the Silents in Elderhood. This also means they have reached the life stage where leadership roles in both church and society are usually relinquished for roles of stewardship. More on leadership theory as it relates to the church is discussed in chapter 3.

### *“Boomerangst” and its Effects on Younger Generations*

Baby Boomers envisioned alternative ways of engaging in life (both secularly and ecclesiastically) than their parents and grandparents. Inspired by the need for something different in their rising adulthood stage, they envisioned complete changes to much of the

---

<sup>12</sup> Other iterations of this type have also been termed “Prophet” generations, often fulfilling judgmental roles in their time. The current generation in this role is the Baby Boomers. How their judgements come to the forefront can be characterized by projecting their private life insights into public life, coming to political power slowly but with increasing rigidity as passionate splits occur among factions with competing moral positions. William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy—What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America’s Next Rendezvous with Destiny* (1997; repr., New York: 1998), 210.

<sup>13</sup> Kristin Meyers, “Americans Are Retiring at an Increasing Pace,” *Yahoo Finance*, accessed September 4, 2019, <https://finance.yahoo.com/news/americans-retiring-increasing-pace-145837368.html>.

traditional structures and methodologies of Christian formation moving into and throughout their leadership years. Those who remained in church or “found their faith” in new church movements set off to explore and re-create structures in line with their vision seeking. The whole process of striking out on their own had dramatic effect on the two generations after them, Gen X and Millennials. These children of the Silents (Gen X) and children of the Baby Boomers (Millennials) have had to find their own way into faith traditions, either of their own making or by following the faith of their grandparents, the GI’s (Gen X) and Silents (Millennials).<sup>14</sup>

“Finding their own way” has not been restricted only to communities of faith. Other leadership roles in society have also been affected. This evidences another element of generation theory called an “Unraveling,” consistent with generation theory’s “Third Turning.” Repeating periods of social instability and/or decay are evident in at least seven other iterations from history both in the United States and abroad dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> The Boomers and how they have affected ecclesiastical communities and beyond happen to embody the current iteration.

In the church, Gen Xers experienced this instability in maintaining ecclesiastical tradition during the impressionable time of late childhood, adolescence (“Youth”) and young adulthood, (“Rising Adulthood”). Millennials have also been influenced by this lack of firm foundations in the church during peak impressionable years. Jim Newby writes,

---

<sup>14</sup> How generations work: Because generation theory looks at 22-year or smaller segments for each generation, the pattern is not perfect in its cut-off. Generally, children (C) of one generation (A) are one generation past the immediate predecessor generation (B). A graphic illustration and summarizing discussion can be found in Eeman, xv.

<sup>15</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 207.

The congruence of disciplines conclude that what is experienced and believed before the age of thirteen determines how one will live their life. The loss of connection to parents at home and adults within the faith community is cultivating isolation, loneliness, and the loss of love and belonging in each emerging generation.”<sup>16</sup>

With two consecutive generations floundering in their faith formation, it is possible to see why the cycle of generation theory is particularly helpful informing contemporary challenges in religious formation and congregational membership decline. Boomers—and churches—however, still have a significant role to play. For churches wishing to retain Boomers, Terry Nyhuis observes,

Churches oriented to the First Half of Life will continue to lose resonance with Boomers in the Second Half of Life. As a result, Boomers will continue to withdraw their involvement from churches. It calls for innovative scholars, churches, and Baby Boomers to understand, accept, nurture, and incorporate values, perspectives, and beliefs in the Second Half of Life into the life of the Church.<sup>17</sup>

To balance first and second half of life issues as they relate to faith transference between generations, younger generations are assisted when they see Boomers actively engaged in the ministries of the church. Older role models are essential for assisting younger generations’ own faith formation, as well as teaching them how to be role models for their own children.

Generations following Idealists (Idealists in this case being the Boomers), are usually children of Adaptives (Silents), and are known as a “Nomad” (or sometimes “Reactive”) generation type (current Gen Xers). In generation theory these are followed

---

<sup>16</sup> Jim Newby, “The Promise and Purpose of Love and Belonging in Shaping the Spiritual Destiny of Sixth Graders” (DMin diss., Portland Seminary, 2019), 308, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/308>.

<sup>17</sup> Terry L. Nyhuis, “Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life (Challenges for Boomers and Their Churches)” (DMin diss., Portland Seminary, 2016), 136, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/136>.

by the next Civic generation type (in this case Millennials), who are typically children of Idealists. Kevin Young, in his 2017 doctoral dissertation, wrote, “Without adequate identity and spiritual development taking place within adolescence, [today’s parents] find themselves in the unfortunate predicament of having to form a child’s faith without their own having been fully-formed.”<sup>18</sup> With today’s parents identified as Gen Xers and Millennials, this is an incredibly important insight moving forward.

Well after mainline protestant church decline<sup>19</sup> began to be documented and discussed in the United States,<sup>20</sup> key aspects of congregational life have continued to stratify along generational lines. These include main areas of congregational community: worship, teaching, and mission,<sup>21</sup> to which I add fellowship. The difficulty with this is the unintentional enforced isolation of the generations. Without the benefit and exposure of multiple generations and their accompanying stages of faith development, role modeling and formative faith interaction between generations does not take place as effectively.

In the case of the absence of Baby Boomers, many traditional mainline Protestant churches, such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), under Silent leadership have continued

---

<sup>18</sup> Kevin Young, “The Efficacy of Late Antique Spiritual Practices for Family-Based Adolescent Faith Formation” (DMin. diss., Portland Seminary, 2017), 20, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/210>.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion on the part of church growth and decline as a pattern in context with secularization and attribution theory outside the United States, see Kevin N. Flatt, D. Millard Haskell, and Stephanie Burgoyne, “Secularization and Attribution: How Mainline Protestant Clergy and Congregants Explain Church Growth and Decline,” *Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 1 (February 28, 2018): 78–107, <http://academic.oup.com/socrel/article/79/1/78/4563828>.

<sup>20</sup> Current Pew Research indicates trends falling from 2007 onward, while the General Social Survey shows the beginning of decline as far back as the 1970s, with the first multi-point drop in the middle of the 1990s. See “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project, October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon T. Smith, “Generation to Generation: Inter-Generationality and Spiritual Formation in Christian Community,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 189.

to operate their programs, committee schedule, and governing structure around the assumed reality of the previous model of religious community life, built by the earlier GI Civic generation. More informal churches under idealistic Boomer leadership have sought to recreate religious community life in alternative ways—ways that met their ideals, but have ended up just benefiting the Boomers. However, as Karen-Marie Yust (a Boomer) identifies, there are three concerns Boomers have not met that are stark realities for children and younger generations today. First, children today are confronted with a world of terrifying realities brought much more close to home, for example “active shooter drills” in schools and other community gathering places. Second, with Millennial parents not tied (nor wanting to be tied) to any specific *institutional expression* of the Christian faith tradition, the opportunity for traditional churches to assist Millennials and their children to confront these new realities is being lost. Third, the more traditional Christian denominations who have historically had strong, broad pastoral support for Christian education programs and educational staff have experienced significant budget cuts, resulting in both a loss and a vacuum of leadership in Christian education.<sup>22</sup>

This vacuum is an additional stumbling block to younger generations today being formed in the faith and thus for the future of the church.<sup>23</sup> There are no supplemental supporting professionals filling the role of Christian Educator in the church. The term “supplemental supporting professionals” is intentional here. Research overwhelmingly

---

<sup>22</sup> Karen Yust, “Strengthening Faith Formation Among Children,” *Sharon and Brook: Connecting the Union Presbyterian Seminary Community*, editorial, Summer 2019, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Lia McIntosh, Jasmine Smothers, and Rodney Thomas Smothers, *Blank Slate: Write Your Own Rules for a Twenty-Second Century Church Movement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019).

shows that faith transference from one generation to another is heavily impacted by the role of parents.<sup>24</sup>

In an interview in 2014 with the author of *Soul Searching* (2005), *Souls in Transition* (2007), and *Young Catholic America* (2014), all texts on the religious landscape of emerging adults, Christian Smith stated,

In our work over the years, what has hit us harder than we realized is the role of parents in shaping their children's spirituality. Despite the arguments today that sideline parents by placing great importance on the influence of peer groups and media, we find that parents are still the most powerful sociological force in transmitting spirituality and religion to their children.<sup>25</sup>

However, studies show that parents drifting between several denominational (or even faith) traditions without being rooted in any given tradition long-term impacts subsequent generations' choosing to follow one faith tradition.<sup>26</sup> Part of this dissertation's hypothesis is that for the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest, uncommitted parental involvement is one of the variables contributing to the generational gap in church. There are also additional variables contributing to church flight in younger generations.

Another hypothesis for church decline is that contemporary youth and children are no longer print-centric as a result of the digital age; which means they are also no longer word—or Word—centric. According to this theory, they are keyed into three alternate formational stimuli brought about by contemporary cultural shifts, including and

---

<sup>24</sup> Marsulize van Niekerk and Gert Breed, "The Role of Parents in the Development of Faith from Birth to Seven Years of Age," *HTS Teologiese Studies*, last modified June 1, 2018, accessed October 29, 2019, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A544314118/AONE?sid=lms>. See also Niekerk and Breed's sources: Benson and Eklin 1990; DeVries 2004; Smith and Denton 2005; Smith and Snell, 2009; Avenant 2015; and Van Staden 2015.

<sup>25</sup> "Young Souls in Transition: An Interview with Christian Smith," *Reflections*, accessed October 29, 2019, <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/seeking-light-new-generation/young-souls-transition-interview-christian-smith>.

<sup>26</sup> John Roberto, "The Importance of Family Faith for Lifelong Faith Formation," *Life Long Faith*, 2012, accessed October 29, 2019, <https://www.lifelongfaith.com/journal.html>.

especially the instantaneous nature of the digital age: image, music, and narrative (story).<sup>27</sup> Where do younger generations find meaning and relevance, and how can the church engage them to create committed disciples who gather faithfully together in weekly community?

Comparing image, music, and narrative to what is usually found in contemporary church settings, traditional educational methods appear to be in need of revision, additions, enrichment, or replacement with new forms of ministry inclusive of Gen X, Millennial, and iGen sensibilities, including digital communication methods, competencies with digital media platforms, and more focused social justice-seeking inclinations. These concerns relate to Christian education, without even touching on worship experiences. In worship, the quality of music (whatever style) impacts the experience of being involved in that faith tradition.<sup>28</sup> Without quality music, churches contribute to an already healthy overall skepticism of the point of institutional religious expressions altogether. After all, better quality music is just a set of headphones away. On the other hand, if a church is “too showy” in their musical production, that could be another reason to leave—a perception of all show and no substance. Regardless, the “worship war” discussion is beyond the scope of this particular dissertation, and worthy of pursuit by other researchers.

---

<sup>27</sup> Leonard Sweet, “Bring Back the Table: Tabor e-Lab #6,” AGS Info, YouTube video, November 6, 2014, 34:45, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=389RR-DjB4g&feature=youtu.be>.

<sup>28</sup> Without taking a side-step into another entire course of study, the last several decades have witnessed a plethora of materials relating to the “worship wars” as traditional and contemporary, ancient and future, contemplative and post-modern musical tastes are all felt and practiced in various worship contexts and received differently by constituents. Quality is the foremost expressed need to make it relevant. See C. Randall Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination: Reforming the Church’s Music*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B Eerdmans, 2012).

In another study on perceived secularization influences by pastors and church members, divergent varying responses are reported. In that study, it was concluded that inflexibility of declining congregations contributed to their own decline. Specifically, the author concludes, “In a world where so much has changed, a congregation’s resistance to change can become an important source of comfort for its members while making it increasingly irrelevant to the surrounding social environment.”<sup>29</sup> In the same study, two control congregations experiencing growth took secularization for granted. Knowing there was increased secular activity and involvement scheduled for Sundays—and Sunday morning in particular—they simply embraced intentional internal changes in response, such as alternative day and worship times.

Educator and author Marie Yust suggests several things need to be in place for educational models moving forward.<sup>30</sup> Items such as the means of addressing underlying Millennial skepticism of organized religion, their other hopes and fears, recognition that future programs need to be holistic and family centered (not child-centered as in the past) and that religious learning environments could benefit and adopt from interactive models introduced in secular arenas, such as those found in children’s museums.

Pedagogically, these typically attempt to incorporate “scaffolding” between activities, such as between thinking and talking and before entering into immersive exercises. Considering “the health of a community can be assessed by the well-being of its children, [and] given the continued hemorrhaging of young people from [US-]

---

<sup>29</sup> Steve McMullin, “The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches,” *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 1 (2013): 58.

<sup>30</sup> Yust, 6.



American churches...<sup>31</sup> one wonders if worship itself could also benefit from incorporating Yust's suggestions not only for children, but for all the generations together. If the church is to impact all the generations living today and embrace formational practices, knowing more about generation theory will help.

### **Going Deeper: Generation Theory**

Social historians William Strauss and Neil Howe identified a four-generation cycle that has revealed a specific historical pattern.<sup>32</sup> They originally developed the theory to understand cycles of human history as it intersects with society and culture. However, in the subsequent work of Carl G. Eeman and others<sup>33</sup> exploring what has become known as generation theory, there is considerable impact on religious leadership. Cross-disciplinary findings are substantial. The following sections will review an overall perspective of elements of the theory with a specific religious formation lens moving forward. Explored in more detail below, the following two tables outline the most recent cycle of generation theory from Strauss and Howe's work.

---

<sup>31</sup>Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 16.

<sup>32</sup> Howe and Strauss, figure 6-6 in *Generations*, 97.

<sup>33</sup> Religious practitioners utilizing generation theory in understanding issues of the faith vary widely. In this study, particularly the works of Carl G. Eeman, *Generations of Faith: A Congregational Atlas* (Bethesda, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); John R. Mabry, *Faithful Generations: Effective Ministry Across Generational Lines* (New York: Morehouse, 2013); Bob Whitesel, *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gap in Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001); Gordon T. Smith, "Generation to Generation: Inter-Generationality and Spiritual Formation in Christian Community," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 182–93; Meredith Gould, *Transcending Generations: A Field Guide to Collaboration in Parishes* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017); and Roseann Giarrusso and Merrill Silverstein, *Kinship and Cohort in an Aging Society From Generation to Generation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013) are helpful resources for further reading.

**Table 1: Turnings, generation type, and current iteration's dates of birth**

| <b>Turning</b> | <b>Generation type</b> | <b>Name: Dates of birth</b> |
|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| First Turning  | Civic/Hero             | GI's: 1901–1924             |
| Second Turning | Adaptive/Artist        | Silents: 1925–1942          |
| Third Turning  | Idealist/Prophet       | Baby Boomers: 1943–1960     |
| Fourth Turning | Reactive/Nomad         | Gen. X'ers: 1961–1981       |
| First Turning  | Civic/Hero             | Millennials: 1982–2002      |

Source: Original projection by Strauss and Howe. Discussion of alternatives to follow.

**Table 2: Stages of life and prime focus in each**

| <b>Stage of Life</b> | <b>Age Span</b> | <b>Prime Focus</b> |
|----------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Youth                | Birth to 21     | Dependence         |
| Rising Adulthood     | 22–44           | Activity           |
| <b>Midlife</b>       | <b>45–66</b>    | <b>Leadership</b>  |
| Elderhood            | 66 +            | Stewardship        |

Each change of Turning occurs when a generation type reaches the Midlife stage of leadership, in bold above. Within the cycle of four Turnings, two generation types generate cyclical peaks of a particular stretch of societal ethos. Civic and the Idealist types, through their leadership years, take on and broadly characterize what happens in society as a whole (First and Third Turnings)—each peak spanning approximately forty to fifty years. In other words, whenever the cycle returns to the leadership years of a Civic generation type (First Turning), that generation's characteristics shape around half a century's worth of what the whole of the United States culture looks like, including religious leadership and the ethos of congregational life and structure.

The second forty-year period characterizes an unraveling that occurs when the Idealist generation type crosses through their midlife years (Third Turning), impacting

leadership roles in all societal levels as they first fill, then vacate these roles by bringing their unique perspectives and leadership styles with them, with congregational life reflecting the same shift. Together, these two peaks set up and influence emergent societal behavior over a full human lifetime, roughly eighty-eight to one hundred years in the theory. Through the following chapters of this dissertation, these insights are extremely important to keep in mind for understanding contemporary conditions.

Carl G. Eeman's particular adoption of Strauss and Howe's theory within ecclesiastical leadership during the midlife stage is especially helpful. He reviews Strauss and Howe's treatment of the theory, where they begin the midlife leadership pattern at a First Turning, culminating in a Fourth Turning crisis experienced at all levels of society.<sup>34</sup> The current societal characteristics as foreseen by Strauss and Howe in their text<sup>35</sup> are now being played out just as predicted for the beginning of a Fourth Turning Crisis:

A Crisis mood does not guarantee that the new governing policies will be well designed or will work as intended. To the contrary: Crisis eras are studded with faulty leadership and inept management—from President Lincoln's poor record of choosing generals to President Roosevelt's colossal blunders with such alphabet soup agencies as the AAA, NRA, and WPA. What makes a Crisis special is the public's willingness to let leaders lead even when they falter and to let authorities be authoritative even when they make mistakes. Amid this civic solidarity, mediocre leaders can gain immense popular following, bad policies can be made to work.<sup>36</sup>

The more recent work of Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais identifying Millennial spiritual characteristics in general as they are unfolding also assists understanding the currently-felt ecclesiastical leadership vacuum. Winograd and Hais use

---

<sup>34</sup> Carl G. Eeman, 117.

<sup>35</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 256–57.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 257–58.

the terms “Civic,” “Adaptive,” “Idealist,” and “Reactive” for the generation types.<sup>37</sup>

Strauss and Howe have used various terms over the course of their work. “Hero” for Civic, “Artist” for Adaptive, “Prophet” for Idealist, and “Nomad” for Reactive are used in *The Fourth Turning*.<sup>38</sup>

With a closer examination of stages of life, the current iteration of generational types, and changes due to the digital age, some recent critique of Strauss and Howe’s generation theory is identified below. This will be cast in light of challenges passing on the faith from one generation to another. A brief discussion follows of how “Awakenings” in the theory’s recurring cycles inform religious emergence.

### **Stages of Life**

The first stage of life has been labeled “youth” and corresponds to birth through around 21 years of age in the theory. This particular stage spans the most impressionable years for the foundations of faith transference, and needs to be regarded carefully. For religious instruction practitioners, it is important to note that during this first stage, the prime focus in life is dependence. Therefore, students in this stage of life are dependent on older role models in the faith to pass on foundational basics of their faith tradition. Despite the rise of the youth/teenage culture in the past half-century as separate from children’s ministry, in traditional generation theory, development of the characteristics of

---

<sup>37</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation Is Remaking America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 13–14.

<sup>38</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 19.

each iteration of a generation “type” takes longer to coalesce so they are elided.<sup>39</sup>

Additional evaluation of youth ministry itself as a movement is addressed in chapter 3.

Rising adulthood with its focus on activity is the second life stage in generation theory. It is considered roughly to be from 22 years of age through 44 years of age. In this stage, young adults either own or disown the faith foundations that have been impressed upon them, so this is another very important set of years for the church. Depending on how they have received their faith, this formational time frame provides the undergirding needed for young adults to in turn assume leadership roles in the church, preparing them to teach and pass on the faith as they move into the third stage of life.

Mature members in faith of the third stage, termed “Midlife” in the theory, are especially influential because the prime focus for this age group is leadership, highlighted in bold in table 2 above and table 3 below.<sup>40</sup> Normally, the leadership years are a generation’s time to shine, making their mark and leading the various spheres of life, including formational experiences in the church. Teacher-practitioners of spiritual formation in this stage and higher are key personnel for passing on the faith to younger generations. These years range from roughly 45 to 66. The last stage of life in the theory

---

<sup>39</sup> Note: Youth ministry as an age-segregated response will be examined in chapter 3 among other age-segregated responses to faith formation.

<sup>40</sup> Note: Both the Silent and Boomer generations have leadership years extended in this illustration due to the Boomer rising adulthood and early midlife years when they did not effectively exhibit social and ecclesiastical leadership, and their subsequent bids for leadership and power in society and ecclesiastical circles since. In contrast to the Silent generation, who continued their ecclesiastical leadership roles beyond their normal set of expected years because of a vacuum of leadership, once the Boomers did gain leadership roles, they became reluctant to let go of the power of leadership as they graduated into their Elderhood years. One only has to look at the U.S. political scene from 2016 onward to observe this played out in secular circles. Interestingly, no Silent generation member has been a U.S. President to date.

is called “Elderhood,” and has typically meant anyone 66 years old and up. Their prime focus is traditionally on stewardship.<sup>41</sup>

To summarize, the reason Midlife is critical is because of the influence this age has in forming other generations in the faith. They can impact generations above them, but they most definitely impact generations following. With the Idealist generation type, all of society reels from their entrance into these years, marking the point of transition to the Third Turning Unraveling, which the subsequent generations have to deal with. Further discussion of Turning characteristics is found below. The next section will more fully describe the four generation types and their recurrence.

### **Generation Types**

Strauss and Howe identified several “constellations” in their work, where several factors align. A constellation could be viewed as a “still frame” photograph in time showing which generations are in which stages. Like each constellation, the current configuration informs the overall ethos of each Turning. Generationally, constellation eras are experienced only from the lived-in life stage of generation members each time. Roughly, this means there would be four constellations within a normal person’s lifespan. The current constellation era, which Strauss and Howe identify as the Millennial Constellation, is represented in simplified form in table 3. Note in bold the generations currently in positions that express the prime focus of leadership.

---

<sup>41</sup> Eeman, 18.

**Table 3: Millennial constellation<sup>42</sup>**

| <b>Generation Type<br/>(Current)</b> | <b>Adult Stage Demographics</b> |                         |                                 |                               |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
|                                      | <i>Birth Years</i>              | <i>Rising Adulthood</i> | <i>Midlife &amp; Leadership</i> | <i>Entering Elderhood</i>     |
| <i>Adaptive Silents</i>              | 1925–1942                       | 1943–1960               | <b>1961–1982</b>                | <b>1983–2005</b>              |
| <i>Idealist (Baby Boomers)</i>       | 1943–1960                       | 1961–1983               | <b>1984–2006</b>                | <b>2007 (–2017)<br/>–2029</b> |
| <i>Nomad (Gen X)</i>                 | 1961–1979*                      | 1980–2002               | <b>2003–2025</b>                | 2026–2048                     |
| <i>Civic (Millennial)</i>            | 1980–1994*                      | 1995–2017               | <b>2018–2040</b>                | 2041–2063                     |
| <i>Adaptive (iGen)</i>               | 1995–2012*                      | 2013–2035               | <b>2036–2058</b>                | 2059–2081                     |

\* This reflects recent proposed changes to generation segments, discussed below.

The table above outlines each current generation as well as when its adult age demographic exhibits or is expected to exhibit their leadership years. Note the two anomalies identifying Elderhood leadership being exercised in the Silent and Boomer generations in terms of current leadership and formation in the church. In the continued absence of some Gen X and Millennial members rising to the occasion of ecclesiastical leadership, the Silent generation and Boomers who have entered their Elderhood are still at the leadership helm of churches. This affects participation by younger generations, as will be seen. Though several descriptive words have been offered for each generation type, for the rest of this dissertation, the following traditional terms will continue to be used unless otherwise noted: Idealist, Nomad, Civic, and Adaptive.

---

<sup>42</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 351.

*First Type: Idealist*

This generation type historically has difficulty relating to the generations above and below it in the repeating pattern,<sup>43</sup> as their leadership years span the opposite peak from the Civic “High.” This tendency is impacting current relationships within the church, the most important of which is the mentoring and teaching role needed to pass the faith on to younger generations. Characterized by re-examining and re-forming social institutions and questioning the establishment, recent researchers have identified the current iteration of this type as the progenitors of the “spiritual but not religious” identity.<sup>44</sup> True to form, since this generation type is in its leadership role, this identity is being passed on to the next youngest generations, affecting church affiliation and membership. The current Idealist type is inhabited by the generation known as the Baby Boomers, born between 1943 and 1960. Traditional generation theory presents this type as the first in the four-generation pattern.

If the theory holds, the newest generation currently adding their numbers to the United States will also be an Idealist generation type. Primarily children of Millennials, current research is beginning to call this generation the “Alphas.” To date, these are children currently roughly 6, 7, or 8 years of age and younger, or born in the neighborhood of 2011–2013, depending on the source.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Mabry, 82.

<sup>44</sup> Mabry, 99.

<sup>45</sup> Christine Michel Carter, “The Complete Guide to Generation Alpha, The Children of Millennials,” *Forbes*, December 21, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinecarter/2016/12/21/the-complete-guide-to-generation-alpha-the-children-of-millennials/>.



*Second Type: Nomad or Reactive*

Following the Idealist generation type is the Nomad generation type, characterized by taking high risks and testing out new ideas and processes. They have the difficult role of moving into midlife and leadership during a Fourth Turning when inevitably a cultural Crisis occurs.<sup>46</sup> The current iteration of this type has both been labeled and label themselves as Gen X, born roughly between 1965 and 1979,<sup>47</sup> 1961–1980<sup>48</sup> or 1981,<sup>49</sup> or even as late as 1982,<sup>50</sup> depending on the researcher. For the current iteration, fear was a basic reality growing up, leading to this generation’s ethos of anxiety and/or relativist perspective on everything and their focus on self-preservation at all costs. As one author wrote, “it is hard to overstate the damage that the Watergate and Iran-Contra episodes did to Xers’ trust in public figures.”<sup>51</sup> Because of this and other societal threats,<sup>52</sup> it has been hard for a Gen Xer to enter into spiritual communities with a sense of being able to give back or to trust authority—especially if said community feels at all “institutional.” This has both positive and negative repercussions. Positive in that the missional sensibilities of Gen X and later generations translate into realized action

---

<sup>46</sup> Turnings and their characteristics are further described below.

<sup>47</sup> Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2017), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Mabry, 114.

<sup>49</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> Eeman, 71.

<sup>51</sup> Mabry, 116.

<sup>52</sup> Threat of divorce, latch-key child phenomena, threat of nuclear demise, the fate of the earth, the Idealist’s utopian dreams for society falling to pieces and being unrealized, and even the progress of thought from the absolutes of earlier generations concerning God and the universe to expanded scientific discoveries contributing to the growing perspective that all truths are relative.

that has observable results. Negative in that institutions such as the church and others that have the best intentions in mind for meeting felt needs move too slowly for results to be observable in the eyes of those wishing to see results.

*Third Type: Civic*

Characterized by building and expanding physical and social infrastructure, the generational characteristics of the current iteration are still emerging. Traditional generation theory identifies the Millennial generation, born roughly between 1980 and 2005<sup>53,54,55</sup> as this type. If the theory holds true, as of 2019, some are currently poised to enter their midlife stage with its focus on leadership, while others are still in the Rising Adulthood stage with its focus on activity.

The last generation of this type was, consequently, the GI generation. In some literature termed the “Greatest” generation, they were born roughly between 1901–1924 and responsible for almost all traditional social and cultural foundations undergirding the United States of America from 1950 up until the present day. This is important to note and instrumental for understanding why Boomers, and thus Boomer-influenced younger generations, are struggling against some of the established norms and institutions.<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> 1980–1994 according to Jean M. Twenge, *iGen*, 5.

<sup>54</sup> 1981–2001 according to Mabry, 152.

<sup>55</sup> 1983–2005 according to Eeman, 94.

<sup>56</sup> Further background of this set of theories is too broad for this study, but a good resource to review is “The Age Gap in Religion Around the World,” Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project, June 13, 2018, <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>, 13–17.

*Fourth Type: Adaptive*

Following every Civic generation type is an Adaptive generation type characterized by refining and civilizing social conventions built by the preceding generation. Historically, their world view and social contexts were almost identical to their predecessors; this type has two large living generations present today; the older of the two has been characterized as the Silent Generation, born 1925–1942<sup>57</sup> while the younger of the two, born roughly between 1995–2012 have been labeled the iGen.<sup>58</sup> Their leading ranks are now in the first years of college.

As noted above, theorists are split over the age range of the most recent generations because of the influence of the digital information age. Students of the iGen are the first truly native digital generation. Smartphones became commonplace around 2012, roughly around the time many Millennials were finishing high school and going to college and the iGen began middle school and high school.<sup>59</sup> The smartphone and other mobile internet devices have sparked significant changes influencing the Rising Adulthood stage for Millennials and the Youth stage for the iGen. How this completely plays out for generation theory's traditional stages of life and the focus of each stage is yet to be seen. Some insights concerning the impact of the digital age in light of teaching and learning Christian formation follow.

---

<sup>57</sup> Eeman, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 6.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

### Faith Transference, Generation Theory, and the Digital Age

A big question moving forward is, what will the upbringing, cultural socialization, and religious involvement of young people be like if they have never known life without digital/smart devices in the home or on their person? This has and will continue to have the potential to severely affect religious faith formation. One of the ultimate trajectories could easily become that faith becomes more and more objectified, like any other bit—or byte—of information gleaned from the internet and used in “education.” This sets up a potentially negative dichotomy between informational faith and transformational faith realized for constituents. This potential is revealed starkly when considering multiple factors influencing younger generations today. One of those factors is shorter-term generational segments, which leads to shorter-lived opportunities for passing on the faith.

Some generation researchers suggest generational theory as originally proposed by Strauss and Howe<sup>60</sup> is unraveling due to the digital age.<sup>61</sup> Generation researcher Jean M. Twenge is one of these, and has suggested the digital age is causing what she perceives as recent generational shrinkage. Especially with the advent of the smartphone, Twenge suggests recent generation segments are now less than twenty-two years long. One example of her theory gives rise to the idea of “micro-generations.” A Micro-generation is comprised of members born around the shift between traditional cut-off dates for generation theory. One proposed example sits between Gen Xers and

---

<sup>60</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Generations*.

<sup>61</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 5–6.

Millennials. Members of this micro-generation contain characteristics of both, and have been affectionately dubbed “Xennial.”<sup>62</sup>

Twenge, omitting the “Xennial” micro-generation, suggests recent generation segments to be Boomers with an eighteen year-long generation, X’ers at fourteen, and Millennials at fourteen, followed by a seventeen-year-long generation segment for the iGen culminating with births in 2012.<sup>63</sup> Sarah Brown’s research, quoting Twenge, observes,

Significant shifts in teens’ behavior, attitudes, and mental health began to occur around 2012... which is also the year when, for the first time, a majority of Americans reported owning a smartphone. ‘Most Millennials didn’t own smartphones until they were adults,’ Ms. Twenge writes. Generation Z [iGen] members, on the other hand, have spent most—if not all—of their adolescent years in the presence of the devices. For this group, [Twenge] posits, ‘that crucial stage of developing social skills during adolescence was probably being affected by the phone.’<sup>64</sup>

Twenge reported that even at 13 years of age, some iGen members have realized the smartphone has affected their human relationships, with some brave souls even reacting against it.<sup>65</sup> Long-term, it remains to be seen if this reaction will grow or wane.

The youngest generation currently living, as mentioned above, are those 7 or 8 years of age and younger, give or take a year or two. These “Alpha” generation children have yet to make a mark in generation research, but they are definitely present in churches among those who have endeavored to keep Christian spiritual formation a central value in their family systems. It could easily be argued, however, that

---

<sup>62</sup> “Xennials, The Microgeneration Between Gen X And Millennials,” *HuffPost Canada*, June 28, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/06/28/xennials\\_a\\_23006562/](https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/06/28/xennials_a_23006562/).

<sup>63</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 6.

<sup>64</sup> Sarah Brown, “How Generations X, Y, and Z May Change the Academic Workplace,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 64, no. 4 (September 22, 2017): 12.

<sup>65</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 298.

smartphones, tablets, and other digital devices will also heavily affect this youngest generation. This is especially true if their parents—Millennials or Gen Xers—have not been diligent about restricting screen time and other digital engagement.

Fostering positive formative relationships from one generation to another is at the heart of the matter when it comes to faith transference. Recommendations according to the American Academy of Pediatrics during the earliest years of brain development say that from birth to 2 years old, children should not engage in screen time at all, with very restricted access as early childhood “babysitting” devices between ages 3 and 5.<sup>66</sup> Research even reveals physiological changes to the human brain brought on by instantaneous digital connectivity.<sup>67</sup> This has strong ramifications for faith formation: who—or what—is teaching human relationship skills since the digital age is still evolving as more “smart” devices, voice activated or otherwise, come on the market, such as Siri, Alexa, Home Google, and the Apple Watch?

All of these questions and observations have bearing on facilitating spiritual formation and the church’s response. Ramifications are not just for younger generations missing in the church, but for all generations currently living and all those yet to come. The importance of this becomes even more apparent when taking into account leadership patterns that have emerged from generational “Turnings” as outlined by generation theory.

---

<sup>66</sup> Screen time for children and youth is a huge topic worthy of a complete separate dissertation. Here suffice it to say the general recommendation is no more than two hours a day for elementary aged children and no screen time whatsoever for children under the age of two. For more information on this topic and making a family media use plan, please refer to the American Academy of Pediatrics repository on Media and Family Life at [HealthyChildren.org](https://healthychildren.org/english/family-life/media/pages/default.aspx), <https://healthychildren.org/english/family-life/media/pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>67</sup> Mitchell Moffit and Gregory Brown, “5 Ways Social Media Is Changing Your Brain,” TED-Ed, Toront, ON, 2015, video of presentation, <https://ed.ted.com/featured/qQzsdX2Y>.

### **Leadership, Turnings, and Passing on the Faith**

When each generation moves into “Midlife,” their leadership style influences specific socio-cultural Turnings. Midlife leadership styles of each generation filter through to all sectors of society as leaders emerge. One example is the church. Church Leadership styles in turn impact the methods, means, and ways faith is passed on during each corresponding Turning.

Strauss, Howe, and Eeman identify a cultural leadership/generation relationship, which revolves around specific “constellations” of generation types. When a Civic generation moves into the leadership of midlife, this resulting First Turning is called a “High.” As they pass into Elderhood and the Adaptives move into midlife and leadership, the Second Turning is considered an “Awakening.” As they move into Elderhood and the Idealist generation moves into Midlife, society experiences a Third Turning, dubbed an “Unraveling.” Finally, when the Idealists move into Elderhood and a Nomad/Reactive generation moves into leadership, society experiences a Fourth Turning, called a “Crisis.”<sup>68</sup> History, therefore, is revealed as related to the cyclical pattern of generational leadership turnover. This, in turn, is reflected in the church.

The United States is currently experiencing a Fourth Turning, as the current Nomad generation, Gen X, moves into their midlife stage. Taking up leadership roles in

---

<sup>68</sup> If traditional ordering of generation theory were to be reshuffled to put a Civic generation first, followed by the others and culminating in the Nomad/Reactive type, perhaps the Turnings would make more sense in the long view of a cyclical building up, maintaining, challenging, and tearing down to be rebuilt, albeit differently, by the subsequent Civic generation. While outside the scope of this study, it bears consideration as generation theory evolves and current researches take into account contemporary variables such as the advent of the digital age and potential shrinking of generation “segments.”

society is now their life stage focus. Consequently, for those Gen Xers that are in the church, leadership is also beginning to open up. However, Gen Xers are different adults than previous generations. Identifying leadership models that Gen X (and later Millennials) favor will need to be evaluated for relevance in the church. Perhaps a more important consideration is whether an institutionalized church can adapt.

Looking ahead to the Millennials and iGens, what is/will be the crisis that will galvanize the next Civic generation, Millennials, to come together and really take the lead when it is their turn? When the iGen hits rising adulthood, will there be a new Civic ethos built by Millennial ingenuity? That is up to future observers to determine. For the purposes of this dissertation, this constellation of the generations, in this particular Fourth Turning in history, is heavily impacting leadership of the church and faith transference from one generation to another. What can we learn from earlier cycles?

### **Turnings and Religious Formation: Lessons from History**

In the United States, “Sunday School” developed as a method of church growth and discipleship during a cross-over from a “High” or First Turning to an “Awakening” or Second Turning in the mid 1800s.<sup>69</sup> Each succeeding “Turning” of US-American cultural life has caused the ethos and characteristics of that generation to become ascribed to the model of religious education most comfortable to, and thus utilized by, that generation. Today there is a Fourth Turning, but church leadership’s religious formation

---

<sup>69</sup> “A Brief History of Sunday School,” Ministry To Children, October 12, 2009, <https://ministry-to-children.com/history-of-sunday-school/>.



practices have not yet caught up with the movement from older formational patterns to ones that find meaning for younger generations. Educational theory and practices will be addressed in chapter 3.

The last “First Turning” or “High,” roughly 1946-1964, set the stage for contemporary Christian Education as it is still mostly practiced. It is based, however, on the earlier 1800s Sunday school model. This is one piece of a bigger picture contributing to religious upheaval being experienced by mainline protestant churches. In addition to younger proselytes missing due to models of “institutionalized” religious education created for earlier generations, a new crop of Christian education practitioners are not stepping up to fill leadership roles as they open.

In review, Idealists protested some of the ways their GI parents did things, launching the pattern into the Unraveling of a Third Turning. Seeking to lead in alternative ways that fulfilled their ideals,<sup>70</sup> this has sometimes negatively impacted relationships with others above and below their generation.<sup>71</sup> Since relationship is critical to faith transference, this has bled over into ecclesiastical involvement and affected younger generations engaging church in meaningful ways.

### **“Awakenings” and Religious Emergence**

One question implied in the previous section requires immediate consideration. How can the church be the authentic body of Christ it is meant to be for the diverse

---

<sup>70</sup> Mabry, 100.

<sup>71</sup> Jeremy Schlosberg, “My Generation!” *MEDIAWEEK*, July 15, 1991, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A10992221/AONE?u=newb64238&sid=AONE&xid=6b0f888d>.

spectrum of people, all of whom are God's people in the end? Similarly, how can it do so when the next generation of faith leaders is also missing from the church?

That is really two questions, but one answer lies in the twining of the two. A revitalized [resurrected?] church can become the authentic body of Christ, with all the diverse spectrum of generations and their characteristics, if it can reflect the values and ethos of the current rising Civic, or "building," generation. Careful observation illuminates the church has mirrored the societal value structures in each of the two "peak" times in the four-Turning pattern of generational shift, occurring at the First and Third Turnings.

During the peak Civic years of leadership—First Turnings or a High peak—church growth, rising membership, and church planting occurs. During Adaptive midlife leadership years, Second Turnings, called "Awakenings," occur. Pursuit of ideals, spiritual and/or otherwise, increases among rising adulthood members, an Idealist type. Baby Boomers are the most recent example. When they leave rising adulthood, move into and through midlife, with their leadership comes the Third Turning "Unraveling." Church programming diminishes, membership shrinks, and church plants may begin to close. When Idealists move from Midlife to Elderhood and the following Nomad generation steps into and then completes their leadership years, the resulting Forth Turning "Crisis" occurs. When Nomads leave leadership and head into Elderhood, this launches the next Civic generation into their leadership years and subsequent up-building of the next "High" peak in a First Turning.

Subsequent with the last Civic generation's (GI's) rising to leadership across the spectrum of the culture of the United States of America, the last "peak" years of the

mainline protestant church soon followed, resulting in its rapid expansion and church plant era of the 1950s–1980s. Therefore, if the hypothesis is correct, then to mirror another golden age of the mainline protestant denominations, and the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest specifically, the church must adapt to the challenge of recreating itself, integrating the values implicit in the next rising Civic Millennial generation’s ethos. Implicit in this challenge: if Millennials are not in the mainline Protestant churches currently having a mainline Protestant faith passed on to them, how will they adopt it and take the Presbyterian Church (USA) into its next chapter?

While this cycle is proven generationally within society at large, more research from previous iterations of the cycle and careful future data collection is necessary to further prove or disprove this hypothesis ecclesiastically. Even if this hypothesis proves false, there is still empirical evidence concerning broader church reformations that stretch out in a much larger pattern; the crux of which has led ecclesiastical researchers like Dyer, Tickle, and Sweeney<sup>72</sup> to suggest we are currently at a major crossroads of faith.<sup>73</sup>

Briefly, summarized by the late Phyllis Tickle on the changing characteristics of Christian faith itself and shortly before her death in 2015, she made an observation of the past two decades of her work:

From the Great Transformation to the Great Emergence, every five-hundred-year pivot in Latinized history has been marked by (or perhaps one should say haunted

---

<sup>72</sup> Richard Rohr, “Rummage Sales,” Center for Action and Contemplation, October 27, 2019, <https://cac.org/rummage-sales-2019-10-27/>.

<sup>73</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 29–30.

by) one overarching question, and that is the question of, “Where, now is our authority?” Or, put another way, as often happens, “How now shall we live?”<sup>74</sup>

What Dyer, Tickle, and others have identified is one ecclesiastical characteristic of generation theory’s cyclical pattern of “Turnings” based on the four-quarter *seculae*, roughly 100 years, of western humanity’s march through history.<sup>75</sup> However, all of Christendom, as well as Jewish and Muslim spiritual paths, are being affected at the 500-year conflux being experienced today.<sup>76</sup>

Directly affecting mainline faith transference by contributing to the rise in Millennial tolerance, interest, and acceptance of interfaith relationships and dialog, this cross-roads has provided a much broader field *a la carte* for spiritual formation as a whole. The effect of this juncture on the post-Millennial generation is even more evident.

The Barna Group reports that Generation Z—the iGen—has the largest atheist demographic in religious adherence to date:

More than any other generation before them, Gen Z does not assert a religious identity. They might be drawn to things spiritual, but with a vastly different starting point from previous generations, many of whom received a basic education on the Bible and Christianity. And it shows: The percentage of Gen Z that identifies as atheist is *double* that of the U.S. adult population.<sup>77</sup>

With regards to contemporary Christian spiritual formation, the most recent “Awakening” exemplified by the Idealist Baby Boom generation’s embarking on the search for meaning during their rising adulthood, is now ending as they retire into Elderhood. This leaves Gen X, Millennial, and iGens scrambling to match meaning with

---

<sup>74</sup> Phyllis Tickle and Jon M. Sweeney, *The Age of the Spirit: How the Ghost of an Ancient Controversy is Shaping the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 12.

<sup>75</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Tickle, 30.

<sup>77</sup> Barna Group, “Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z,” *Barna Group*, January 24, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>.

answers to the conglomerate of global ills identified by the Millennial movement as fall-out from the most recent “Unraveling” during the Idealist’s midlife/leadership years.<sup>78</sup>

### **Conclusion**

To heal the breach experienced in the church context, contemporary pedagogical research is striving to identify and impact models of faith transference between multiple generations. Renewing models of education that enable and equip diverse generations to communicate well is key. Incorporating these models into leadership of Christian education and faith formation practices is the focus of this ongoing research, culminating in proposed formational experiences practiced intergenerationally.

Return for a moment to the small rural mountain community church described above. While it can be argued that smaller family-sized churches are predisposed to intergenerationality, there is still some need for carry over from observations of theory to realized practice. How a church context and its leadership addresses faith formation is of critical value. Chapter 3 engages in a closer look at educational and leadership theories impacting the church, and what this means for intergenerational formation.

---

<sup>78</sup> Hugh Evans, *What Does It Mean to Be a Citizen of the World?*, TED Conference, Mountain View, CA, 2016, video of presentation, [https://www.ted.com/talks/hugh\\_evans\\_what\\_does\\_it\\_mean\\_to\\_be\\_a\\_citizen\\_of\\_the\\_world](https://www.ted.com/talks/hugh_evans_what_does_it_mean_to_be_a_citizen_of_the_world).

### CHAPTER 3: LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP THEORIES IN THE CHURCH

On Sunday morning, the pastor of the church identified in chapter 1 gets up early enough to watch the sunrise most days of the year as it slowly illuminates the sky. Packing his bag and pouring his fresh made mocha into a travel mug, he gets into the car and begins the ninety-mile drive east into the sunrise. Driving through contemplative scenes of natural beauty, he arrives an hour and a half after leaving the city behind, just in time for the gathering of the local lay leaders and assigned worship assistants for the day as preparation for worship begins.

The congregation and lay leaders are extremely proud of their little church, excited and pleased to have a well-educated clergy person from so far away, coming to preach the word and offer pastoral visitation on Sundays and some Monday mornings. Congregants take care of day-to-day and week-to-week concerns themselves, true to the spirit of the valley's pioneering roots. Throughout the year, the church holds several Session meetings on Sunday afternoons where vision, future, maintenance, and budget concerns are discussed among the leadership, moderated by the part-time supply pastor. Most weeks, he leaves Monday morning to arrive back home in time to pick up his children from school. Every six weeks or so, members are especially excited to see the pastor's children come with him to church—at home they attend church most weeks with their mother. On those weeks, the pastor and children stay for lunch and play for a while before turning around to head home Sunday afternoon and be ready for the following school day.

Probably kept in the front of their minds by the off-and-on attendance of the pastor's children, one of the topics of concern raised by the volunteer lay leadership is the lack of young people in worship. Despite the fact that this church has historically been a family-sized church where multiple generations have come and worshiped together, the church stopped offering regular Sunday School some years ago, long before the current pastor arrived, as time and energy slowly ebbed away from previously dedicated volunteers as they aged. Children have grown up and moved, or chosen alternate paths.

With the new pastor's arrival, a few adult-centered learning opportunities, prompted by the pastor, have been facilitated by a gifted lay volunteer during special liturgical seasons of the church such as Advent and Lent. However, Sunday School for children has not materialized; the closest alternative is an activity table in the back for whenever younger families with children, or a grandchild or two, visit. Volunteer leaders ask, "How do we get our young people and visitors to stay in church?" Perhaps a deeper question is: why have young people stopped coming to church in the first place?

In the previous chapter, it was identified that one particular generation type in the four-type pattern has had a difficult time with relationship between generations above and below it, contributing to cross-generational communication challenges. This has affected faith transference from one generation to another. Identified as an Idealist type, the current occupants of this type are the Baby Boomers, with the next Idealist generation type born about 2012 and later just now beginning to arrive.

This dissertation does not place blame squarely in the laps of Boomers, however. Additional variables in church and culture are also just as impactful. In generalized Christian education contexts, however, the relationship challenges experienced by older

and younger generations in relating to the Baby Boomer generation has especially impacted faith formation on generations following them. This issue then becomes one of what faith leaders of any generation today can do to focus on healing, reaching out, and affecting positive engagement with younger missing generations, fostering their interest and involvement in the church.

To answer the question above put forth by the Elders on Session,<sup>1</sup> one way forward is for leadership to embrace, engage, and support ongoing cross-generational relationship building and healing. Realized in actual practices, this creates a way forward for intentional intergenerational formation. This chapter seeks to address basic age-specific educational theories, how social science insights inform spiritual formation leadership as a whole, and provide a brief summary of how these relate to the current “Fourth Turning” in generation theory.

### **An Evolution of Christian Education**

Christian Education, which has taken many forms, is usually how Christianity has been learned and passed on through the ages. It is part of spiritual formation, but not all of it (discussion of spiritual formation to follow in chapter 4). To understand the long-term effect of past generations’ educational practices on current generations missing in the church, underlying theories of education need to be examined. Contemporary spiritual formation of both young people and elders moving into the mid parts of this century

---

<sup>1</sup> “Elders” in this sense mean volunteer lay leaders that have been ordained to the office of Elder and serve three-year leadership terms on the governing board of the local church, called a “Session.”



relies on it. Modern, and some Post-modern, models of education have supported an institutionalized age-segregated education, but the rate of attrition for younger generations in the church has still increased as of 2015.<sup>2</sup>

Historically, the progression of spiritual and formational enculturation can be traced orally and through the scriptures in this way: whole-family storytelling began as an oral tradition, which became supported by letters hand delivered back and forth for literate peoples, with all generations present, literate or not, to hear them read.<sup>3</sup> As time moved further from the first generation of “Followers of the Way,” second-generation believers began to collect sayings and teachings, weaving them together with narrative, which became the Gospels. Even though more formal creeds developed later, early confessions of faith were learned by heart. Especially for the illiterate, storytelling and oral tradition led to rote memorization of the traditions, and applied faith-life manifestations through simple role modeling of parents and/or apprenticeships among generations in what was usually multi-generational—at least three-generation—households.<sup>4</sup>

In the Middle Ages, architecture, including cathedrals and stained glass windows, also became a medium to impress generational transference of the faith, especially for illiterate peoples. An important shift for Western Civilization was the genesis and development of monastic communities, which became a focused attempt to integrate faith

---

<sup>2</sup> “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center’s Religion and Public Life Project, May 12, 2015, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

<sup>3</sup> Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 83.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 82–83.

and daily living in a time of scarcity. With later development and the rise of literacy as a whole—perpetuated and developed first by those same monastic communities then later by secular individuals and organizations—classical theology and the Reformation resulted in the crafting and adaptation of many formal doctrinal creeds. For the past five hundred years, these have been collected by current denominations as written historical repositories reflecting the church’s beliefs at given points in its history.<sup>5</sup>

Moving to more recent efforts to educate constituents in the faith triggered the rise of various Sabbath or Sunday School models. These formational expressions combined storytelling, scriptures, catechesis, and similarly-aged communal worship and learning experiences eventually culminating some rite of passage in the church such as a Roman Catholic’s First Communion, or in protestant denominations, Confirmation and official membership on the rolls of a local church. In the last century, the rise of camp and conference ministry and service-learning mission trips has also contributed to formation. These short-term camps or trips include experimental living in intentional spiritual community, a reflection of earlier monastic communities, through experiential creative dislocation; in other words, impactful spiritual learning environments set outside one’s normal routine and location in life.

Incidentally, parallel rites of passage in the other two Abrahamic faiths include *Bar/Bat Mitzvahs* in the Jewish tradition, and circumcision and marriage in Islam. Each also has its own models of religious education and formation for faith transference between generations. Examining recent models of Christian religious education from

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, the Book of Confessions of the PC (USA) includes documents as early as the oral tradition Apostles’ Creed (180 C.E.) the Nicene Creed (380 C.E.), the Scots Confession (1560 C.E.) on down to the most recent adoptions of the Brief Statement of Faith (1987 C.E.) and the Belhar Confession (2016 C.E.)

modern and post-modern contexts in light of generation theory reveals some trends. The Adaptive Silent generation modified earlier catechesis and came up with Bible study curriculum such as *Kerygma*,<sup>6</sup> *Bible Study Fellowship*,<sup>7</sup> *Seasons of the Spirit*,<sup>8</sup> and *David C. Cook studies*,<sup>9</sup> among many others, in their attempt to teach and transmit the Christian faith.

Idealist Baby Boomers developed the inductive Bible Study method for college campus ministries practiced by groups such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. They also developed *Workshop Rotation Model*<sup>10</sup> and *Godly Play*<sup>11</sup> for early childhood religious education, among others, all of which became supported by a plethora of denominational and nondenominational publications and curricula. Enrichments were developed with various kinds of retreat, trip, and travel ministries that utilized creative dislocation to further internal work.

A blooming information age resulted in late Boomers and early Nomad/Reactive Gen Xers experimenting with writing Bible Software. These include a range from

---

<sup>6</sup> “The Kerygma Program Adult Bible Studies,” Kerygma Program, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://kerygma.com/>.

<sup>7</sup> “Comprehensive Bible Studies Around the World,” Bible Study Fellowship, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.bsfinternational.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> “Seasons Online: What is Seasons of the Spirit,” Seasons Online, accessed December 10, 2019, [https://www.seasonsonline.ca/2/what\\_is\\_seasons/](https://www.seasonsonline.ca/2/what_is_seasons/).

<sup>9</sup> “All Curriculum Brands,” David C. Cook, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://shop.davidcook.org/collections/all-david-c-cook-brands>.

<sup>10</sup> “About Rotation.Org,” Rotation, accessed October 23, 2019, <https://www.rotation.org/pages/about-rotation-org>.

<sup>11</sup> “Starting a Godly Play® Program,” Godly Play Foundation, December 12, 2013, <https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/starting-a-godly-play-program/>.

academic scholarship to Bible computer games. Some examples are *Bible Works*,<sup>12</sup> *WordSearch*,<sup>13</sup> *Logos*,<sup>14</sup> *Accordance*,<sup>15</sup> and others, all in an attempt to ride the wave of change and still make Christianity relevant and transferable.

Simultaneous with these experiments in faith formation have been shifts in public education. Both religious and secular expressions have been critiqued as manifestations of a banking education model, or depositing information to be retrieved later without a transformative effect. Religious education theorist Robert Pazmiño, notes,

The exclusive reliance upon schooling models for the passing on of a living Christian faith have been insightfully critiqued after the 1960s by educational theorists and practitioners alike who long for vitality and renewal in the educational ministries of the Christian church.<sup>16</sup>

A more robust personal transformation resulting in authentic spiritual formation is further addressed in chapter 4. First, informed by generation theory, a closer look at how applied learning theories and communication between the generations have recently occurred.

### **Applied Learning Theories by Generation**

Recall Idealists envision alternatives to the status quo in their search for meaning and relevance. Pablo Freire, (1921–1997) observed his students and began to question

---

<sup>12</sup> “Bible Software with Greek, Hebrew, LXX, and More! Software for Bible Study and Exegesis,” Bible Works, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.bibleworks.com/>.

<sup>13</sup> “Bible Software: Bible Study Software: Wordsearch Bible,” Wordsearch Bible, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.wordsearchbible.com/>.

<sup>14</sup> “Logos Bible Software,” Logos, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://www.logos.com>.

<sup>15</sup> “Accordance Bible Software,” Accordance Bible Software, accessed December 10, 2019, <http://www.accordancebible.com/>.

<sup>16</sup> Robert W. Pazmiño, “Christian Education is More Than Formation,” *Christian Education Journal; Glen Ellyn* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 356. ProQuest.

and critique direct instruction as “banking education.”<sup>17</sup> His basic criticism was that in modernist educational models, students would get information deposited in their heads to be withdrawn at some later time. All this proved was that the human being can gather facts and “regurgitate” them. For Freire, the question arose of whether this method is truly transformational, or growth inducing, for the learner from one generation to the next or incomplete. His critique led to a renaissance of Christian Education research and writing during the second half of the last century, and contributed to the rise of Christian Education as a related but separate profession to clergy in mainline churches. Paid professional Christian educator positions in churches have since dwindled as church membership has shrunk in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.<sup>18</sup>

Both GI and Silent mid-20<sup>th</sup> century adaptive leaders discovered that Boomers—“Youth” at the time—were drawn to gatherings of similar aged constituencies and capitalized on such experiences through the original church coffee house movement of the 1960s as well as the beginning and spread of age-specific “Youth Groups.” However, they did not change educational models. In some cases, this worked, resulting in the rise of conversational teaching as a means to Christian transformation and growth.<sup>19</sup> In others, Boomers learned and squirmed under Silent and GI teachers, receiving a healthy dose of

---

<sup>17</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (New York: Continuum, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> This author maintained professional membership in APCE, the Association of Presbyterian Christian Educators for many years, attending continuing education conferences that peaked at over 1,000 professional educators from around the United States. In recent years, the position of paid professional “Director of Christian Education” practitioners has been one of the casualties for many churches experiencing shrinking budgets, causing many smaller churches to revert to all volunteer-led education programs and the challenges this presents in terms of educational offerings due to preparation, time, materials, volunteer coordination and dwindling pastoral support from clergy.

<sup>19</sup> For a complete argument in favor of incorporating conversational teaching as critical for Christian transformation, see Beverly C. Johnson-Miller’s article, “Conversational Teaching and Christian Transformation,” *Christian Education Journal; Glen Ellyn* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 378–91, ProQuest.

banking education. They in turn decided it was not good enough and went in search of new methods of learning. In many cases they still remained dedicated to Christianity, albeit anxious to find alternative expressions.

Passing into their midlife years of leadership, Boomers expanded youth groups and sought to teach differently, incorporating their life discoveries from rising adulthood. One example of that is the rise and subsequent fall of Vacation Bible School experiences incorporating bible study storytelling, arts and crafts, and contemporary style Christian folk music, which also spawned the “worship wars.”<sup>20</sup> Sunday School experiments began to incorporate similar elements to become the *Workshop Rotation Model*,<sup>21</sup> with *Godly Play*<sup>22</sup> being developed for early childhood Christian educational experiences. Youth Groups branched out to go on mission trips. Camping ministries, retreats, and conferences regained popularity, as well as new technologies in digital learning through programs, applications, and the internet.

As the current Idealist generation began to teach and lead in the church, they brought much of these back into adult formational experiences as well. They have utilized videos, active whiteboards, and internet learning platforms to teach about the Christian faith. A faulty tendency among all this progress has occurred however, resulting in teaching about the Christian faith, not necessarily teaching for transformation as followers and faith practitioners. Which brings the focus back around to Freire’s original

---

<sup>20</sup> “Worship wars” is a huge topic and worthy of an in depth study in and of itself. Concisely, as it relates to generation theory, it reveals yet another dimension of an Idealist generation seeking to find meaning alternative to the status quo in worship. It involves choice of musical style within the context of worship and how it interfaces with faith formation. A good resource for further study is C. Randall Bradley, *From Memory to Imagination: Reforming the Church’s Music*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> “About Rotation.Org.”

<sup>22</sup> “Starting a Godly Play® Program.”

critique. Living out the Christian faith is much more than learning about it, as is recognized by the Latin American Liberation praxis approach. Originally posited by Gustavo Gutierrez and further developed over the years since Gutierrez first published *A Theology of Liberation*,<sup>23</sup> the basic movements as understood today are read/hear, reflect/discuss, application for transformation, evaluate, repeat. For a time, this was most heavily practiced in Latin American *comunidades eclesiacas de base*, or base ecclesial communities.<sup>24</sup>

Gen Xers appreciate a praxis, or “incarnational” approach to living out the faith. They are still developing how they want to teach, however, since what they experienced as learners growing up was a wide range of all the previous models of teaching and their various methodologies.<sup>25</sup> During childhood they learned through *Workshop Rotation Model*, perhaps *Godly Play*, Vacation Bible School, and camps and conferences, among others. They were particularly drawn to service-oriented endeavors in young adulthood, a tendency toward realized application of faith that has persisted as they have aged and has also been mirrored by the next generation, the Millennials. Both are still learning, through interactive technologically-driven educational platforms, personal Bible studies, and intentional creative dislocations, such as mission trips with storytelling *in situ* even as

---

<sup>23</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> Marcello de C. Azevedo, “Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Meeting Point of Ecclesiologies.” *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 602.

<sup>25</sup> “Models of Teaching” refers to specific kinds of presentation organization utilized by religious instruction practitioners, while “methodologies” refers to the way each Model is carried out. Some examples of Models of Teaching include Advanced Organizer, Direct Instruction, Encounter Model, Storylinking, and Workshop Rotation.

adults.<sup>26</sup> This is consistent with overarching progression of spiritual engagement through stages of life, and stages of faith.<sup>27</sup> Younger faith practitioners seek ways to be active and see results. More mature faith practitioners seek ways to make meaning, reflect on deeper life issues, and leave a legacy.

Gen Xers, in their current life stage, have begun to teach and have discovered contemporary younger learners have different learning needs and orientations than their own. This is not surprising; Gen Xers moved into midlife, so their faith practices are beginning to shift toward making meaning. Having experienced confirmation classes and youth groups that ranged from social outlets centered—or not—around a brief teaching on Christ, the Church, and Christian Living, Gen Xers are still searching to find appropriate models to teach from for contemporary children and youth while still being formed themselves. They are, as their generation is, “making the best of it” and “surviving.”<sup>28</sup> However, additional tools are needed to meet the learning needs of a different time and clientele.

The current Civic Millennials have also experienced the gamut of educational models and experiments: Godly Play as primary students; Workshop Rotation Model as elementary students; tween, middle, and high school youth group; confirmation classes in some cases; and mission trips and service opportunities through diverse parachurch organizations. All of these were experienced in mostly age-segregated learning

---

<sup>26</sup> One example of this is the Eco Stewards Program, of which this author was a participating founder: <https://ecostewardsprogram.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>27</sup> Related studies from James Fowler’s *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest For Meaning* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1995) reveal tendencies correspond to stages of life, but not always specifically aged.

<sup>28</sup> Carl G. Eeman, *Generations of Faith: A Congregational Atlas* (Bethesda, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).



environments, with only rare exceptions. One deficiency in all of this is the tendency not to interact with or understand generations older than themselves in matters of faith. They have reached rising adulthood where their focus is activity, so their generational tendencies in teaching focus on experiential learning. Ongoing observations and evaluation of Millennial teachers is needed for further development of this train of thought; but still strong in their own preferred learning environment is a praxis approach.

More is known about how Millennials learn at this point than how they teach or will approach teaching faith transference as they mature. Sociologist Christy Price found Millennials learn best through active learning, variety, clear expectations, and a rapport with professors/trainers.<sup>29</sup> She encourages educators/trainers to utilize “Five R’s” to engage Millennials in learning: Research-based, Relevance, Rationale, Relaxed, and Rapport.<sup>30</sup> If, as the pattern has unfolded before them, the Millennial generation teaches “the way they were taught,” then quite a diverse set of methodologies and models will be used. It remains to be seen if their students, the iGen and the Alpha Gen, will learn best in the same ways. Research is only now beginning to assess the youngest generations, so only a few pointers have been identified. Teachers in public schools, however, are still using a thematic approach utilizing learning centers.<sup>31</sup>

The newest Adaptive generation is the iGen, a term coined by generation researcher Jean M. Twenge. They are roughly 18–23 years of age at the leading edge,

---

<sup>29</sup> John Laskaris, “How to Engage Millennials: 5 Teaching Strategies for Millennials That Will Work!,” *EFront* (blog), last modified March 16, 2016, <https://www.efrontlearning.com/blog/2016/03/5-strategies-to-engage-the-millennials.html>.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Outside the scope of this dissertation is further discussion of contemporary education in general. However, it heavily impacts teaching traditional Sunday school in the church since most church educators today at the various levels of age-segregated models are usually volunteer educators from the public sector, not paid church professionals.

and, based on her theory of shrinking generational cohorts, around 5–8 on the younger end. They are in the youth and rising adulthood life stages in generation theory.<sup>32</sup> According to Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace, their best learning environment is active education: they “prefer to engage in hands-on learning opportunities in which they can immediately apply what they learn to real life.”<sup>33</sup> This is also consistent with the life stage focus of dependence moving toward activity for this age. One shift noted by practitioners has been learning groups for this generation work best between six and eight participants, rather than earlier “small group” experiences of the Gen Xers with group sizes between twelve and sixteen. The iGen is currently the one at highest risk of never entering the doors of a church, as research shows sharp decreasing religious affiliation from late Millennials onward.<sup>34, 35</sup>

The youngest generation, the Alpha Gen, is just now starting off with their oldest members entering primary schools across the United States. They are sometimes in church as their parents, Millennials and some Gen Xers, heavily impact their commitment to a local worshipping community, since they are still in their dependent life stage and do what their parents do. What is known about how they learn best and what makes them tick? So far, their teachers, also mostly Gen Xers and Millennials, have continued to teach in child-centered, thematic, and center-inspired small group learning environments.

---

<sup>32</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace, “Generation Z: Educating and Engaging the Next Generation of Students,” *About Campus* 22, no. 3 (July 1, 2017): 22, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/abc.21293>.

<sup>34</sup> “Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of ‘Nones,’” Pew Research Center, accessed October 23, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>.

<sup>35</sup> Barna Group, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018).

Without a longitudinal study available, further discussion is simply speculation. As previously noted, how teachers of these youngest generations learned impacts how they in turn lead and teach the faith to younger generations.

Return for a moment to the little white church in the valley. It has been some time since Sunday school was still held there, the last regular Sunday school teacher they had is now aged 89. Her crop of Sunday school students still sometimes writes and stays in touch with her. In almost every case, they have grown up and left the valley for work elsewhere. Her generation taught the way they learned, through direct instruction, reading of the Bible stories, and memorizing verses on a weekly basis. Some contemporary social issues were addressed and discussed in light of a firmly unquestioning moral backdrop solidly based in an assumed Christendom, reflecting the socio-cultural ethos of late modern United States “Christian-based” culture. Her last students are now older Generation X leaders of a post-Christian and growingly secularized society. Sunday School and teaching today’s adults to become tomorrow’s teachers meet extreme challenges when framed in the older mindset. Reviewing traditional learning theories will shed light on the perceived impasse.

### **A Review of Traditional Learning Theories**

Gen X and Millennials are both in adult stages of development—Midlife and Rising Adult, respectively. A brief overview of Andragogy, the art or science of teaching adults, is helpful here as it informs what kinds of learning theory went into their upbringing in spiritual formation in the church. Andragogy exploded onto the scene in the

1970s and developed through the end of last century. Malcom Knowles<sup>36</sup> developed the term and philosophical undergirding for andragogical practices.<sup>37</sup> Gangel and Swindoll made salient observations concerning adult learning within religious contexts with their writing in the late 1990s.<sup>38</sup> Understanding this helps explain how Sunday School, at least in the little church, disappeared. It also sheds light on larger church educational contexts.

Andragogy was developed to address adults of the Silent generation at the time in their Midlife stage when their primary focus was leadership. Baby Boomers, who at the time were in their Rising Adulthood stage, exhibited different characteristics as they began to enter adulthood, but were taught with the same earlier andragogical models in place. To properly understand how these two generations have affected current pedagogical practices, following a generational chain of teaching/learning practices is illuminating.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner*, 7th ed. (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2012), <http://georgefox.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=680833>.

<sup>37</sup> George Henry, *Malcolm Shepherd Knowles: A History of His Thought*, Education in a competitive and globalizing world series (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Kenn Gangel and Charles R. Swindoll, *Ministering to Today's Adults* (Nashville, TN: Word Publication Group, 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Here and in the rest of this study unless otherwise noted, the terms “andragogy” and “pedagogy” are split by age. “Andragogy” will refer to the teaching of adults. “Pedagogy” will mean teaching children and youth. Traditional understanding of “Pedagogy,” in education refers to the “art, science, or profession of teaching” as defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary in reference to the field of education as a whole. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “Pedagogy,” accessed September 17, 2019, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pedagogy>.

*Andragogy: The Art or Science of Teaching Adults*

Traditional instruction to adults as understood by Silent and Boomer generations meant one teacher, usually a GI or Silent generation teacher, teaching usually lecture-based content to a group of learners in a classic “banking education” model.<sup>40</sup> The Baby Boomers began to reinvent or modify education models to reflect facilitative learning. Contemporary education models have rearranged the flow of facilitative learning and branched out into imaginative learning and conversational teaching. This developed from the observation that “learning takes place best in a cooperative rather than a competitive environment.”<sup>41</sup> This approach reflects a discovery learning model, consisting of the following steps: 1. Asking the right questions; 2. Suggesting available resources for self-directed learning; 3. Using effective tools and teaching how to use them; and 4. Evaluating meaning and application.<sup>42</sup> The end product of this andragogical shift from “instructor” to “facilitator” became a key conceptual change in education. It also echoed down to pedagogy, defined here as the art or science of teaching children, which is addressed below.

Even as early as the 1970s when Knowles was developing his theory, Margaret Mead began to identify a growing generational gap in communication. It is the opinion of this author that this trend has accompanied generation theory’s cyclical patterns, resulting in regular periodic gaps. Although this has not been extensively studied, some salient points will here be discussed. Mead wrote in 1970 that the post WWII conference on

---

<sup>40</sup> Freire, ch. 2.

<sup>41</sup> Gangel and Swindoll, *Ministering to Today’s Adults*, 228.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

children in 1950 was concerned with young people's generational identity—now the elder Baby Boom generation; at that time “youth” were still firmly “children.” She writes following this generation's struggle with commitment in the 1970s, “to what past, present, or future can the idealistic young commit themselves?”<sup>43</sup> Answering this question gave rise to both andragogical and pedagogical practices that have been in place ever since.

Beginning in the 2000s, a new set of adults came into the fore, whose identity has been formed with more fluidity of religious belief than previous generations. How they learn best has also proven different. Their teachers, however, have continued practices geared toward models with which earlier generations were comfortable. Resulting complexities, both successes and failures, attempting to teach younger generations with practices utilized by earlier generations are revealing.

Adults learn differently because their need-orientation is different than other ages, so writes Gangel.<sup>44</sup> Contemporary adults' needs are difficult to navigate. Designing an educational/formation experience for adults historically requires identification of specific steps in a specific order. Gangel's religious education model starts with needs, followed by scripture and theological foundations, then proceeding through “why” questions, objectives and philosophy; “what” questions, organization and curriculum; then on to “how” questions, methods and personnel.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1970), ix.

<sup>44</sup> Gangel and Swindoll, 49–51.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

For adults' needs, Gangel relies on four guidelines for adult learners developed by Malcolm Knowles:

1. Voluntary Involvement: Adults must enter willingly into educational experiences;
2. Developed Experiences: Adults bring a large and varied amount of experience to the learning situation;
3. Reality Relatedness: Adults approach learning with a different kind of readiness than children and youth; and
4. Life Application: Adults enter learning experiences in a problem-centered frame of mind and commonly show a concern for contextual immediacy.<sup>46</sup>

Bottom line, young adults and middle-aged adults are more “present-oriented than any other age-group. The educational implication emphasizes immediate practicality and specific problem-solving in the educational task.”<sup>47</sup> This concurs with generation researchers' observation of younger generations: Gen X, Millennial, and older iGens need to find immediate application of learning material to their contextual real life.<sup>48</sup> The method employed by Gangel in *Ministering to Today's Adults* (1999) is based on a liberation theology praxis,<sup>49</sup> which he calls the learning cycle: approach, explore,

---

<sup>46</sup> Gangel and Swindoll, 7–10.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>48</sup> Laskaris, “How to Engage Millennials.”

<sup>49</sup> Developed by Latin American theologians in the process of attempting to bridge the gap between wealthy Roman Catholic colonialism to the lives of the common people beginning in the 1950s and 60s. Developed and articulated by Gustavo Gutierrez, considered the father of liberation theology. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988).

discover, appropriate, assume responsibility, repeat.<sup>50</sup> While this is helpful for contemporary adult ministries, there are some questions about application for youth and children that bear illuminating.

### *A Critique*

In the past, traditional pedagogy, the art or science of teaching in general, has encouraged passivity. However, a “spectator” approach can never compete with smartphones and other digital enculturation as the digital age has changed how young and adapting older generations think, process, and interact. This is especially true for the iGen, whose brain functions have actually been affected and changed as a result.<sup>51, 52, 53</sup>

Traditional pedagogy applied to teaching adults also fails to use the collective experience of adult learners as the class comes to listen to one person talk, yet the rest of the class has material from life to offer the community of learners. Contemporary learners are much more collectivist. Put another way, traditional pedagogy places the responsibility of learning on the teacher, though both expert knowledge and the community’s collective wisdom are important. Faith transference from one generation to the next needs both.

---

<sup>50</sup> Gangel and Swindoll, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Twenge, *iGen*, 98.

<sup>52</sup> “5 Ways Social Media Is Changing Your Brain,” *TED-Ed*, accessed April 23, 2019, <https://ed.ted.com/featured/qQzsdX2Y>.

<sup>53</sup> “How to Speak Gen Z,” Sunday Cool Tees, YouTube video, March 6, 2019, 2:27, <https://youtu.be/YtrxVWf91Jo>.



In addition to understanding how adults learn and try to teach based on what made them comfortable in the past, contemporary adult learning has to take into account the pedagogical models utilized upon Gen Xers and the Millennials when they were still children and youth. An interesting discovery as contemporary adults have begun teaching is that younger generations do not fit older models of adult learning. This has led to modification of educational approaches. Projecting into the future, even more modifications will need to be made when teaching iGen and Alpha generation members as they grow through adolescence and come into adulthood because the younger years through age 13 are the most impressionable points in one's life journey for teaching and appropriating the Christian faith.<sup>54</sup>

In Christian faith-based communities, re-evaluating teaching and learning is even more imperative for the very reason of passing on faith, the life that leads to life everlasting, the Way of Jesus and of Harmony and of Shalom.<sup>55</sup> For religious education, the past fifty or more years have been orchestrated around age-segregated models of faith formation, following pedagogical practices developed for two generations that have long passed their youth and childhood. To begin to address this in religious settings, a synthesis of what has been gleaned from andragogy, youth ministry, and pedagogy is required to move forward. At the same time, it is imperative to understand why changes may have substantial push backs such as “Doing things the way we always have has always worked” and “Don't change a thing about traditional [age-segregated] Sunday

---

<sup>54</sup> Jim Newby, “The Promise and Purpose of Love and Belonging in Shaping the Spiritual Destiny of Sixth Graders,” (Dmin diss., Portland Seminary, 2009), 21, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/308>.

<sup>55</sup> Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012).

School.” Change is always hard, and ideally includes considerations to take in terms of a pastoral presence supporting both old and new methodologies.

In the final analysis, Christian education, as part of overall spiritual formation, has to be relevant to the contextual real lives of younger people, while still honoring elders and their spiritual journey in life. To do this, as Mead suggested almost fifty years ago, older generations will need to have access to the younger generations’ experiential knowledge, allowing the young to “lead their elders in the direction of the unknown.”<sup>56</sup> Current research suggests that engaging in critical intergenerational formational experiences involves true mutuality, accommodation, reciprocity, inclusivity, and equity among generations.<sup>57</sup> This will be examined in greater depth in chapter 5. Beyond what has been learned from andragogy, however, there is still what can be gleaned from additional recent approaches to teaching younger generations. This has immediate bearing on the rise of intergenerational Christian formation.

Return to the little church by the mountain. One Sunday, a new young family came in: “We’ve heard good things about you and the church so we thought we’d come and check you out.” Over the next season, this family brought six children to church ranging in age from college to kindergarten, though only the youngest four regularly attended with their parents. Worship has been designed and orchestrated with the majority congregational demographics in mind for months, with only occasional changes reflecting age-diversifying gestures for when the pastor’s children or the infrequent grandchild or youth attends. The pastor realized that for those who have not been raised

---

<sup>56</sup> Mead, 94.

<sup>57</sup> From author’s notes participating in local presbytery intergenerational formation learning cohort and an upcoming chapter by Jason Brian Santos, “Intergenerational Sabbath Communities: A Path Toward a New Ecclesiology,” unpublished. Accessed from Santos in a closed group, September 26, 2019.

going to a traditional mainline Protestant church, there are many parts that may be confusing to newcomers.

For the small church and its pastor, an entire new challenge to reality just opened up. The whole family is in the sanctuary as there is no separate “children’s church” or “Sunday School” available for any age. Everything—any chance for learning, building relationships, passing on the faith, affecting lives, or developing relationship with God—has to occur in the context of worship during the hour-and-fifteen-minute service. The following two sections briefly examine issues germane to pedagogy commonly utilized for the past half century and now in need of modification; especially for the context described above.

### *Pedagogy: The Art of Teaching Children and Youth*

There was a time when the little Sunday School room at the church (in a separate building, the Fellowship hall) described above held a mixed-aged class of children learning Bible stories and having the faith handed down to them by another caring adult other than their parent(s). No longer. First, there have not been any children in the church for about fifteen to twenty years. Second, safety regulations require two adults at all times when accompanying minors away from their parents. Sunday School endeavors drifted to adult-centric topics presented once a month on a midweek evening. When children began to show up again, a retired teacher attempted to instigate Sunday School as she had always known it, albeit in the back of the sanctuary for safety reasons. It became apparent

that the older, familiar style of religious instruction was not working. Recent literature supports this: Ivy Beckwith, in *Postmodern Children's Ministry* observes,

The church's ministry to children is broken. A cursory look doesn't reveal its brokenness. From the outside children's ministry looks healthier than ever. But it is broken. It's broken when church leaders and senior pastors see children's ministry primarily as a marketing tool. The church with the most outwardly attractive program wins the children and then the parents. It's broken when we teach children the Bible as if it were just another book of moral fables or stories of great heroes. Something's broken when we trivialize God to our children. It's broken when we exclude children from perhaps the most important of community activities: worship. It's broken because we've become dependent on an 18<sup>th</sup>-century schooling model, forgetting that much of a child's spiritual formation is affective, active, and intuitive. It's broken when we depend on our programs and our curriculum to introduce our children to God—not our families and communities. It's broken when we've come to believe that church has to be something other than church to be attractive to children. And perhaps most importantly, it's broken when the church tells parents that its programs can spiritually nurture their children better than they can. By doing this, we've lied to parents and allowed them to abdicate their responsibility to spiritually form their children. A church program can't spiritually form a child, but a family living in an intergenerational community of faith can. Our care for our children is broken and badly in need of repair.<sup>58</sup>

Beckwith has touched on a part of the problem; but she leaves out an important reality. In many cases, contemporary Gen X and Millennial parents might rather leave their children in “expert” care in age-segregated learning environments. Gen X parents were brought up with no real firm foundational understanding of the faith of their somewhat religiously private Silent parents; much less their even more quiet, dutiful, and private GI grandparents. Boomer parents who rejected their late GI parents' unquestioning lifestyle in the faith were mostly absent from committed single church attendance, causing their Millennial children to also be brought up rootless in any single denominational tradition. This, among other factors, has contributed to the growing

---

<sup>58</sup> Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2004), 13–14.

prevailing culture of "spiritual but not religious" rising adults with a patchwork of religious traditions and beliefs. Thus, ultimately, both Gen X and Millennial parents do not really know how to form their children in the faith, because they are still finding out what they believe themselves!

The reality of an instable and/or unsure mature faith in parents, among other reasons, provides difficult layered challenges for faith transmission through generations using traditional models such as age-segregated Christian Education as well as historical parental involvement in passing on the faith. Recent application of research has begun to identify and experiment with formation using alternative methods of teaching and learning to address this gap. Despite some attempts, such as the "Faith 5" program by Faith Inkubators,<sup>59</sup> it does not adequately address spiritual formation within the whole family, both for true intergenerational formation reasons listed above and for, in some cases, a perceived lack of theological depth. "At our core, we human beings are our relationships ... There is something about the human spirit that yearns for others to share in our lives," writes Andrew Root in *The Relational Pastor*.<sup>60</sup> This can be especially true in the area of youth ministry, which has received significant, albeit somewhat flawed, focus over the past three generations. A review of the field of youth ministry as separate from pedagogy will be helpful in light of why traditional religious education and formational practices of the church in age-segregated situations has led to the need for intergenerational renewal.

---

<sup>59</sup> Faith Inkubators, "FAITH5," FAITH5, accessed April 29, 2019, <http://www.faith5.org/>.

<sup>60</sup> Andrew Root, *The Relational Pastor: Sharing in Christ by Sharing Ourselves* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013), 9.

*Youth Ministry: A Failed Experiment*

In 1994, Mark DeVries came out with his evocative text *Family Based Youth Ministry*,<sup>61</sup> since updated with a 10-year anniversary second edition in 2004 and an eBook in 2015. His critique was revolutionary in youth ministry circles. From his perspective, he identified a system that de-integrated youth from the whole church—as in, whole family/body of Christ—and systematized a separate curriculum, separate “youth group” space, and gave rise to a separate body of specialized ministry practitioners. It siphoned off younger members of the church to essentially exist in self-perpetuating silos. Concerning the big questions of faith and life, there was no chance to learn from their elders with more mature and growing faith journeys.

In an attempt to reach youth in the church, curriculum after curriculum came out for Christian educators, teachers, youth workers, and the occasional ordained “minister for youth” to follow and attempt to celebrate the few years of adolescence from around six or seventh grade through high school. As it turns out, sixth grade is the tipping point year, according to research summarized by Jim Newby.<sup>62</sup> What a young person believes and how much it “sticks” occurs through the first twelve years of religious formation.<sup>63</sup> This is not news to our Jewish brothers and sisters, who have practiced religious education and enculturation culminating in *Bat* and *Bar Mitzvah* rites of passage at thirteen years of age for centuries. It does illustrate a major hole in Christian faith

---

<sup>61</sup> Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

<sup>62</sup> Newby, “Promise and Purpose.”

<sup>63</sup> “SF: What Is Sticky Faith?” *Fuller Youth Institute*, accessed October 18, 2019, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/stickyfaith>.

formation, however. One attempt to redress this is the curriculum called Journey to Adulthood, which breaks youth group aged Sunday School into three chunks, separated roughly in two year intervals, 7-8<sup>th</sup> grade, 9-10<sup>th</sup> grade, and 11-12<sup>th</sup> grade. The first section culminates with a “Rite-13” celebration for the whole church community.

However, despite some attempts to track and follow young graduates as they moved into the “mosaic” of college existence “away from” the influence of parental, youth group, and congregational upbringing and formation, youth workers who have continued to try to sustain a niche in meeting the needs of adolescence and young adults have not met with much success. For several decades now the steady stream of youth in high school and college years leaving church has become a torrent and then a flood, resulting in the deficit now found across the Pacific Northwest in mainline protestant churches. Dean and Foster noted in 1998, when Gen X was going through adolescence,

By now the exodus of adolescents from mainline churches is both legendary and sobering. About half of Christian youth workers report having ‘some trouble’ keeping ten and eleven-year-olds involved in church; 70 percent report having ‘a great deal of trouble’ retaining seventh through ninth graders. Nearly all of youth workers report a great deal of trouble involving tenth through twelfth graders. Most of these youths do not drop out to attend other churches; the majority of these youth attend no church at all. Eighty percent of American adult’s report having dropped out of church (60 percent) or diminished their participation (20 percent) for two or more years during their own adolescence, a pattern visited doubly upon their sons and daughters. Today more than half of the youth who attend church as children have disappeared from church involvement by the time they are seventeen. Even youth who go through confirmation tend to view the ceremony not as a rite of passage into the life of the church but as graduation out of it.<sup>64</sup>

This is particularly distressing when paired with the denominational data indicating the sharp decline of membership in the Presbyterian Church (USA) for the past fifty years.

---

<sup>64</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Upper Rooms Books, 1998), 32–33.

Despite Christian Smith, Robert Faris, and Melinda Lundquist Denton’s findings regarding rising young adult formational trends in 2004,<sup>65</sup> the reality is, regardless of whether or not young people are engaged in theological thinking or “belief in God,” their membership in church has still dropped, at least for the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest.<sup>66</sup> The following tables show membership trends in the Presbytery of the Cascades. Data does not align exactly with generation theory age cut-offs or life stage, particularly the younger two generations, so some inferences have to be drawn. Due to reporting age brackets not matching accepted generational theory dates of birth or simply because they are not known exactly and reporting agents guessed, the data is imprecise but as close as the Office of the Presbytery of the Cascades was able to provide for this dissertation.

**Table 4: Membership Trends 2008–2017, Presbytery of the Cascades**

| Year    | 2008  | 2009  | 2010  | 2011  | 2012  | 2013  | 2014  | 2015  | 2016  | 2017  |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Pv. Yr. | 25112 | 24683 | 21641 | 20934 | 20369 | 19334 | 17306 | 16863 | 15937 | 14963 |
| Gains   | 1217  | 994   | 979   | 891   | 740   | 649   | 534   | 545   | 541   | 404   |
| Losses  | 1646  | 4036  | 1686  | 1456  | 1775  | 2677  | 977   | 1471  | 1515  | 1030  |
| Current | 24683 | 21641 | 20934 | 20369 | 19334 | 17306 | 16863 | 15937 | 14963 | 14337 |
| Trend   | -429  | -3042 | -707  | -565  | -1035 | -2008 | -443  | -926  | -974  | -626  |

**Table 5: Age as of Report of Official Membership to Presbytery**

| Year  | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 65 +  | 8671 | 8214 | 8032 | 7836 | 7182 | 6748 | 5504 | 5360 | 5349 | 5049 |
| 56–65 | 3951 | 3584 | 3546 | 3464 | 3106 | 2509 | 2083 | 2216 | 1705 | 1593 |
| 46–55 | 3621 | 3062 | 3022 | 2923 | 2297 | 1970 | 1463 | 1288 | 1182 | 980  |
| 26–45 | 3300 | 2773 | 2737 | 2633 | 2028 | 1735 | 1341 | 1234 | 1135 | 1012 |
| 0–25  | 1739 | 1428 | 1469 | 1306 | 1046 | 827  | 626  | 580  | 469  | 452  |

---

<sup>65</sup> Christian Smith, Robert Faris, and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Are American Youth Alienated from Religion?*, A report of the National Study of Youth and Religion (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2004), <https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/research-findings/reports/>.

<sup>66</sup> Information provided by statistical report of the Office of the Clerk of the Presbytery of the Cascades, accessed April 2019.



**Table 6: Age as of Report of Sunday School Attendance\***

| Year  | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 0–18  | 4991 | 4722 | 4521 | 4283 | 3549 | 3006 | 2379 | 4793 | 3148 | 1503 |
| 19–25 | 526  | 541  | 446  | 385  | 370  | 305  | 314  | 164  | 206  | 191  |

\*Generation theory: “Youth.” These represent both members and non-members.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine whether the trend identified above for younger generation attrition from church proves true across the United States or even all of western civilization. It is the suspicion of the author that, at least for the United States, this is the case. Reflecting on Generation X coming of age in the church and the Millennials’ experience of youth group, Kenda Creasy Dean wrote,

Many young people simply have not experienced enough fidelity on their behalf to acquire it for themselves. Consequently, postmodern adolescents are preoccupied with fidelity: ‘Will you be there for me?’ Before adolescents can take seriously the gospel’s claim that Jesus will ‘be there’ always, a community of affirming others must ‘be there’ for them, demonstrating steadfast love on their behalf. ‘Will you be there for me?’ is the cry of an era, not just of a generation.<sup>67</sup>

A basis in relationship is foundational to any effective ministry to children and youth, and even adults new or newly returned to the church, which is the focus of the next section.

### **Religious Socialization Through Relationship**

Return a moment to the question posed by the Session Elders above, “How do we get our young people and visitors to stay in church?” Next generation church researchers McIntosh, Smothers, and Smothers, write, “This is an exciting question,” because,

---

<sup>67</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 77

Pastors and church leaders are realizing that it takes more than weekend worship experiences to transform individual lives and the world. We are acknowledging that *engagement through relationship is the real work of discipleship*. Building relationship requires gathering, listening, building trust, and sharing stories. And it requires struggling with issues of faith, family, and fears. When this happens in the context of a congregation, authentic faith communities can form<sup>68</sup> (Emphasis added).

It is the opinion of this author that an authentic faith community means faith is alive, being practiced, and being passed on to younger generations from older ones. It therefore has to include multiple generations interacting together, being impacted and formed by one another. This occurs in relationship among all ages present in the faith community, but unfortunately it has the potential to be stifled long-term when practiced in age-segregated silos. It is vital that those growing in their faith observe others beyond them also growing in their faith.

DeVries' summary critique of age-segregated youth ministry points to this effect:

One of my working assumptions is that the contemporary crisis in youth ministry has little to do with programming and everything to do with families. Our culture has put an incredible emotional weight on the shoulders of the nuclear family, a weight that I believe God never intended for families to bear alone. One of the secrets you will learn about in these pages is the strategic priority of undergirding nuclear families with the rich support of the extended Christian family of the church. When these two formative families work in concert, we are most likely to see youth growing into a faith that lasts for the long haul.<sup>69</sup>

Faith in the “long haul” is the single most important effect religious education and spiritual formation practices can pass on. Since DeVries' writing, the Fuller Youth Institute has undertaken longitudinal studies on youth ministry practices and intergenerationality, culminating in helpful data for all ministry practitioners: “Despite

---

<sup>68</sup> Lia McIntosh, Jasmine Smothers, and Rodney Thomas Smothers, *Blank Slate: Write Your Own Rules for a Twenty-Second Century Church Movement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), xv.

<sup>69</sup> Mark DeVries and Earl F Palmer, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17, ProQuest.

the age segregation that exists in our churches and broader culture, each young person is greatly benefited when surrounded by a team of five adults. We call this the new 5:1 ratio.”<sup>70</sup> Jim Newby, writing in 2018, agrees:

For those who are serious about faith and the promise that it holds, the priority of intergenerational relationships can no longer be held at arm’s length by the faith community, and more pointedly, by ministries devoted to the faith formation and well-being of adolescents.<sup>71</sup>

Additional insights regarding the importance and role of relationship can be found when considering the *imago dei* of people of all ages. Both Richard Rohr and the late Eugene Peterson refer to the relational nature of humanity as a reflection of being made in the image of God. As a reflection of the importance of relationships among one another and the community of Creation, this echoes reflections from the Celtic spiritual tradition, which at some major points diverges from classical Roman Catholic Christianity.<sup>72</sup> Trinity and the interrelationship of Three-in-One are at the heart of it. Peterson writes of the *perichoresis*, or “circle dance,” this way: “God is only and exclusively God in *relationship*” (*italics original in text*). This indicates that our Oneness and God’s Oneness are related.<sup>73</sup> Viewed by Rohr as a three-way mutually self-emptying ethic of love, it is characterized as always having inward and outward flow, one into the

---

<sup>70</sup> “SF: What Is Sticky Faith?”

<sup>71</sup> Newby, “Promise and Purpose,” 13.

<sup>72</sup> Briefly, Pelagius saw Creation’s original goodness in creation and every newborn child, and emphasized this as primary, whereas Augustine saw humanity’s basic fallenness, emphasizing infants were born sinful. At the parting of the ways of these two perspectives in A.D. 663-664 at the Synod of Whitby, Roman Christianity (rep. by Bishop Wilfrid, and Queen Eanfled) won and Celtic Christianity (rep. by Bishops Colman, Cedd, and Abbess Hilda) began to fade; or at least got pushed to the margins of Western Civilization at the time. See J. Philip Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997) for additional historic material on Celtic Spirituality.

<sup>73</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 7.

other—and, it could be added, into the community of Creation.<sup>74</sup> Peterson continues: “Each member moves with and around the others in a joyful dance.”<sup>75</sup> For contemporary practitioners, “The Christian life allows for no mere spectators to this life of God but pulls us in as participants in the dance.”<sup>76</sup> In this, one can identify a deeply theological foundation for intergenerational formation.<sup>77</sup> Because so much of formation rests on relationship, adoption as an integral part of a worshiping community’s practices is similarly vital. Church leadership has to be completely on board with intergenerational approaches for it to take effect and be embraced by the entire faith community. The following section will examine leadership theory in a congregational context with the generation theory lens in place. More detail on the application of leadership theory, personal and congregational transformation is addressed in chapter 5.

### **Generational Leadership Characteristics and the Relational-Spiritual Context**

To review, focusing specifically on leadership characteristics exemplified by the two youngest “majority” generations in the current four-cycle pattern reveals the challenges and the opportunities ahead for older Silent and Boomer church leadership. The younger end of the two generations currently 22 to 54 years old are still developing their leadership style. These two youngest generations of leaders are “Gen Xers”—the

---

<sup>74</sup> Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 90.

<sup>75</sup> Eugene Peterson and Peter Santucci, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places A Study Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 7.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> See chapter 4.

current Nomad generation type now in Midlife—and “Millennials”—the current Civic generation type in Rising Adulthood.<sup>78</sup>

### *Leadership for the Church in the Fourth Turning*

On the wide spectrum of ages of people living today, each generational demographic seems to be drawn to or repelled by specific aspects of what church looks and acts like when engaging the world. In addition to differing worldviews about the church’s place in society and personal life, there comes an embedded difficulty in understanding, communicating, and passing on one’s values about church and church involvement. That difficulty is being played out in the current shift between Boomer and Silent generations, as well as the Boomers and the following two generations, the X’ers and Millennials. The result is a lack of Generation X and Millennial adherents and a growing vacuum of younger leadership in mainline protestant denominations. The resulting quandary of an aging leadership demographic, with nobody to pass the baton of leadership on to, was illuminated by a recent regional gathering.

### **The Little White Church’s Family**

At a recent Pacific Northwest regional gathering<sup>79</sup> of Presbyterian Church (USA) congregations, a breakout session on membership trends and demographics for the

---

<sup>78</sup> Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, 3rd ed. (New York: Vintage, 2000), 11.

region's churches was facilitated. The goal was to learn what outreach was happening for the target audience of Generations X and the Millennials, and to a lesser extent, the older edge of the iGen, or "Generation Z,"<sup>80</sup> the next Adaptive generation. Representatives from the Session of the little mountain community church attended.

Out of ninety-six churches in the local presbytery, about thirty to forty other attendees from across the state attended the session, representing about twenty to thirty churches of all sizes. Only a handful of leaders present at the session included Generation X or younger. Two out of the twenty-some churches admitted to regular offerings for children or youth. One church confessed their "young adults group" was perhaps 50–60 years of age. Such observations became the foundation for the question of what to do about this state of affairs and how might younger generations become engaged with the Presbyterian Church (USA). Representatives of the little white church in the mountains were keenly interested to learn about characteristics of the missing generations in their church.

### **Generational Characteristics for Current Midlife Leaders and Rising Leaders**

A closer look at Generation X and Millennial characteristics will assist with recognizing and understanding what makes these populations tick. This will also reveal why they are not found often in traditional church expressions. With the ultimate aim of

---

<sup>79</sup> Stated Meeting of the Presbytery of the Cascades, First Presbyterian Church, Portland, Oregon, March 9–10, 2018.

<sup>80</sup> "Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z," Barna Group, January 24, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>.

future leadership development, and thus potential for passing on the faith, knowing their characteristics will also identify an ecclesiastical ethos they would be drawn to, imperative for survival in the next chapter of Protestant Christianity.

*Generation X, Born 1961–1981*

Generation X, of the “Reactive,” or Nomad type identified by Strauss and Howe,<sup>81</sup> are currently entering into their midlife years: 42–65.<sup>82</sup> This is significant because historically in other iterations of the cycle, once a Nomad generation adopts a faith perspective, they do finally embrace it whole-heartedly during Midlife as society disintegrates around them in the Fourth Turning.<sup>83</sup> For the purposes of religious settings, current Nomads, or Gen Xers, are, as described by Carl G. Eeman, visually-oriented, so movement and colors in worship are appealing. Similarly, they prefer to be interactive with freer worship styles since rote liturgies older generations know by heart might not be familiar. Involving other senses are also appreciated, for example, candle light services with real scented candles. Some additional considerations for worship format include providing sermons and “children’s moments” that are interactive and for everyone. For example, Gen Xers will enjoy turning to their neighbor and talking about a point mid-sermon. If the preacher invites feedback a few minutes later and incorporates their observations into the rest of the sermon, it can be particularly effective. To assist Gen

---

<sup>81</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America’s Future, 1584 to 2069* (1991; repr., New York: Quill, 1992), 387.

<sup>82</sup> Eeman, 151.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

X'ers to become familiar with traditional worship styles, consider a few times a year offering running commentary on the parts of worship.

One particular challenge for Gen X'ers and Millennials both: silence is suspect. To employ moments of silence in the service, there would have to be intentional education about kinds and modes of prayer conducive to it before a Gen Xer will settle in for the experience willingly. Millennials are more tolerant of experiments. Avoid religious language and alphabet soup, Gen Xers won't understand it and "check out." Recall they are skeptical of organized religion since there was little to no home church commitment during upbringing to begin with. However, converts will embrace it with zeal if they embrace it.

In the area of educational and formational enrichment, classes about the faith community's core beliefs would be very helpful as long as it's interactive! Other "real life" classes would have even more draw; classes that inform "non-church life," connecting the two in real ways. Some examples would be premarital classes with input from married Gen Xer couples, marriage enrichment classes for relationship building since many saw their own parents unhappy and divorced and parenting classes. Gen Xers will even make common cause with Boomers for the sake of their children, Nomads in general don't want their children to go through what they went through. They will know what not to do...but will appreciate learning what *to do* instead.

Additional ideas: financial organization, recalling self-preservation is important, home repair and maintenance, Mom's/Dad's Day Out since working and saving hard, both parents got ready for their first home and child and then when the child, and/or subsequent ones arrived, an increasing number of Xers decided to go counter-culture and



have one parent “stay home” if at all possible, and this often times increasingly was the Dad. Quality childcare is especially important. If/when Dad or Mom “goes back to work” in the home or part time, they still want stronger relationships with their children, education about Children’s issues, needs, and safety are important, again referring back to broken home lives many Gen Xers experienced.<sup>84</sup>

Secularly, the Nomad generations have habitually had multiple challenges hit them simultaneously in the unraveling stages going from Third Turning to Four.<sup>85</sup> Thus, they are always on the alert for threat to their lives—self-protection comes first, then maybe introspection if they can fit it in. Regardless, they develop skill sets in innovation to meet threats. Survival is big for them; historically, Nomad generations have had the least amount of economic resources to meet the society’s pressures at the time. Bartering has made a come back for this group, as they have numerous valuable skills but little discretionary income. In the same vein, stewardship and tithing is much more understandable when expanded beyond the wallet. Talent and Time are things they have and can offer. Treasure—not so much.

### *Millennials, Born 1982–2003*

Millennials are now at the turning point that each eight-decade-long generational cycle needs. As they rise to prominence and majority by the 2020 election cycle, they are

---

<sup>84</sup> Eeman.

<sup>85</sup> William Strauss and Neil Howe, *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America’s Next Rendezvous with Destiny* (January 1997; repr., New York: Broadway Books, December 1997).

poised to take over remaking the United States ethos for the next eighty-year cycle.

Winograd and Hais identify two points within the eighty-year cycle that heralds an “era;” that is, a period of about forty years that is dominated by one of the two main “peaks” of generation characteristics. These two peaks in the recurring pattern have been at the Civic generation leadership years and Idealist generation leadership years.<sup>86</sup>

It cannot go unremarked that for each Civic era cycle of leadership, some catalyzing event has to happen that propels society into the era of Civic-dominated rebuilding.<sup>87</sup> Previous Civic generations did so in the 1770s, after the Revolutionary War; 1860s, after the Civil War; and 1930s, after the Great Depression. For the Millennials, it remains to be seen what history will reveal.<sup>88,89</sup> When Millennials do rise to the challenge, it will be an adaptive challenge,<sup>90</sup> and the pattern predicts that adaptive solutions have always emerged in answer to the challenge.

Historically, the emerging Civic generation produced intensely, rebuilding society and revitalizing that which had been left deferred during the preceding Idealist era. However, they did not do so with a clean ticket, and Millennial generation is marked with a cloud imposed on them by older, jaded generations. For example, noted media

---

<sup>86</sup> Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais, *Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation Is Remaking America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 14–15.

<sup>87</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 258.

<sup>88</sup> Potential candidates: 2008 “Great Recession” followed by the ascendancy of the Trump Administration in the 2016 election year, the subsequent troubling trajectory leadership of the United States of America has begun to exhibit, including House Impeachment and Senate “trial” as this chapter is being edited. In the absence of a major world war or civil clash, current political unrest seems a likely prerequisite crisis for the current Civic generation, unless the 2020 presidential election becomes further target of suspicious activity and potentially extreme social unrest.

<sup>89</sup> Tim Price, “What Is the Crash Generation?” Roosevelt Institute, last modified April 29, 2013, <http://rooseveltinstitute.org/new-guardwhat-crash-generation/>.

<sup>90</sup> Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015), 261–62.

commentator personality and early Gen X'er Glenn Beck lambasted the Boomer generation as well as the Millennial generation in 2008.<sup>91</sup> He claims Boomers made the mess currently experienced but Millennials do not have enough drive or decisiveness to step up and fix it. Dr. Jean Twenge also holds the opinion that Millennials, whom she identifies as the offspring of both Boomers and X'ers, are entitled, self-important, and ultimately indecisive.<sup>92</sup> Being an early X'er herself,<sup>93</sup> she particularly criticizes the Boomer generation for the mess younger Millennials are now faced with fixing.

Leadership characteristics that will enable Millennials to rise to the current challenge of living into the historical pattern for Civic generations include the fact that Millennials sit on the edge of being a truly “native” generation to the digital age. Similarly, the next group, the iGen, is a completely digitally native generation. Some strengths they have include “native” instant communication and digital networking abilities and the ability to ride out the preceding volatility of Fourth Turning<sup>94</sup> change identified and adopted from the business world<sup>95</sup> world by Winograd and Hais as FUD, or Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt that marks the beginning of every Fourth Turning. Riding out the FUD period, a new Civic generation provides the solutions based on their

---

<sup>91</sup> Glenn Beck, “Trophy Kids,” *Glenn Beck*, accessed April 23, 2018, <http://www.glennbeck.com/content/articles/article/198/17145/>.

<sup>92</sup> These descriptors are from revising some earlier 2004 held opinions in her second edition, Jean Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before* (2004; repr., New York: Atria Books, 2014).

<sup>93</sup> Born in 1971, Dr. Twenge began writing *Generation Me* at 32 years of age, published it at 34, then concluded her revised edition in 2014, ten years later, just before publishing her next book, *iGen*, in 2017 at 47 years of age. She identifies her children as solidly iGen.

<sup>94</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 272–73.

<sup>95</sup> Winograd and Hais, 19.

own beliefs and attitudes, whose majority and unity will provide the foundation for the following new civic ethos.<sup>96</sup>

According to the “Blueprint for a Millennial America,”<sup>97</sup> Millennials have already determined what they want their years in leadership and their goals for society to look like. The specific titles used in the report include: Education Attainment, which is similar to one of the previous Civic Generation’s goals, which created the GI Bill; Green Living, Working, and Innovating; Wellness and Coverage; Entrepreneurship and Social Safety Trampoline; and Equal access and Equal Opportunity. Again, this echoes generational goals from the GI’s, who created Social Security, with the United States as a World Supporter with high global influence. In this case, however, the Millennial stamp on this value means for the good of all, not the few. They also share the goal of Fiscal Responsibility with their earlier Civic peers.<sup>98</sup>

Spiritually, Winograd and Hais identify that for Millennials, “Their fundamental beliefs about religion, marriage, and child rearing will play an important part in how Millennials shape America’s social institutions for at least the next half-century.”<sup>99</sup> Specific data about Millennial involvement in religion can be generalized in two conflicting sources. The National Study of Youth and Religion, which in its last publishing cycle (2016), gave rise to the perspective that youth and young adults still

---

<sup>96</sup> “The Millennial State of the Union,” Roosevelt Institute, last modified February 1, 2011, <http://rooseveltinstitute.org/millennial-state-union/>.

<sup>97</sup> “The Blueprint for the Millennial America,” Roosevelt Institute, last modified October 21, 2015, <http://rooseveltinstitute.org/blueprint-millennial-america/>.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Winograd and Hais, 193.

have overall a strong relationship with God.<sup>100</sup> The Pew Research survey data on current beliefs however identifies that Millennials, like their times, tend to be “spiritual but not religious.”<sup>101</sup> How this plays out for the future of the church, or religious life, under the Millennial midlife years of leadership may include the following combined characteristics: a belief in God, but outside the box of traditional (older) generational consent; an understanding that the Bible is at the least, a reflection of God’s word or at the most literal. Overall, spirituality is important, but official membership in a religious body/institution is not important if it feels at all institutional and left over from previous generations. They will be more tolerant and less driven by cultural issues that divide older generations such as homosexuality and race. They will be more driven by a “live and let live” approach, rejecting orthodox and doctrinal beliefs, it is likely that multi-faith marriages will continue to rise; and an adoption of Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims to add to the current acceptance of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews as mainstream faiths.<sup>102</sup> These characteristics, here neither judged good nor bad, are likely to be central to a realized Millennial United States, as it will unfold into the next “High” First Turning. These will also then be important characteristics for churches, and any spiritual communities that Millennials and those that follow will look for as important.

As Millennials come of age and become the majority generation by 2020 election time, a truly “great” opportunity will open up in front of all sectors of society as their

---

<sup>100</sup> Nicolette D. Manglos-Weber et al., “Relationships with God among Young Adults: Validating a Measurement Model with Four Dimensions,” *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 2 (2016): 193–213.

<sup>101</sup> Becka A. Alper, “Millennials Are Less Religious than Older Americans, but Just as Spiritual,” Pew Research Center, November 23, 2015, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/23/millennials-are-less-religious-than-older-americans-but-just-as-spiritual/>.

<sup>102</sup> Winograd and Hais, 205–08.

creative minds come into play shaping and reshaping, crafting and re-crafting, perhaps even resurrecting a society ethos which will, as each Civic generation has done, possibly make additional strides toward that ultimate reality for which the faithful pray: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”<sup>103</sup>

If, as this dissertation suggests, the lens of generation theory adequately informs current adaptive challenges for church leadership facing denominational demographics, then adaptive solutions will need to be made. This is not the first time this has had to happen. Nor is it even the first time it has happened in the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest. For the current Elders—Silent generation—even though in their peak leadership years they were good at adaptive solutions, at their current life stage, they are struggling with how to adapt to the vastly different culture and society that has evolved since their leadership in maintaining the previous Civic generation’s established ethos.

*An Adaptive Challenge, History Revisited*

Roughly 200 years ago, or two cycles of four generations, there is the example of the Lewis and Clark expedition used in *Canoeing the Mountains*, by Tod Bolsinger.<sup>104</sup> The place of the leadership of the expedition in their Turning was roughly the same location as the current day Silent generation: they were an Adaptive generation type. The Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery were able to employ adaptive solutions to the challenges they faced in the beginning of western expansion. Their following Idealist and

---

<sup>103</sup> Matthew 6:10.

<sup>104</sup> Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 13, Kindle.

Nomad generations, however, gave rise to tensions between ideologies around slavery and sovereignty, resulting in the Civil War during their Elderhood. The Civil War, a “Crisis” during what would have been a “Fourth Turning,” actually interrupted development of the following Civic generation and gave rise to a hybrid Civic-Adaptive group, the only anomaly to date in Strauss and Howe’s pattern.<sup>105</sup>

Contemporarily, the Silent Generation and the Boomers are poised to pass off the baton of church leadership, albeit not in a Civil War crisis, but definitely a time of social, cultural, ideological and spiritual restlessness. Examples of impending crisis include rampant disrespect for the earth by some national and global leaders, mounting climate change, a certain disregard for rules at highest levels of government, and more importantly for the church, emptying sanctuaries where once hundreds worshiped.

### **Conclusion: The Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest**

The GI and Silent generations built and maintained civic life as it has been orchestrated for the past seventy years or more. They brought their models of leadership, their understanding of how things are done, their structures of hierarchy, and their world view into the church and set out to make the church mirror their experience in work and social life. The Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest became influenced, maintained, and expanded by these two generations during their leadership years, which corresponded to the most recent First and Second Turnings. The next generation began

---

<sup>105</sup> Strauss and Howe, *Fourth Turning*, 262.

with a rocky start, however, having had a love-hate relationship with the establishment. When they finally did take up leadership roles in the church, “their individual self-confidence, combined with a sense of the inherent rightness of their own view, [led] them to be focused, no-compromise, passionate debaters. Their confidence in their personal understanding of faith also [led them] to be a splintery and divisive generation.”<sup>106</sup>

During the current transition into the Fourth Turning, the Silent Generation—all retired Adaptive generation type—and now the Boomers—Idealist generation type, almost all of whom are retired at this point, are poised to pass on their leadership roles in the church to the next slate of church leaders rising up in the cycle of generations. However, herein lies one of the main challenges facing the church today: the next two generations are missing in the church. Gen X would ordinarily be stepping into leadership roles and “running with perseverance the race set before them,” to expand the scriptural metaphor from Hebrews 12:1.

As a mainline protestant church in the Pacific Northwest, the Presbyterian Church (USA) flourished under GI and Silent leadership, and to a certain extent in new forms with the Boomers. Congregations became true communities of faith within the broader denominational and geographical community. “In-group” members worshiped together, became spiritually formed together, learned from one another, were present for one another, supported one another, lifted up one another’s burdens, and celebrated together when things went well. Within larger churches, there have even been programs and people specifically tasked (in the Presbyterian Church (USA) usually Deacons) to support those who have not done so well: the suffering, the grieving, and those simply in tight

---

<sup>106</sup> Eeman, 64.



spots. All of these characteristics and programs were implemented by the last Civic generation, maintained by the Silents, and either modified substantially or let go by the Boomers in favor of alternative expressions.

However, after working to set in place and maintain all these positive and caring structures for each other and their children, the two older generations reached their Elderhood, with most GIs now passed on. The Silents have fallen sway to a typical challenge in late Elderhood: decreasing levels of energy, more difficulty getting around and accomplishing what they used to do, and not quite being able to stay “current” with the pace of change in society or with younger generations visiting their church. The next generation to enter Elderhood is the Baby Boom generation.

Boomers in Retirement offer some challenging issues for churches wishing to have ongoing volunteerism in their programs. Boomers were socialized to age-segregate since their Youth Group days, and in adulthood have rigorously pursued what they want, sometimes to the exclusion of others. One resulting reality for smaller membership churches is the “snowbird” flight from northern climates to sunnier places during the course of the winter. This results in complete interruption of any volunteer lay leadership of regular program offerings in the church, such as Sunday School in the winter, for anywhere from two to four-and-a-half months. Larger churches call this time frame the program year<sup>107</sup> and can usually scrape together some replacements, but this is still challenging to program administrators. This tendency to age-segregate in Elderhood, now

---

<sup>107</sup> In program-sized and larger churches, the “program year” coincides roughly with the start and end of the secular school year. For a summary and discussion of church size as it corresponds to congregational identity, see Jackson Carroll and David Roozen, “Congregational Identities in the Presbyterian Church,” *Review of Religious Research* 31, no. 4 (1990): 351–69 and Israel Galindo, *The Hidden Lives of Congregations: Understanding Congregational Dynamics*, Alban Institute publication; AL297 (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004).

being echoed by Boomer offspring as a reaction against perceived Boomer relational distance, has institutionalized itself into the current church, in all congregational sizes.

One repercussion for the Presbyterian Church (USA), as a generalization, is that it has become an “in-group” made up of mostly white, retired professionals focused on community maintenance of only one or two generations in the cycle, with what few ministries there are to younger generations also mirrored in age-segregated models of outreach. These exist without the benefit of a pathway forward to reintegrate the younger ages back into “big church” as they age out of their specialized ministry foci.

Intergenerational communication patterns and challenges identified that seem to occur with generation theory’s four-generation cycle have to be taken into account. The current ideological impasse between the Baby Boomer generation, their predecessors, and the subsequent two generations needs to be further illuminated. As with Idealist generations of the past, it began when the Boomers were youth; at precisely the same time iterations of previous generational Turnings occurred: when an Idealist generation was coming of age, heralding the advent of a Third Turning—“Unraveling”—in the cycle. Today, with Gen X in their midlife stage with leadership as its focus, the impending realities of a Fourth Turning Crisis now must be faced.

What this proves is a consistent challenge for the Presbyterian Church (USA) denomination in the Pacific Northwest. It must retool to cast its vision outward, looking outside of the comfort zones of the “in groups” to both community members not represented within traditional church membership<sup>108</sup> and to generations outside the

---

<sup>108</sup> Traditional church membership here is defined as those who join the church by officially placing themselves on membership roles and pledging to be committed to a specific local church both financially and in other acts of service and prayer.

comfort zones of “in groups.” This includes two areas of difference not addressed in this paper: racial and gender diversity. Subsequent research could glean from comparing non-white protestant and apostolic traditions to main line white congregations. Since relationship is at the heart of the matter, this is especially difficult when half the congregation disappears for three or four months out of the year. So not only is this a challenge looking “outward,” in contemporary times to an increasingly secularized culture, this challenge includes reaching across the relational divides<sup>109</sup> between the generations within nuclear and extended family groups of traditional church members.

Before moving on, it would be remiss of this study if it were not pointed out that,

Growth, in and of itself, is not the goal. Deeper discipleship, relationships, and impact must be the first focus of any church, *not its own institutional survival* ... Growth ... is an outcome of being mission-driven and deeply invested in people. We want to believe that our work is relevant within today’s society. We want to know that we matter. And churches must *continually question their relevance to their customers if it is to stay in business*<sup>110</sup> (emphases added).

One approach to this adaptive challenge is to bring Generations X, Y, and Z into the church in ways that allow them to accept it as a spiritual home. Realistically, this means to assist the church itself in adapting to a different religious and cultural reality. What this will probably look like is a different church, including a greater appreciation for pluralities, ecumenism, egalitarianism, interfaith dialog and even multi-faith family blending. With these points illuminated, one must revisit issues of Christian faith formation as practiced among the generations in the Presbyterian Church (USA).

---

<sup>109</sup> It is the opinion of the author that a major contributor is a technologically-driven divide, but that discussion is outside the current scope of this paper.

<sup>110</sup> McIntosh, Smothers, and Smothers, xi.

The same question social theorist Margaret Mead asked in 1950, “to what past, present, or future can the idealistic young commit themselves?”<sup>111</sup> can also be asked today. Applied to religious contexts, seventy years ago, the modern Sunday school was adapted to meet just such a need. The resulting biblical and theological foundations for it are still felt today. The next chapter will address these foundations. Beginning with Spiritual Formation and in light of traditional age-segregated religious education it will set the stage for examining the emerging practices of intentional intergenerational Christian formation.

---

<sup>111</sup> Mead, ix.

CHAPTER 4:  
SPIRITUAL, BIBLICAL, AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS IN CHRISTIAN  
FORMATION

In chapter 2 Generation theory was discussed, and particularly how Strauss and Howe’s concept of the transition from Third to Fourth Turning<sup>1</sup> revealed the disintegrating trajectory of contemporary United States culture and thus its reflection in the church as a crisis of denominational decline. Chapter 3 addressed applied educational and leadership theories in relation to the role of church leadership in the formation of faith. It also took a look at the characteristics of current Gen X leaders in the stage of Midlife leadership, and Millennial leaders in the stage of Rising Adulthood.

In this chapter, framing spiritual formation in a broad umbrella-like context gives rise to the perspective that spiritual grounding informs all aspects of one’s beliefs, values, behaviors, and relational manifestation toward others within the spiritual community. Specifically Christian formation means individually and corporately all of the above formed in the likeness of Jesus Christ. Christian education becomes one of the means spiritual formation is expressed. Placed in the context of communities of practice, Kenda Creasy Dean aptly framed it this way: “In Christian tradition, faith is a matter of desire, a desire for God and a desire to love others in Christ’s name, which results in a church

---

<sup>1</sup> This discussion could also branch out to disintegration of Western Civilization as a whole, but that is outside the scope of this paper. For some interesting views on this wider topic, please see recently published *Ages of Discord: A Structural-Demographic Analysis of American History* (Storrs, CT: Beresta Books, 2017) by Peter Turchin and a review of his work and others on this topic—including a nod toward Strauss and Howe—by Laura Spinney, “End of Days: Is Western Civilisation on the Brink of Collapse?,” *New Scientist*, accessed October 8, 2019, <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg23731610-300-end-of-days-is-western-civilisation-on-the-brink-of-collapse/>.

oriented toward bearing God’s self-giving love to others, embodied in a gospel-shaped way of life.”<sup>2</sup>

Defining some of the core concepts of this author’s interpretation of spiritual formation here is appropriate. “Spirituality,” “soul,” “spiritual relationships,” and even “broken spirituality” or “sin” are terms sometimes difficult to pin down. For the purposes of this paper, definitions must be defined in light of intergenerationality, then combined to form a more integrated understanding. Including these foundational concepts in biblical precedents for intergenerational faith transference will set the stage for moving forward.

**Self.** By definition, self is solitary and alone. Modern, and to a certain extent post-modern, United States culture of individuality continually pushes human development, spiritually and otherwise, in a dis-integrated direction instead of into a more whole—and a more holy—integrated relational being. How the church assists or hinders this process deeply affects the challenge of passing on the faith from one generation to the next.

**Soul.** Sometimes defined as “Spirit,” a more precise separation of these concepts is fruitful. Soul is sometimes defined as: “The totality of what it means to be a human being...our one-of-a-kind, image-of-God, persons-in-relationship identity which defies reduction; the opposite of “self,” which is the “soul minus God.”<sup>3</sup> For this paper, it includes an understanding that in the soul is a divinely planted spark of God’s very self within the human spirit. Spirit, then, is how each human being carries her/his precious soul energy into the world.

---

<sup>2</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 36–37.

**Spirituality.** "...A serious and disciplined commitment to live deeply and fully in relation to God."<sup>4</sup> Spiritual relationships, then, are communally formed discipleship interactions exhibiting longitudinal growth in relationship with others. Some additional background is necessary to weave a more complete picture: "Essential to living in the way of God is living in the context of the Trinity. As Trinity, God is always relational."<sup>5</sup>

**Broken spirituality.** A broad definition for sin, it is a disintegration of self and others in relationship to God, one another and the community of Creation. These definitions approach the nuance needed for establishing the concept intergenerational Christian formation. They also convey the needed foundation for applying intergenerational formation in communities of practice. Therefore, the following definition will be unpacked further in chapter 5:

**Spiritual formation.** Spiritual formation is primarily what the Spirit does, forming the resurrection life of Christ in us, that we might reflect the radiance of Christian faith community practice in daily life. Understanding Dean's "gospel-shaped way of life" weaves this definition together into an ongoing process reflecting human beings internally<sup>6</sup> re-integrating relational soul-natures toward wholeness<sup>7</sup> with God in Christ, with one another, and the community of Creation.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps one of the most

---

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, Peter Santucci, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places Study Guide* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 6–7.

<sup>5</sup> Peterson and Santucci, 7.

<sup>6</sup> For a more complete exploration of internal family systems, see Richard C. Schwartz and Martha Sweezy's *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Richard Plass and James Cofield, *The Relational Soul: Moving from False Self to Deep Connection* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 157.

<sup>8</sup> Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), xx.

important pieces of spiritual formation undergirding intergenerational Christian formation is community.<sup>9</sup> Community is intrinsically understood in this context as intergenerational, although not necessarily in family groups related by blood.

### **Spiritual Community: A Personal Journey**

Formation within a spiritual community comprises any faith-related educational activity that has at the center of its mission the transformation of one's heart, mind, and spirit. This is undertaken in worship, Christian education endeavors, missional activities, and fellowship with the whole of one's spiritual community. Going beyond the simple transmission of facts, data, or the belief systems of the parent, church, synagogue, or temple, it seeks to permanently shape one's being into more godliness; within the Christian context this is understood as being formed in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

I was baptized as a baby, as my tradition commonly does, drawing out promises from my parents and from the faith community that they would raise me in the faith. This meant they would teach both by example and through Sunday School as much as they could. This would continue until formal Confirmation, or avowal of belief and becoming an official member of a local congregation, would propel me forward on my own to grow in spiritual formation within the context of my family's faith and my denomination's fairly open tradition.

---

<sup>9</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).



I was raised in a program-sized church, which means we were big enough to have age-segregated classes and youth groups. When it came time for other Middle School Youth Group members and me to go through Confirmation class, I remember learning about as much as an eighth grader could tolerate. I had a hard time grasping the purpose of the various doctrines, theologies, Church history, and our denominational polity, as it seemed so removed from what I perceived to be “real life.” Neither was it what really drew me to God. It was not the social scene of Youth Group relationships that drew me, either. I had a deeper longing and a deeper calling my teachers in and of the faith did not touch on. This deeper sense of something calling is what continues to pull me today.

At the heart of it all has always been a draw to “soul”, what at first I called the “human spirit,” and which drew me to long for a closer connection with it—like a clarion call, an inner prompting spoke to me without words. I knew I wanted to know more about it, to sense it, to feel it, to live into and recognize my unique and authentic piece of God-in-me spiritual center, or “soul” and how that related to the rest of my life. I did not have the words to express this at that time. I now regard “soul tending” as part of Christian vocation, often developed through organized spiritual formation.

Spiritual formation guides believers into closer relationship with the reality of our made-in-the-image-of-God relational and communal existence (soul) and God. Eugene Petersen and others have been extremely gifted at focusing on the challenges contemporary society and culture face “dancing around” current culturally imbued self-centeredness. There, God is taken out and the human being stands alone, soul-less.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent resource that bridges the gap between evangelical and mainline protestant sensibilities, Eugene Peterson’s *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) discusses these challenges and more for Christian spiritual

In a sense, to call the human spirit “soul” is to confirm for oneself and others that there is a single divine commonality which ties all of humanity together, breaking down all barriers.<sup>11</sup> With intentional formation, one’s spiritual journey brings a deeper connection to God, creation, cosmos, other beings, and the inner reality all human beings share as God’s children. Formation, then, is utterly about nourishing one’s soul. In the past, Judeo-Christian scriptures have provided biblical foundations for this in formal religious education settings. Today, an integration of learning-teaching-experiencing seems to be a strong means for soul-nourishing, but traditional structures of formation sometimes make it more difficult rather than easier.

### **Biblical Foundations in Age-segregated and Intergenerational Formation**

Biblical foundations for age-segregated formation in faith and learning exist; yet they include some short-comings with respect to generational stratification. Biblical foundations for intergenerational formation and learning also exist, and also include some deficiencies in contemporary cultural contexts. Both observations lead to reasons for teaching methodologies incorporating intentionally integrated intergenerational approaches. Doing so would prove useful moving forward in the goal of forming committed, dedicated disciples in younger generations and, one would hope, a certain

---

formation. For a more evangelical perspective, Dallas Willard’s *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998) also discusses this. For a classic mainline protestant perspective, *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) by Howard L. Rice is a helpful comparison.

<sup>11</sup> Peterson, 43.

revitalization within ecclesiastical communities. This, then, becomes a movement toward arresting congregational decline. That said, institutional survival is not the goal; it is a happy byproduct of missional movement outwards. Missional movement outwards comes from mature inner Christian spiritual formation. Mature Christian spiritual formation occurs in community when someone further along the journey teaches and models growing in faith even while passing it on from one generation to the next.

### *Against Intentional Intergenerational Formation*

The Christian New Testament book that bears the name of Titus is a letter to a young pastor, not to a congregation *per se*, in that it is addressed to the pastoral leader of a small church on the island of Crete. Paul writes instructions for teaching the faith to the young man Titus, who it is possible in his day would have corresponded approximately to the life stage of contemporary Gen X and/or Millennial adults: rising adult or early midlife. Reviewing its contents in conversation with biblical scholars, one could make the argument that it exhibits a very timely and modern underlying leadership assumption for any hierarchical structure: “No effective adult education program can develop in any congregation unless it has the support and blessing of the pastor.”<sup>12</sup> Paul writes to Titus

---

<sup>12</sup> Kenn Gangel and Charles R. Swindoll, *Ministering to Today's Adults* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 1999), 34. For a more thorough examination of leadership theory application here, a review of leadership theories and influencing change can be found in James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), ProQuest, and the work of Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015). For the context of this paper, a more robust exploration of applied leadership theory for the purposes of changing church culture to be more accepting of intergenerational formation will be addressed in chapter 5.

specifically with regards to teaching different groups of adults: older men, older women, younger women, and young men, omitting “slaves” for contemporary context.

**Older Men.** “Teach older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound [healthy] in faith, in love, and in endurance.”<sup>13</sup>

**Older Women and Younger Women.** These are taken together in Paul’s advice to Titus. Perhaps because Titus himself was a young man, he was to teach the older women to in turn teach the younger women: “Tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; *they are to teach* what is good, so that *they may encourage the young women* to love their husbands, to love their children, to be self-controlled, chaste, good managers of the household, kind, being submissive to their husbands, so that the word of God may not be discredited” (emphasis added).<sup>14</sup>

**Younger Men.** Titus, a young man himself, was under the same strictures he was told to teach other young men: “Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. *Show yourself in all respects a model* of good works, and in *your teaching* show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us” (emphasis added).<sup>15</sup>

Taking these categories described by Paul and applying them to religious instruction today, some grounds for age-segregated models of teaching the faith are found. For much of the past twenty years or more of spiritual formation, most churches have responded in kind with the need to teach the faith to younger generations through

---

<sup>13</sup> Titus 2:2.

<sup>14</sup> Titus 2:3–5.

<sup>15</sup> Titus 2:6–8.

Christian Education programs following established stages of life and stages of faith developmental levels. Thus, educators have tended to group students of the faith in age-segregated classes, much like public education. Some more conservative sects have also historically been known to practice gender-segregated instruction as well, to follow their interpretation of the biblical witness. Child development theories have supported age-segregated formation, allowing teachers to address spiritual learning modules and curricula to human developmental stages such as those discussed by Jung, Piaget, Vygotski, Ericson, Kohlberg, Dykstra, Gillian, Fowler, and others.<sup>16</sup> However, beyond apparent successes of age-segregated faith formation for previous generations, such as GIs, Silents, some Boomers, and to a lesser extent, Gen Xers, what is experienced today by some Christian educators and spiritual formation practitioners is very different: a rapidly shrinking clientele in traditional Sunday school formats and less young families in worship together. One wonders if the persistent effort to take children out of worship and away from their parents was and is a mistake. Sending them to “children’s church” before the adult-centered sermon begins in effect contributes to driving younger postmodern families with “helicopter parenting”<sup>17</sup> tendencies away.

---

<sup>16</sup> Neil J. Salkind, *Encyclopedia of Educational Psychology* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2008). An excellent discussion on models of teaching both in and out of the church built on these classic theorists in education, human psychology and faith development can be found in Bruce R. Joyce, Marsha Weil, and Emily Calhoun’s *Models of Teaching* (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2004). In addition to this popular teacher preparation text, Sara Little’s classic *To Set One’s Heart: Belief and Teaching in the Church* (Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983) is a helpful historical frame for Christian educator foundations, as is Jack L. Seymour’s *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997). A more recent development and application can be read in David I. Smith and Susan M. Felch’s *Teaching and Christian Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), along with developments in conversational teaching: Beverly C. Johnson-Miller, “Conversational Teaching and Christian Transformation,” *Christian Education Journal; Glen Ellyn* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 378–91, ProQuest.

<sup>17</sup> “Helicopter parenting” is the term describing parents that are always hovering around their children, sometimes overprotective and hyper diligent that every potential is made available for their children. To discover one’s level of helicopter parent tendency, Hasan Yilmaz developed a scale in “A

Regardless, “children’s church” leads to the first step of the age-segregated silo effect. This creates separate camaraderie, separate worship, separate educational and formation experiences and results in a reduction of positive role-model relationships between generations. This in turn creates a gap in passing on the faith from one generation to another. In rediscovering intentional intergenerational formation, biblical foundations for this alternative and growing approach can also be identified.

### *For Intentional Intergenerational Formation*

Renewal of interest in intergenerational formation has caused several authors to write in the area of intergenerational formation in the past decade or two. As their research and writing becomes more readily available, Christian educators are taking note of this approach and applying it. Some compelling findings in both the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament Christian scriptures are lifted up as foundational expectations for this method of faith transference. They have been there all along, but perhaps they have been overlooked through the lens of late modern and postmodern Western Civilization’s individualism. Particularly for this study the New Testament texts are worth rediscovering.

Allan Harkness, in the article “Intergenerationality: Biblical And Theological Foundations,” writes,

---

Good Parent is Not always the Parent Who does Everything, Every Time for his/her Child: A Study to Develop Helicopter Parent Attitude/s Scale (HPAS) / İyi Ebeveyn, Çocuğu İçin Her Zaman Her Şeyi Yapan Ebeveyn Değildir: Algılanan Helikopter Ebeveyn Tutum Ölçeği (AHETÖ) Geliştirme Çalışması,” *Erken Çocukluk Çalışmaları Dergisi* 3, no. 1 (2019): 3–31, ProQuest.

Secular theory and research demonstrate that the impact of intergenerational interactions on personality and societal development is substantial. But is that sufficient reason for advocating for intergenerationality for Christian nurture in Christian settings? ... Two areas addressed in the New Testament are especially significant in presenting the necessity for intergenerational interaction: the nature of discipleship outlined by Jesus, and the “household tables” in the New Testament letters.<sup>18</sup>

Holly Catterton-Allen interprets these “household tables” by presuming faith formation takes place in community family groups that are intergenerational in nature.<sup>19</sup> Examples of these include: “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands”<sup>20</sup> and “Husbands, love your wives”;<sup>21</sup> “Children, obey your parents”<sup>22</sup> and “Fathers, do not embitter your children.”<sup>23</sup> This was true especially for the close-knit Jewish peoples, but it is also evident throughout understandings of the early church movement as “house churches” outside the context of the synagogue became common for “Followers of the Way,” the term members of early Christian households became known by as Judaism and Christianity gradually separated. The arrival of Paul’s letters in these homes became occasions for gathering and reading, listening, discussing, and implementing for the whole family.

Later, as the Gospels were crafted and disseminated, specific scriptures utilizing children as teaching moments in the life of discipleship became evident. These include

---

<sup>18</sup> Allan G. Harkness, “Intergenerationality: Biblical and Theological Foundations,” *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (May 2012), <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A289360000/AONE?sid=lms>.

<sup>19</sup> Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 82.

<sup>20</sup> Ephesians 5:22.

<sup>21</sup> Ephesians 5:25.

<sup>22</sup> Colossians 3:20.

<sup>23</sup> Colossians 3:21. Contemporary contexts can expand interpretation to mean all primary caregivers of children.

Matthew 18:1–7; Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 9:33–37; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 9:46–48; and Luke 18:15–17. For Jesus, lover of all, children became teaching illustrations to alert adults to both the challenge and the gift of relational integrity toward one another and God.

Alternately, reviewing the earlier texts from Titus and including the letters to Timothy, one can also reinterpret these pericopes to support cross-generational formation, instead of age-segregation; for example, older women and younger women (Titus 2:3–5). Finally, several occurrences in Acts have “whole households” baptized, which for the time would have meant multi-generational households (Acts 16:15, 16:33), with children participating in all aspects of the life of households of faith (Acts 20:7–12, 21:5–6).<sup>24</sup> By definition and common practice during biblical times, multi-generational households would have received the word of God all together, with adults interpreting it for children and grandchildren and all ages learning together what the meaning, message, and import of the reality of Christ could be in their contextual lives.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the umbrella of spiritual formation is played out in discussion of religious education and matched with scriptural references describing teaching moments and methods. Revealed in this discussion is a need for contemporary contexts to integrate them, with a recovery of intentional intergenerational Christian formation. One of the main hypotheses for this dissertation is that intergenerational formation is of key

---

<sup>24</sup> Allen and Ross, 83.



importance for discipleship moving forward, galvanizing relational impact on younger generations in the church.

Just because the biblical foundations are there, does not make intentional intergenerational Christian formation an easy change for contemporary congregational life. There are many barriers to implementing successful intergenerational ministry models. Perhaps chief among them is creating a paradigm shift within congregations unused to intergenerational practices of being the whole family of God together. The next chapter will begin to unravel the problems and reweave a congregational tapestry.

Utilizing applied leadership theories of self-transformation, teamwork, and servanthood, one suggested way forward for leadership to navigate through this hurdle is offered, enabling congregations to begin to appropriate a culture of intergenerationality. It will begin with the transformation and experience of personal spiritual formation for the pastor or leader of the congregation. Those being led will not go where their leadership has not been her or himself. A review of additional means for congregations to begin to experience being the whole family of God together will be offered in chapter 6.

## CHAPTER 5:

### AT THE CROSSROADS—APPLIED LEADERSHIP THEORIES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL FORMATION

Following discussion of leading change in the church, this chapter proposes a practical step-by-step example for personal transformation of a congregational leader wishing to affect a paradigm shift toward intergenerationality. This creates a basis from which to influence congregational change, though it is not a quick transition. Moving from theory to practical application can often be challenging, and is especially difficult in situations requiring a paradigmatic shift within an institutionalized culture such as the church.

#### **Leading Change in the Church**

To begin, Brenda Snailum and a team of intergenerational experts reported that,

Transitioning from a predominantly age-stratified ministry mindset to an intergenerational culture requires a paradigmatic shift in philosophy and core values, and efforts to create intergenerational community need to be an integral part of the whole church's vision, mission, and purpose.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Brenda Snailum, "Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry Within Existing Evangelical Church Congregations: What Have We Learned?," *Christian Education Journal; Glen Ellyn* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 168, ProQuest.

If this whole-church approach is not in place, inevitably the effort is much more difficult to carry out. Sabotage of efforts to change most likely will occur.<sup>2</sup> As Allen and Ross observe,

Intergenerational experiences do not always meet the immediate felt needs of everyone present: the children may not wish to participate in an idea-oriented discussion; seniors may not wish to have young children disrupting a special event; the youth group may not wish their parents to be among them; the parents may not wish to be with their teens; and those whose offspring have recently flown the nest may not wish to reenter the world of children and chaos...leading people out of their comfort zones may create initial uneasiness...<sup>3</sup>

Since it involves a cultural shift, intentionally integrated intergenerational formation as an approach to strengthening the whole spiritual community has to begin with transformation of leadership. Successful leadership in cultural shift will have a ripple effect to other lay leaders in the church. When the culture has shifted to integrated intergenerationality it will have a direct bearing on revitalization, retaining younger generations in the faith. This, it is hoped, will begin to address denominational decline in the Presbyterian Church (USA). A congregation that has embraced a whole-church approach will most likely realize stronger discipleship of all ages, as exemplified in the five-year anecdotal observations of members and leaders of St. Joan of Arc Parish,<sup>4</sup> as well as the beginning case studies offered by this author in chapter 6. This can be gained through worship experiences, educational methods and missional outlook. The result is

---

<sup>2</sup> Typical experience in applied leadership theories when changes are being introduced to a system not wishing to be changed. For further study, Peter Northouse offers several leadership theory summaries in *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE 2015). For how adaptive leadership manages conflict is particularly helpful here, see chapter 11, 255–93.

<sup>3</sup> Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 179.

<sup>4</sup> Annemarie Scobey-Polacheck, “Come One, Come All,” *U.S. Catholic*; Chicago, June 2008, ProQuest.

spiritual formation *en masse*, together for everyone, as a community made up of all ages and stages. This reflects back to the church being the whole body of Christ, as illuminated from 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 in chapter 4 above. To borrow the scriptural metaphor, it begins with the head—in this case church leadership.

### **Christian Leadership**

This author’s definition of Christian Leadership is: Relationally transformative servanthood in Christ, with the Holy Spirit, for God’s intended healing and wholeness. Unpacking that definition, one must draw from at least two leadership models: transformative leadership and servant leadership.<sup>5</sup> Peter G. Northouse summarizes the various aspects of transformative leadership: “Transformative leaders are able to inspire followers to accomplish great things...transformative leaders are recognized as change agents who are good role models, who can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, who empower followers to meet higher standards, who act in ways that make others want to trust them, and who give meaning to organizational life.”<sup>6</sup> Northouse summarizes servant leadership: “Servant leaders place the good of followers over their own self-interests,... emphasize follower development,...demonstrate strong moral behavior toward followers, the organization, and other stakeholders.”<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Northouse, 161, 225, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 190.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. 225.

This study applies these two models in a blended effect for the purposes of transforming both church leadership (professional and lay) and church culture itself to be more intergenerational: transformative leadership because the church leader(ship) must transform her/him/itself first, to become a role model for the rest of the church, thus teaching by example as Jesus did. Second, servant leadership, for how the leadership serves the community also communicates how to lead it into new ministries of vitality to others. When leadership is willing to take on the challenge of personal transformation for the good of all, it becomes one of the greatest personal challenges and rewards, yet also leads to the whole worshipping community's fulfillment of the church's role in nurturing spiritual formation together.

Standing at the helm of a congregation that struggles with declining membership, aging congregants, and passing on the faith to younger generations very well could frighten leadership into running to "safety." What that looks like is following the "way we have always done it before." However, this is a precarious position. The culture has changed and the people who make up the culture have changed. Something else has to be done.

Since the opposite of "running to safety" is facing fear or challenges, personal transformation of the leader(ship) is a path forwards that offers the potential to view these same challenges or fear as a wild frontier to be explored. As Bolsinger's Lewis and Clark analogy illustrates in *Canoeing the Mountains*, the only way to truly find out is to nimbly retool and go forward.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 27–29, Kindle.

## Tools for Transformation

The way of transformation is both descent and ascent as Malcolm Guite identifies in poetic conversation with Dante.<sup>9</sup> A leader must dig deeply into the core of who they are, how they came to be, and what motivates them to then heal and renew into a transformed person from the inside back out. To traverse this pilgrimage of faith into transformed spiritual leadership with that lens in place, the example below will utilize three tools overlaid one upon the other like a blueprint. The first and second tools are the classic three-fold path of theological reflection, usually termed purgation, illumination, union<sup>10</sup> overlaid on a physical labyrinth, which is a unicursal walking meditative path.<sup>11</sup> Symbolically woven together, these two might best be described as: purgation/purgatory in descent, illumination and hope born in womb like stillness, followed by union/integration to resurrection/ascent. The third tool is scaffolding from which to view the ensuing personal work: the nine personality tendencies as identified through work with the Enneagram.

To begin the purging step, which is letting things die that need to die, is hard. For example, Lewis and Clark had to trade canoes for pack horses and native guides.<sup>12</sup> Loss, pain, and grief are all things church communities and leadership do not relish

---

<sup>9</sup> Malcolm Guite, *Word in the Wilderness: A Poem a Day for Lent and Easter* (Norwich, Norfolk, UK: Canterbury Press, 2014), xii.

<sup>10</sup> Lauren Artress, *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice*, rev. ed. (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 28.

<sup>11</sup> The labyrinth is an ancient unicursal meditation path of pre-Christian origin that has been adopted by Christian mystics as well as others to represent the spiritual journey. There are many contemporary designs; see Appendix A for one example.

<sup>12</sup> Bolsinger, 34, Kindle.

experiencing. The Enneagram as a tool provides benchmarks for a pathway forward, however. In each of the nine types there are places of integration and disintegration. When operating at peak integration, which has known characteristics for each of the nine types, the leader is both transformed and a role model of transformation. Similarly, the physical labyrinth provides physical markers: turns outward and inward to the center, a resting place in the middle, and a return to the threshold on the way back out.

Growing in leadership, transformation as understood through the lens of personality work using the Enneagram would have to be characterized by the leadership team's ability to "move around" the Enneagram. If churches and church leadership teams operated with healthy Enneagram personality characteristics<sup>13</sup> mapped out ahead of time as goals along the path, incredible potential for healthy community would emerge. This means integrating the healthy potentials of each of the nine types into church leadership instead of stagnating, or worse, disintegrating, within one type.<sup>14</sup>

### *Purgation/Descent*

Much of the process of uncovering wounds from the past means, for the leader or leadership team, work on identifying the inner congregation(s)<sup>15</sup> of the leader(s)/leadership team. It also means identifying the DNA of the church itself over the

---

<sup>13</sup> Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types*, 3rd ed. (New York: Bantam, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> "How The System Works," Enneagram Institute, accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/how-the-enneagram-system-works/>.

<sup>15</sup> Richard C. Schwartz and Martha Sweezy, *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, 2nd ed, (New York: Guilford Press, 2019), 4.

course of its life as a congregation and how it has treated its leaders and members alike. Knowing this and also knowing the benchmarks of a healthy or vital ministry illuminate paths of transformation moving forward.<sup>16</sup> A successful intergenerational formation ministry will also reflect these benchmarks, with the added benefit of multiple ages engaging in positive formational experiences. The actual process of purgation in this instance means letting go of things that are unhealthy for the community. One example in a leader reexamining her or his normal *modes operandi* is how to conduct meetings. Perhaps having a printed agenda and “power housing” through it (a stereotypical white male hierarchical method) to get it all done is one of those things that could be purged, with the result that more open listening to a diversity of others such as with consensus circle work could occur.

To mirror this process physically, prayerful labyrinth walking, or traveling from the entrance, or threshold, toward the center and back out, brings a balance with the inner and outer work. From the example above: taking physical pieces of something into that labyrinth, like a pinecone, placing a symbolic meaning on it, like the “power housing,” and leaving it in the labyrinth brings a focused attention to alternate means of group work.

---

<sup>16</sup> Steve McMullin’s research indicates benchmarks of a healthy and vital ministry include first a recognition by church leadership that secularization of society and Sunday morning in particular has occurred. This is followed by intentional internal changes to effectively engage the new surrounding culture and includes meaningful, quality use of the arts, such as music, visual, and dance, in worship. See Steve McMullin, “The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches,” *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 1 (2013): 43–59.



Healthy levels of Enneagram integration assist with leadership abilities on a personal and relational level, as well.<sup>17</sup> For example, if one of the personality type characteristics is to be combative, like in Enneagram 8, then looking to one of the other type characteristics to balance that personal tendency pastorally would be transformative, such as the Enneagram 2 tendency to helping others, and outward-focus. Admittedly, it is a new kind of work being suggested here to ascribe Enneagram work/personality traits on a congregational level, and worth further research and study outside the scope of this dissertation.

### *Illumination/Hope*

The second stage in the three-fold path is illumination,<sup>18</sup> or the mid-point in the ascent/descent movement. This is mirrored in a physical labyrinth at the center. Similar to the example above, resting in prayer in the middle of the labyrinth for an Enneagram 8 is hard work—they are wired to move and get things done. In prayer, intentionally asking how to better relate to someone unlike them could reveal alternatives and end up in further overall progress towards “getting things done.” This is work on each individual’s, and thus each leader’s, internal lives and sometimes origins for these are found in childhood relationships.<sup>19</sup> Wounds do happen, and healing them is essential before moving forward as a team toward cultural shift. When the leadership is together in this

---

<sup>17</sup> Suzanne Stabile, *The Path Between Us: An Enneagram Journey to Healthy Relationships* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 12.

<sup>18</sup> Artress, 28–29.

<sup>19</sup> Schwartz and Sweezy, 11.

process, creating sacred space for transformational life in, of, and for others, they provide the example for the rest of the worshiping community, even as Jesus did for the disciples.<sup>20</sup> One of the deepest pieces of illumination about any leadership role in the congregation going forward is that the leader alone cannot transform others, only her/himself. Leaders can only lead by example, and do so by surrendering self. Bolsinger writes, “Mostly, the challenges of uncharted leadership challenge us to keep exploring and become someone completely different from when the journey began.”<sup>21</sup>

As a leadership team leads into the uncharted waters of intergenerationality “off the map,”<sup>22</sup> key for contemporary contexts is to blend inner transformation with outward service. This missional focus brings engagement of participants in mitigating real felt needs in the community. With authentic engagement, perceptions of making a difference in the world bring new energy and vitality to the spiritual community. This in turn leads into a healthy, collaborative systemic change, which, by virtue of the process, can also lead to spiritual formation in a completely new way. This begins the journey of the third step.

### *Integration/Ascent*

The third step in the three-fold path is taking what has been learned from the illuminating stage and forging a path forward. For example, an Enneagram 8 pastor may

---

<sup>20</sup> This exhibits both authentic leadership and servanthood leadership; see Northouse, 195–256.

<sup>21</sup> Tod Bolsinger, 203, Kindle.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 34, Kindle.

realize in prayer that to work better with an Enneagram 2 committee member, some thought needs to be given to how helping others is central to the task at hand. Moving out of Illumination into Union means the pastor will creatively orchestrate the next meeting with this in mind. In the parallel pilgrim journey of Christian labyrinth walking, this stage comes after resting in the middle in prayer, in supplication, and in the silent open moment listening to God's still small voice, receiving from God those messages that can then be woven back into the fabric of congregational life. In the physical labyrinth, it involves physically walking back out of the labyrinth on the same path that brought the pilgrim to the center.<sup>23</sup> The reason a labyrinth walk fits this process well is the fact that it is unicursal, or there is only one path that leads the walker into the middle. Unlike a maze, where choices have to be made to go one way or another without knowing the outcome, in a labyrinth, the one path leads the pilgrim in and back out without getting lost along the way. In facilitating a paradigmatic shift in church culture toward intergenerationality, this is extremely helpful as a metaphor. Moving forward toward intergenerationality is the goal, or middle, and along that path experiments with trial and error will undoubtedly happen, but it will still lead to the ultimate goal.

Church leadership can only transform itself through learning more about who they are, how they were made and what impacted their formation, and how this in turn informs their relationship to the church in the world. It also has a parallel corollary to understanding who the church is in terms of its congregational DNA, how it got to that point, what impacted their congregational zeitgeist through time, and how that in turn affects constituent membership. Taken altogether, it really is an application of group

---

<sup>23</sup> Artress, 29.

spiritual formation. Before tackling what, exactly intergenerational formation is and how to do it, it is helpful to creatively redefine spiritual formation through an additional lens.

### **Spiritual Formation Redefined**

“Spiritual” and “Formation” together have a specific connotation, but an understanding of these two separately before moving forward provides a deeper engagement when reweaving them back together. Consider the image of a woven rug. Weaving rugs involves warp—longitudinal threads/yarn running up and down—and weft—lateral threads/yarn holding the others together. Using the weaving analogy for the concepts of “human spirit/spirituality” and “formation/development/transformation,” an emerging woven pattern is quite complex. It reflects deep foundations that inform spiritual and relational personhood.

Once we realize that it is spirit that defines our self at the deepest levels of our being—that spirit enables us to offer our whole selves to the activity of leadership, to connect to others richly and rewardingly, and to give us deep sources of meaning—then we begin to understand its relationship to leadership and its importance.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, spiritual transformation and relationship reveal interrelatedness.

Gordon D. Fee observes “spiritual” as defined by the Bauer-Danker Lexicon of the Greek New Testament refers to a classic Greek understanding, “pertaining to spirit as inner life of a human being.”<sup>25</sup> What is missing from this definition is a recognized

---

<sup>24</sup> Russ S. Moxley, *Leadership and Spirit* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Bauer-Danker Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, “Spiritual,” quoted in Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 37.

divinely implanted spark within each human being. This spark is often referred to interchangeably as either “spirit” or “soul.”

Returning to the image of a woven rug, the human spirit/soul represents multiple threads coming down the warp. Theologically, this comes from Genesis: “So God created humankind in [God’s] image, in the image of God [they were created]; male and female [God] created them” (adapted for inclusivity).<sup>26</sup> To simplify, God’s divine sparks are the “down” pieces in the weaving. “Down” because for the theological model being built here, God has implanted a tiny seed of God’s very nature within every human being.

From there, each “seed,” to continue the metaphor, requires nurture. In the church, and in religious education, this nurture is formation: “Formation requires submission to the Spirit, humility of the mind and heart, and space for solitude, reflection, and accountability.”<sup>27</sup> Formation, then, is the weft: lateral threads holding together the warp. Lateral because most formational experiences happen within the context of community: a combination of church, Christian education, family, public or private school, and work. Together, the resulting image and metaphor is a woven cross.<sup>28</sup>

To continue the weaving analogy, this author combined Eugene Peterson’s definition of spiritual formation with Charles Kannengiesser’s, as noted in chapter 4: Spiritual formation is primarily what the Spirit does, forming the resurrection life of Christ in us, that we might reflect the radiance of Christian faith community practice in

---

<sup>26</sup> Genesis 1:27.

<sup>27</sup> MaryKate Morse, “Evangelism, Discipleship, and Spiritual Formation: Which is What?” Missio Alliance, accessed April 5, 2018, <http://www.missioalliance.org/evangelism-discipleship-and-spiritual-formation-which-is-what/#.Wsa7my-IMbQ.facebook>.

<sup>28</sup> For a visual representation, please see Appendix B.

daily life.<sup>29, 30</sup> In essence, each child of God reflects the visual image of a metaphorical woven rug cross in daily life. This becomes the foundation for intergenerational Christian formation. Intergenerational Christian formation reflects the central interconnectedness of spiritual community—of all ages—in religious growth toward Christlikeness in Christian community.

### **Intergenerational Christian Formation (IGCF)**

Intergenerational Christian Formation (IGCF) is intentional educational and worship formation group experiences geared toward engaging multiple generations in their faith journeys together. This looks like all generations interacting together in church and out of it, growing together in mutuality, accommodation, reciprocity, inclusivity, and equity as a community. Successful IGCF ministry would be evidenced by the development of a stronger body of Christ, an ongoing growth of regular participation in church by younger generations, and a deeper developing faith for all ages. For the purposes of applying this study, the main marker of success in becoming more intentionally intergenerational would be mainline protestant congregations in the Pacific Northwest, such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), experiencing revitalization resulting in younger generations attending and engaging in worship, education, fellowship and mission across generational divides. However, to do that, models of teaching, that is,

---

<sup>29</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 237.

<sup>30</sup> Greenman and Kalantzis, 63.

applied learning theories, need to be focused through a lens of what I will call “intergeneragogy,” or “the art or science of teaching intergenerationally.”

### **Intergeneragogy: The Art or Science of Teaching Intergenerationally**

Teaching intergenerationally means five key markers are present at each formational activity or practice: mutuality, accommodation, reciprocity, inclusivity, and equity. When all of these are present, a cohesive quality of communal shared practice emerges. These markers can be used as a check-off list when planning each experience of intergenerational formation, be it worship, fellowship, missional outreach, or education.

Andrew Achenbaum writes, “Faith-based communities should do more to promote intergenerational activities in outreach and in educational settings. They should provide opportunities for newcomers of all ages to find an appropriate niche regardless of their date of birth.”<sup>31</sup> Beckwith (children’s ministry) and DeVries (youth ministry), from chapter 3, and now Achenbaum are all touching on a felt pedagogical need to find ways to pass on the faith that are engaging, alluring, and able to produce long-term disciples.

Despite DeVries and Palmer’s updated edition for Family Based Youth Ministry in 2004 offering an “implementation strategy” for family-based youth ministry—this is by definition intergenerational formation—missing from DeVries’ 1994 edition, there is still a gap. DeVries offers one way to do youth ministry counter to the prevailing silo effect of formation in “youth group” without re-entry into the greater body of Christ in

---

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Achenbaum, “How Theory-Building Prompts Explanations about Generational Connections in the Domains of Religious, Spirituality, and Aging” in *Kinship and Cohort in an Aging Society From Generation to Generation*, ed. Roseann Giarrusso and Merrill Silverstein (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 205.

the Church. Longitudinally, even another fifteen years after the second edition, youth ministry is still struggling to keep younger people involved in church after high school graduation. Briefly unpacking the five markers for intergenerational formation reveals what is needed to make it work.

**Mutuality.** Mutuality means there is no hierarchy of power, instead there is mutual exchange. Mutuality is being transformed by one another. In *Divine Dance*, Richard Rohr wrote, “Human strength admires autonomy; God’s mystery rests in mutuality.”<sup>32</sup> In Rohr’s contemplation of the Trinity, he has identified the relational nature of God, Spirit, and Christ as a three-way triad of self-emptying love—“perfect given-ness toward the other.”<sup>33</sup> Since human beings are made in the image of God, the argument is that human beings are designed to interrelate in the same way. Despite the scriptural teaching that humanity was made in God’s image, this is not easy for humanity. Yet the beauty of being made in God’s image is that humanity was made to be in relationship with others in communities of practice. In context, old are learning from young, young are learning from old, and each is enriched by spiritual growth with and through one another.

**Accommodation.** Accommodation is giving up something of one’s place in order to enter into and learn from another’s. In order to allow openness to spiritual transformation, spiritual growth, even discipleship for that matter, one has to be able to step outside of oneself and participate in and with others at differing points along the journey of faith and life. It may mean sitting in worship coloring with a grandchild and

---

<sup>32</sup> Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 59.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.



asking questions about a Bible story instead of resting serenely in a pew while a preacher's voice drones on overhead. It may mean being in "big church" with the grown ups to get a sense of the rhythms of corporate worship instead of leaving for "children's church" where playing with various plastic toys is the draw after a brief retelling of a scripture story. It might mean bringing early childhood education materials into corporate worship for all ages.

**Reciprocity.** Reciprocity is the actual give-and-take marking the process of mutuality and accommodation. It means all parties are willing to give up personal journey space for another's to walk along in community together. It means all parties bring something to the table that others can learn from and appropriate for their own journeys.

**Inclusivity.** To engage in authentic intergenerational experiences, the first three markers have to be in evidence. The next step is to be intentionally inclusive. This has various levels of meaning, but each require the need to be found played out through multiple representatives of two or more groups of differing people in one place at one time.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, for an authentic experience of congregational intergenerationality, representatives of the whole spiritual community must be present, regardless of age or stage of faith development.

**Equity.** Like it sounds, each age and stage represented by members of the spiritual community must have an equal place. For example, contrary to a traditional rectangular table for fellowship activity after worship, round tables bring an equality to everyone sitting, with no implicit hierarchy or pecking order of who sits at the "head" and who sits "next to" the head person at the table and so on. It also means an equal share in

---

<sup>34</sup> Allen and Ross, 21.

each of the above identified markers of mutuality, accommodation, reciprocity, and inclusivity from birth to age 92 and beyond.

*Deficiencies for Intergenerationality in Age-segregated Spiritual Formation*

Youth ministry, children's ministry, and even adult ministries in traditional age segregated program sized churches and larger have all, to some extent, failed to take into account these markers of intergenerationality. In this instance, smaller family-sized churches, defined as 120 members or less, have a slight advantage in that they operate with a degree of intergenerationality already in place. It can be enhanced with intentional enrichments to the overall curricular approach (not curriculum, necessarily) to the community's practices in worship, fellowship, mission, and education.

Returning to where this chapter began, the importance of leadership and staff in paradigm shift is substantial. Once a pastor, leadership team, or pastoral team has engaged in the transformation of expectations and self, what the worshiping community looks like in a truly intergenerational formation oriented space becomes revitalized. Resting in this new mode of being is similar to resting in the center of the labyrinth. Reintegrating these learning pieces into the full life of the Church is walking back out to implement and renew congregational existence.

The next step is then integrating it into the whole fabric of the worshiping community, facilitating and supporting congregational systemic change. This is mirrored in the walk out of the labyrinth, as the paths that have been trod before become remade into something new with the added insight of congregational transformation as the goal.

The next section identifies arguments used against intergenerational ministry, followed by strategies to assist changing a congregational mindset in favor of intergenerational ministry.

### *Against Implementing Intergenerational Ministry*

Discussed above was the “first level” leadership implementation strategy for systemic change: transforming leadership itself. This means examining preconceived notions of how one is a pastor or leader of the congregation and how ministry is conducted for the purposes of transformation and spiritual growth, and it requires personal investment in changing oneself. Once this is under way, the next step is to pursue it at the congregational level.

At first, leadership may espouse the idea of intergenerationality, without fully grasping what that means in terms of pushback from congregational participants. This occurred with one youth ministry practitioner in the Pacific Northwest. Returning from a conference for youth ministry where intergenerationality was presented with enthusiasm, attempts were made to implement events of a more intergenerational nature. It met with resistance, not from leadership, but from participants. After a few more attempts, efforts were then abandoned.<sup>35</sup>

This is a classic example of how an adaptive challenge defeated an attempt to change a cultural mindset, a change in the systemic status quo. Even the most enthusiastic

---

<sup>35</sup> Protecting anonymity, this account is an illustration used in Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 177–78.

leaders still may find change at the congregational level a slippery slope or even an uphill battle. Often the first sign of resistance—or sabotage, in leadership theory—happens from the volunteer congregational lay leaders—volunteer parents or teachers: “We’ve never done it this way!” Pushback from constituents then becomes the primary challenge moving toward congregational systemic change. Here are four arguments against intergenerational ministry likely to occur, adapted from the example above:

1. Teens may complain that “youth group” is no longer just for them as they want to be singled out as “special” in some way.
2. Parents of students who are unable to attend intergenerational events express guilt and/or frustration with additional time commitments.
3. Some key volunteers in either youth or children’s ministries may not like working with older or younger ages, being “used to” the ages they have “specialized” in as volunteers and thus skip intergenerational events.
4. Older adult ministry volunteers may not wish to re-enter the world of working with children and youth, preferring instead to pursue their own perceived “age-appropriate” formational practices.

These four arguments against shifting paradigm to a more intergenerational approach in ministry can become a challenge to leadership trying to effect change. At this point, leadership has to take a hard look at its commitment to intergenerationality in the church and congregational change. Repetition of the leadership’s intergenerational ministry vision is key to “living into” a new ministry paradigm, but the reality is that at first it may initially experience “loss.” This occurred in one congregation implementing

“Festivals of Faith,” one of several intergenerational ministry programs.<sup>36</sup> However, as the congregational leadership “stayed the course,”<sup>37</sup> it eventually experienced an upswing in participation and dedication from the whole spiritual community.<sup>38</sup> This leads to the crux of the matter regarding congregational shift to intergenerational ministry: although introducing a congregation to intergenerational ministry is somewhat easy, “building a permanent culture of intergenerational cooperation...is not.”<sup>39</sup> Several variables affecting the move to a more permanent cultural change can be observed through the lens of generation theory.

*Additional Considerations by Generations Entering Their Leadership Years*

For a Gen X-influenced hearer, everything is suspect; belief in the vision, no matter how many times it is heard, does not happen with repetition unless lived out by the leadership/spokespeople of the vision and results in genuine, authentic, observable change from the “way it was” to something better. It has to be seen to be believed and experienced as positive to Gen Xers for them to adopt it. For example, for leadership to tout a new intergenerational study where Silent, Boomer, and Gen Xers will together examine leadership roles found in the Bible as a means to positively impact the

---

<sup>36</sup> An initial 7 percent drop in religious education the first year was followed by an increase of Mass attendance after inception of the program and has resulted in a much stronger community according to the source. Reviewed by Annemarie Scobey-Polacheck in “Come One, Come All.”

<sup>37</sup> Bolsinger, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Scobey-Polacheck.

<sup>39</sup> Drew Zahn, “Connecting the Generations: How Churches Are Building and Sustaining Age-Integrated, Multi-Generational Ministry (The Underparented Generation),” *Leadership Journal* (Spring 2002): 40–42, <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A96626960/AONE?sid=lms>.

congregational life requires more than a study; it requires activity in realized change from the status quo. A Gen Xer with time may attend the first or first and second study, but talking about it has to be met immediately with how it will impact working with others in the church with realized examples and opportunities to try it out.

Millennials, on the other hand, are more willing to take a look at a broken system for quite a bit longer before coming to a decision to either do something about it or invent something new. Some examples observed by this author: Sunday school? Not the answer. Dinner Groups around themes of loss of a loved one? Good to go.<sup>40</sup> Worship in the pews with traditional musical offerings? Can be boring, especially if any aspect is sub-quality, especially music. Informal worship in the park, coffee shop, or around a campfire? Better.<sup>41</sup>

It is not particularly clear why these alternate gatherings draw so much more enthusiastic response than a church function. One reason may be the allure of something “outside” the walls of the church and its institutionalized feel. For example, the sense that church suppers in an uncomfortable and sterile-feeling fellowship hall just do not cut it for the depth of intimacy craved by younger people. Remember the largely self-absorbed parents? Intimacy is a dear need, and healing the wound of nuclear distance means recreating a “nuclear” feel in a new and healing way: gathering in a person’s home around some semblance of a “family table” fellowship begins to do that. For the avid outdoors enthusiast, Nature itself, and the intimacy of the campfire setting is a compelling alternative witness to God’s grandeur than the inside of a church building.

---

<sup>40</sup> See “The Dinner Party,” an organization of 20–30 somethings dealing with loss of loved ones, accessed October 17, 2019, <https://www.thedinnerparty.org/about>.

<sup>41</sup> The author was invited to “take church up to the lake” with a group of 30–40-year-olds who go camping regularly during summer weekends instead of attending church.

The following generation's leading edge—the "iGen" or Generation Z—is just now entering college, and their leadership years are just around the corner. Younger members of the cohort are in late elementary, middle, and high school. All of them are still in the process of formation. At all levels, their teachers are key because of the importance of relationships and their life stage of dependency. Knowing these generational characteristics is very helpful when faced with integrating intentional intergenerational forms of ministry. It will necessitate some adaptive solutions all through the congregational system from leadership on down to support of the whole congregation. However a long, hard, and difficult pathway forward it may be to shift to an intergenerational paradigm, it is important if the goal is transformed, engaged younger generations in a revitalized church.

### *Implementing Intergenerational Ministry*

The challenge defined by this dissertation is passing on the faith to younger generations missing in the church. Attempts to provide temporary technological fixes will most likely fail. One example of a technological solution applied to this challenge is illuminated this way, "How will we make church relevant to new generations?" "Hire a new Educator!" The challenge is to change a cultural ecclesiastical mindset, not a staff person. Just changing a staff person without changing the systemic structure is incomplete.

From another perspective, consider the challenge a leadership team facing shrinking membership, class sizes, and youth attrition may require of a Sunday School

coordinator, whether paid or volunteer: “Make Sunday School better!” This question gives rise to a richer, although lengthier, process: discern the problem facing formational ministries and the church as a whole. Then, engage and synthesize experimental multidisciplinary and intergenerational approaches.<sup>42</sup> Evaluate them. Finally, if successful, apply them to the whole church. This is a different process and outcome than attempts in the past several decades. Comparing some technological fixes in the past will assist envisioning the difference adaptive solutions could make.

### *A Review of Shifting Ministry Experiments*

Gradual modifications in Christian education over the last seventy years have been technological fixes: from wooden desks and chairs to plastic (1950s–1960s), the 1960s Coffee House movement to Bean-bags on the floor in church “Youth Rooms” (1970s). Carpet squares in a circle were popular (1980s–1990s). Then some alternative cultural shifts brought about round café tables that seat four to six with a staffed, quietly running espresso bar in the back corner and table tent questions for discussion openers (2000s). All of these occurred in parallel with the rise of service-learning mission trips as well as camp and conference ministries resulting in short-term community living through experiential dislocation.

Each of these technological solutions are still in evidence across churches in the Pacific Northwest. While they are still being modified and/or utilized with younger

---

<sup>42</sup> For a summary discussion Daniel Kahneman’s System I/System II thinking, see Erik Johnson, “Thinking Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman,” *Erik Reads and Writes* (blog), April 6, 2014, <https://erikreads.wordpress.com/2014/04/06/book-summary-thinking-fast-and-slow-by-daniel-kahneman/>.



generations today, there is ample room to enrich and grow ministry incrementally through the process of adaptive experiments in intergenerational formation. Some of them may fit better within the context of an intentionally intergenerational Christian formation endeavor. Ultimately the goal of all of these solutions, whether technological or adaptive, is to revitalize the church, with a positive corollary of addressing aging declining congregations and engaging younger generations in long term faith formation.

In the final chapter, the author of this dissertation offers examples of practical experiments in his congregation that have been levered toward a shift to an intergenerational mindset for ministry. To get there, he has attempted to orchestrate smaller steps in congregational paradigm shift over the course of three years. The following section will illuminate these smaller steps.

### **Congregational Steps Toward Intergenerationality**

The first step is similar to the labyrinth metaphor for personal transformation in chapter 4: several things have to “die,” or be purged from congregational collective memory as “how things are/were always done.” Since the last Sunday school teacher to have taught in the congregation is still living and a faithful attending member (at 89 years of age), I was able to learn how Sunday School previously existed. Remembering the “good old days” when the congregation had a “one-room” Sunday school every week, I learned that because the congregation is small and rural, the Sunday school was in effect a mixed-age experience, helping to foster acceptance of additional new ideas in intergenerational ministry. For larger church contexts, it would be a worthy pursuit to

research if an intermediary step from age-segregated Sunday school offerings to mixed-age would work longitudinally to assist paradigm shift toward an intergenerational mindset overall.

Today in the church I serve, there is no separate Sunday school hour, nor even a partial “children’s church” time when younger children are excused from worship to engage in more “age-appropriate” experiences elsewhere during the time of a usually adult-centric sermon. There is only the “worship hour.” Consequently, I re-organized the physical sanctuary space in an effort to be more welcoming to children and youth. I have also begun to experiment with alternatives to traditional sermons designed to engage multiple generations.

To keep initial “risk” low for older congregants, I began an incremental change several years ago. I included in the back of the sanctuary a child-sized table with lectionary-inspired activities, as opposed to “activity bags” used in larger churches. A congregational volunteer coordinates the activity and prepares the space for the beginning of worship. Children may work on their various activities for voluntary sharing later in the service. During Sunday worship, I offer a children’s message and interact directly with the children either on the front steps or at the children’s table. This year I moved the table from the back of the sanctuary to in the middle of the pews to bring younger attendees closer to the weekly rhythm and movements of each time of worship together, and more into the midst of the whole family of God. Now, the parents, and in some cases grandparents, have the option of sitting right next to their children or grandchildren while their activity is taking place if they are choosing to engage in the materials provided. There is also the choice to simply stay with their grown-up in the pew and work on a

clipboard, since the children's table and chairs are really designed for early childhood ages.

A second step was to introduce the idea of intergenerational ministry altogether. To do that, I offered a brief presentation on generation theory during fellowship time after church, introducing the different generations currently living and some of their salient characteristics. One of my regular Gen X visitors really engaged the material, became an official member of the congregation, and now helps to plan the church's activities as a member of the Intergenerational, or IG, Team.

To set up success for intergenerational formation integration, the third step was to engage an intentionally intergenerational task force to attend a regional multi-church gathering on intergenerationality designed to be spread over the course of one year's time. This cohort has been meeting for eight months as of the writing of this chapter, studying elements of intergenerationality, reviewing case studies of intergenerational experiments, and offering collegial support for ongoing experiments in intentional intergenerational formation at each church's context. From this task force emerged the intergenerational ministry team, the IG Team mentioned above.

Simultaneously with this year of study and preparation, I have been modifying elements of worship with children and youth in mind. I have invited them to be full participants in liturgical movements from pouring of baptismal water to collecting coins in our "joy jar", offering prayers during the prayers of the people, and even sometimes expanding the "children's message" to replace the more traditional adult-centered sermon. This final step is the most challenging to adult participants in service. To carry it out, I have experimented with creative biblical storytelling paired with intentional

intergenerational dialog as part of the response to the proclamation. This often looks like a modified *Godly Play* lesson with congregational “I wonder” questions discussed intergenerationally. Another week I invited a master of fine arts painter to offer a “live studio” visual representation of the biblical text as I read it slowly in a *lectio divina* style and offered a short interpretive reflection.

These and additional experiments in case study format are analyzed in more detail in chapter 6, with my critique considering whether or not these efforts actually do and will contribute to increased participation in congregational life by younger generations. Ultimately, only a longitudinal study of ongoing such experiments will help determine the level of revitalization an intentional IG approach may be as a viable path forward arresting denominational decline for the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest.

## CHAPTER 6: CASE STUDY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter explores and analyzes applied integrated intergenerational Christian formation practices within the context of a small rural church that does not have age-segregated Sunday School of any sort in place on Sunday mornings. That said, additional areas to consider for larger churches will be mentioned in context below. Areas to include are: Christian education, organized fellowship, enrichment programs, and missional service. Each would be intentionally intergenerational spiritual practices in the life of the congregation. The claim is that all areas of the church's life together are vital for being formed in and passing on the faith to subsequent generations and require multiple generations present for faith transference to occur. Questions this case study proposes follow.

First, would a more intentional intergenerational Christian formation style of engagement develop a stronger body of Christ and a deeper developing faith for all ages? Second, could more intentional intergenerational Christian formation experiments in small church contexts, if successful, be applied to larger church contexts successfully? Third, would intentionally integrating more intergenerational Christian formation practices result in higher retention rates for younger generations in membership of mainline Protestant churches such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest?

Evaluation of a systematic implementation of Intergenerational Formation, or IG, long-term in small church contexts is still needed. Through interdisciplinary lenses of generation theory, chapter 2, applied learning and leadership theories; chapter 3, and

spiritual formation practices and the biblical witness; chapter 4 it was hypothesized that successful faith transference was missing from mainline Protestant churches such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) for specific reasons relating to the interplay of these theories. Chapter 5 proposed intergenerational Christian formation practices to offer a means to revitalization of congregational life intergenerationally as a means toward arrest of denominational decline. Specifically for smaller church contexts, if they do not include Sunday school, models will need to be pursued to determine if IG experiences within the context of worship alone is sufficient for success. “Success” in this case is a sustained ability for older generations to be able to pass on their faith and for younger generations to remain engaged and growing in their faith within the context of the church.

From the limited experience of the author in the specific context of his smaller rural church, there is still the problem of getting young families with children and youth to actually be in the church building on a regular basis for regular IG experiments to take place and have an effect.<sup>1</sup> If there is no commitment from younger families to be there on a weekly basis then limited data or longer-term evaluation of this can be accomplished. When they do come, there has been positive feedback on almost all levels, including new younger families’ enjoyment of being there. IG examples conducted in the author’s church will be described below.

---

<sup>1</sup> Some additional reflections pertaining to the author’s specific experience will be revealed in the Critical Analysis section, below.

## Process for Implementing IG Experiments

The process I used to explore integrating IG more fully into the life of the congregation began with incremental steps. This means I started with adding a children's table in the sanctuary itself, in the back, so the whole family could remain in worship together. Then I began to introduce additional elements of intergenerationality into the service, from participation in movements of the service to transformation of the proclamation/sermon to be more age inclusive. Evaluation of each incremental addition toward intergenerationality initially was geared solely to whether or not the church worship service would begin to see younger families and children coming to Sunday morning worship on a regular basis. A yet-to-be-determined longitudinal evaluation will need to be designed to determine if the impact of these IG experiments will have planted seeds of faith that transfer from older generations to younger generations over the lifetime of those present, resulting in committed membership in the church in later years.

I have employed a variety of resources, models of teaching, and applied learning theories. For example, the sanctuary space was physically reconfigured to be more inclusive of all ages within the context of a worship service. Second, children and youth are intentionally invited to participate in the movements and liturgies of the worship service. Third, specific methodologies that have broader age-specific points of entry to engage multiple generations together are utilized, such as modified *Godly Play* format sermons or artistic and musical interpretations of scripture. While it would have been incredible if I had been able to address all three questions above in each experiment, the process has been more incremental, resulting in some experiments meeting multiple research goals while others were less broadly oriented.

### Applied IG Experiments Described

The little white church in the mountains used as an illustration throughout this dissertation is the congregation this author currently serves. The entirety of orchestrated formational experiences only takes place once a week during Sunday morning worship, roughly an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and a half. Semi-regular additional offerings include special guest speakers on adult topics of interest to the community once a month during the program year, September through May. I am usually not present for these, as they occur in the middle of the week, in the evenings and I live 90 miles from the community and have young children of my own with bed time routines to keep and school nights to hallow.

With this limitation, I have had to experiment with IG practices solely within the context of worship on Sunday mornings. The experiment I most enjoyed was combining elements of traditional worship with elements of *Godly Play*,<sup>2</sup> a Montessori-inspired early childhood religious education model developed by Jerome and Thea Berryman, I modified their approach to fit the whole-church family within the context of Sunday morning worship for all ages. This has not always been fully intergenerational by definition of the five elements described above, but I'm working on it.

In addition to the following experiments for intentional IG, I have also attempted to orchestrate additional alternative proclamation enrichments. For example, the Master

---

<sup>2</sup> Jerome Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*, rev. ed. (Denver, CO: Morehouse, 2009).



of Fine Arts member putting together an illustration during reading of Scripture and following commentary of the passage. Another example would be allowing for artistic endeavors of all people by including clipboards on each pew with colored pencils for individual artistic response to the material presented in scripture or commentary.

### **Methodology**

For a stretch of time beginning in Lent in spring 2019 through early fall we integrated intentional intergenerational practices in our worship service about once or twice a month. There was increased attendance, engagement, and participation of a new younger family made up of three of the younger generations examined above; at an educated guess, they comprised a Gen X father, a Millennial mother, and several iGen children. There was a brief break in their attendance during soccer season, but during late fall and early winter their attendance picked up again.

It is hard to determine if our experiments actively engaged all ages, deepening their faith through this stretch of time, particularly as surveys conducted before and after to assist with analyzing levels of faith development were not utilized, an oversight on my part. I have not seen any such instruments; so one suggestion for further research is the development of such instruments. They could be utilized before and after a concerted effort of IG integration for a sustained period of time, thereby providing more concrete comparison data.

The intended outcome of my experiments was to create an alternate learning/worship environment with a mixed-age assembly made up of both nuclear

family relationships and extended church family relationships. To make it successful, resulting in true intergenerational Christian formation for the congregation, there has to be at the least, as described in chapter 5, mutuality, accommodation, and reciprocity, if not inclusivity and equality as well. Revealed in my examples and analyses below, more still needs to be done.

*Liturgical Season: Lent and Easter*

**Implementation of March 24 Experiment.** The brief sermon set up, prepared, and launched an in-sanctuary intergenerational discussion among attendees. Requesting intentional formation of intergenerational discussion groups in situ, text from Luke 13:6–9 and the following questions were offered to the congregation. The discussion ended with prayer.

**Questions for Reflection.** Luke 13:6–9 tells the story of a fruitless fig tree that the owner is ready to cut down. The gardener, however, asks for a little more time. The gardener wants to tend and cultivate the soil in the hope that figs may yet grow. The gardener is open to a different future for this tree, in spite of its present condition.

1. Think about my own life, or the life of someone I love, in relationship to this story: What needs special tending?
2. What will cultivate the “soil” of daily life so that new growth, new possibilities, might emerge?
3. What can I learn from this gardener about allowing for a different outcome, a new possibility?

**Findings.** Several of the older congregation members who have been supportive of intergenerational work and past experiments expressed appreciation. A new family visited this week with three children of elementary school age and one middle school-aged child, as well as the pastor's 8-year old son. All of them participated in the intergenerational discussion groups during the "Proclamation" part of the service.

Additional intentionally integrated intergenerational and inclusive worship modifications:

- iGen or Alpha 8-year-old was trained by a 92-year-old GI Generation member before service to be the acolyte and fulfilled that role for service;
- Same 8-year-old passed the "joy jar" with a 70ish-year-old Silent Generation member for loose change for missions with each joy shared;
- Same 8-year-old held the baptismal bowl in his hands while Gen X pastor poured the water into it during the Assurance of Pardon;
- Hebrew Scripture was read by a female Boomer Gen. member;
- Psalm Reading was read by male Gen X pastor;
- Pastor read *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth*<sup>3</sup> up front with the children on the steps, and Alpha and iGen children minus the middle school aged youth attending sat up front to see the pictures as the story was read;
- Gospel was read by a female Silent Gen. member;
- Sermon included a brief introduction by Gen X pastor then intentional IGCF small groups for five to seven minutes, followed by sharing of each group's discussion;

---

<sup>3</sup> Douglas Wood, *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA: Candlewick, 1999).

- Offering conducted by 92-year-old GI Gen. Usher; and
- For after Church Visitations, Gen X pastor and 8-year-old son visited a Gen X horse boarder, a home-bound early Silent Gen, a Silent Gen. mother and Boomer daughter, a GI Gen. couple, their son (Early Boomer), his daughter (Gen X or Millennial, not sure which) and his granddaughter (iGen) at their home. Then Gen X pastor and son had dinner with an early Silent Gen. member. At the last three visits, the pastor had to share the news of one of the congregational member's passing—a previously very involved Silent Gen. lady who lost her husband the previous summer.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? Yes. Was it successful? It did generate repeat attendance by the new young family and their children. Additionally, two adult generations expressed how meaningful the experience was.

**Implementation of March 31 Experiment.** Acolyte was 92 years old, worship assistant was a Boomer, the Gen X pastor was assisted by one of the iGen children during pouring of the water into the baptismal font during assurance of pardon.

**Findings.** Sunday, March 31, 2019 brought the same younger family to church for the second time: they brought one of their older youth, who also brought a friend from the community.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? No. It was more of a multi-generational experience. Was it successful? It did generate repeat attendance by the new young family and their children, who seemed to enjoy participating as they were

asked. In my opinion, there was not enough involvement by youth and not enough engaging elements for children. Mutuality was not in evidence. Sermon was adult-centric and not interactive. Reflecting on if a congregational member willing to “adopt” the children’s corner in the back to bring some more intentional connections to the rest of the service to make sitting through a “grown-up” sermon and flow of service, I have to conclude that this still would not be IG. It would be more “parallel play,” or multi-generational but not intergenerational.

**Implementation of April 7 Experiment.** Sunday’s sermon was a Godly Play<sup>4</sup>-inspired story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. To make it intentionally IG, the pastor planned to have all younger children invited forward to see the story unfold with the materials, while the youth and adults present would have been asked to move so all could see the visual presentation. Unfortunately, there were no children or youth in service. There were only twelve adults in attendance, the youngest at about sixty years of age, which up until recently was the norm. The pastor went ahead with the IG sermon as planned, placing it up on the Communion table facing the congregation so all could see from their seats without needing to move as some have mobility issues. The pastor followed the story with a few appropriately adult-oriented comments and observations about the text.

**Findings.** As disappointing as it was to have planned for a specific outcome in terms of projected attendees, I was not actually disappointed. With practice and appropriate materials, it could be possible to rotate in a Godly Play-inspired sermon on a more regular basis. There may not be a “target” IG audience on any given day; but there

---

<sup>4</sup> Anna Thomas, “Godly Play Foundation,” Godly Play Foundation, accessed October 27, 2019, <https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/>.

are always at least two other generations present beside myself: the Boomer and Silent generations.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? Yes. Was it successful? Actually, yes. Two members of different generations approached me afterward and complimented my IG attempt at biblical storytelling.

**Implementation of April 14 Palm Sunday Experiment.** The young family returned, and I had all three of my own Alpha Generation children present. Throughout the service, I invited children into participation of liturgical movements. Once again a child held the baptismal bowl while the pastor poured water into it. The youngest Alpha Gen. child present carried the missional “joy jar” around at the sharing of joys, and maracas were offered to the children to shake during the sung response to the assurance of pardon.

**Findings.** All the children present, even the middle school youth, came forward for the children’s time. They enacted Jesus entering Jerusalem on the backs of donkeys with older congregational members participation shouting “Hosanna to the Son of David.” Then they returned to the back of the sanctuary and marched in with loud steps to simulate the Roman legions entering Jerusalem from another direction. The sermon was more traditionally adult-oriented, but even the youth seemed to be engaged.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? Yes. Was it successful? Yes. Feedback from regular church attendees was positive, especially that the

new younger family seemed to be coming regularly. I thought I did everything just right for an intergenerational Palm Sunday celebration.

**Implementation of April 18 Maundy Thursday Worship with Foot Washing Experiment.** Thinking ahead to the potential for more interaction to be intentionally intergenerational, the IG Team and I planned a special service for Maundy Thursday with multiple generations in mind. Those in attendance included three Gen X members (one couple and the pastor), three Silent Gen. members, and four or five Boomers. All but two participated in the foot washing ceremony; all participated in Communion. Readers included the Gen X couple, one Silent, and one Boomer. A female Boomer was worship assistant to balance the male Gen X pastor.

**Findings.** From my initial perspective, this was a crushing defeat of intergenerationality. From the perspective of the participants, it was deeply meaningful. No children were present at this mid-week worship experience, and two Silent generation members did not want to do the foot washing. To my mind, this meant IG criteria were not met. This prompted me to reflect on what, exactly, I was thinking about for a “successful” application of intergenerationality.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? Yes. Was it successful? Yes. Upon rumination, I concluded that my hoped for outcome was faulty in that I was focusing on inclusion of Millennial and younger members, wishing for a much broader generational representation and involvement. However, the service was successful for the three generations present, and therefore it met IG criteria.

**Implementation of April 21 Easter Experiment.** The Easter sermon was a Godly Play-inspired story of the risen Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene. Two smaller children came forward to the steps to watch the story unfold. Older students chose to remain in the pews with their parents. At the end of the presentation of the story, “I wonder” questions were offered about the story, then the children were invited back to sit with their grown-ups and form intentionally intergenerational small groups to offer additional “I wonder” questions anyone might have with one another. After two minutes of lively discussion, the time was brought to a close by prayer.

**Findings.** The young family that had been attending semi-regularly did not come to Easter service. The children that were present were there because they were made to go “because it’s Easter and that’s what we do”—go to church on Christmas and Easter with very few visits in between. Only a few of the “regular” adult attendees expressed appreciation for the alternative proclamation of the Easter story.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? An attempt was made. Was it successful? It’s hard to tell. I thought this format for a service that is normally a “high holiday” for the church could have been incredibly impactful for younger people—once again misplacing my hoped-for outcome to mean “Millennial and younger.” Upon reflection, perhaps the issue of survival of the church by membership and attendance increase might need to be excised from the real reasons behind planning and carrying out intergenerational ministry. If the real focus were growth in spiritual formation for all present coupled with an outward missional focus in serving and loving the community in response, then that is enough and fulfills the Lord’s command to love



God and love your neighbor as yourself. Increase in membership and attendance, if realized, would simply be a healthy by-product.

*Liturgical Season: Ordinary Time or Time After Pentecost*

**Implementation of June 30 Experiment.** Sermon time during the service was given over to an experiment in modified “Messy Church.”<sup>5</sup> This involved creating “stations” around the sanctuary and outside in the nearby picnic pavilion behind the church fellowship hall with different activities related to the lectionary scripture readings for the day. A lay female Boomer leader gave some reflection points in a more traditional presentation to an adult group of the congregation, a female Gen X member facilitated a craft illustrating one of the scripture passages, and a few other options were outlined and attendees were invited to follow their interest in a self-directed encounter with the texts; e.g. quiet reflection outside in the pavilion within hearing of the creek for creation awareness, or modified self-directed *lectio divina* reading of texts.

**Findings.** With the different stations available, populations self-selected based on interest. What really happened was that adults who wanted a “sermon-like” message all went back to the back and sat down to listen. Kids and youth went forward to the crafting station to make illustrations of one of the Bible stories. Others chose to sit and not engage, and one or two went outside to just sit, listen, and be quiet.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? No. This did not

---

<sup>5</sup> “Messy Church USA | Fresh Ideas for Building a Christ-Centered Community,” accessed October 27, 2019, <https://messychurchusa.org/>.

meet criteria described above for true intergenerationality as it was more of a multi-generational endeavor without mutuality, reciprocity, or much accommodation. Was it successful? Somewhat. It did invite inclusion for all the ages present with the different offerings, but what could have been done better was to bring the whole body back together and weave together all the observations and activities in a more intentionally intergenerational way for the whole assembly. The few children did go and make creative crafts related to one of the scriptures and were able to share them with the congregation at the conclusion of the experiment. A few of the older members with mobility challenges did not get up to engage, and one that prefers quiet and solitude went outside on his own. The lay leader offered few but very salient reflection points on one of the texts. More intentionality is needed for this mode of IG experiment, including inclusion of less-mobile members. One way to do this would be to ask the less-mobile members which station they would like to participate in and then hand them the station sign, inviting other interested in that station to join her/him so movement is reduced to a minimum.

**Implementation of August 4 Experiment.** This was more of a passive experiment than an active one. I invited a professional Boomer artist member, who is also a Commissioned Ruling Elder trainee, of the congregation to paint a vision of one of the scripture readings in the context of worship. She agreed, reluctantly, since for the past five years she had been experiencing “artist’s block,” or an inability to produce her art. She chose vibrant pastel drawing instead of paint, but the easel was set up in front of the sanctuary, and she began the drawing as I began a slow deliberate reading of Hosea 11:1–11. Throughout the reading of the passage and following commentary a compelling visual picture emerged. The artist actually continued work on it through the end of

worship; finally concluding after coffee fellowship was finished. She confessed later being asked to do the work in front of the congregation in the context of worship healed her block and opened up her creativity, so for her it was an incredible blessing.

**Findings.** The congregation was spellbound by the process of the picture emerging before their eyes. For me, the pastor reading the text, I intentionally chose to stay somewhat “hidden” behind the easel so the focus would be on the artwork, not on me reading. The rest of the worship service was a little awkward for me to lead since the artist was still painting past the time I thought it would take to finish the work. Consequently, I learned that if I want to do that kind of visual presentation again, I would need to plan and orchestrate the service differently to include extra time for the artist.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? No. Was it successful? Yes. This experiment was a joy to engage in, but also lacked, in my first opinion, intentional intergenerationality. It occurred on a Sunday no youth or children were in church, but did include three other generations. In my opinion, it would be considered multi-generational as opposed to including the marks identified above for IG. To make it fit IG requirements, an intentional intergenerational debrief about the experience after the artist had completed her work would have been a good way to “inter-generate.” Informally, some of this occurred during the “fellowship hour” after church, as the artist was finishing her work in solitude, but more intentionality coupled with engaging the author herself in dialog about the work would benefit a similar alternative proclamation in the future.

**Implementation of August 18, 2019 Experiment.** With new audio equipment being tested for the first time to assist aged congregational member hearing, a traditional worship service format took place. Two of the pastor's Alpha children assisted with the baptism bowl during the assurance of pardon and the "joy jar." Two additional younger children were present, one Alpha Gen. left part way through the service with her Millennial dad. The other was the pastor's youngest, also Alpha Gen., 4 years of age—sometimes clinging to my leg, sometimes running to the back to color at the table in the children's corner.

Hebrew Scripture reading was given twice, once reading it from the pulpit Bible, the second time in the context of the Children's Moment, which was a modified Godly Play-inspired story presentation. Besides the pastor's three children, a guest from out of town walked in off the street to try out the Presbyterian Church and the two national staff of the Presbyterian Church (USA)—IG cohort facilitators from the Office of Formation—were present for an on-site visit to assist with their ongoing effort understanding a small church's context for applied IG.

**Findings.** To attempt to make the experience intentionally IGCF, during the "I wonder" questions after the Godly Play story, I invited the children to go back and sit with their grown-ups to come up with some additional "I wonder" questions, or to just offer observations of their experience with the story. To date, there has not been much feedback on that Sunday's experiment from the national staff observers or other members present.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? Sort-of. Was it

successful? I am not sure. There has been surprising silence after that story and the visit of the national staff observers. To make it more intentionally IG, one idea would be to have pre-printed questions for small groups to ask one another in a discussion format after the “I wonder” questions at the end of the story. These questions would have to be geared toward all ages and abilities to answer to meet the first three IG requirements.

**Implementation of September 29, 2019 Experiment.** A creation-themed Sunday was planned with the IGCF team, with a “Blessing of the Pets” service to follow after church. Time was given for families to go home, eat lunch, and bring back their pets. For morning worship, the Communion Table was down front, on level with the pews. I presented the story of Creation, using texts from Genesis 1:1—2:4b. Modified from the Godly Play story for worship with young children, I retold the story with each of the seven days represented by a different symbolic tile, laid down on the table as the story unfolded. At strategic points in the beginning and throughout, I addressed the entire congregation—the youngest at age 4 through the eldest at 92—inviting engagement and responses to questions. For the “I wonder” questions at the end, again I addressed the whole congregation, and gave several minutes for participants to come up with their own “I wonder” questions to share with their pew neighbors or in family groups. The sermon was concluded with prayer utilizing some shared responses from the small groups. Later, at the Blessing of the Pets, many families brought their animals for a brief blessing ceremony. Songs were sung, scripture read, and prayers for pets were offered.

**Findings.** This format seemed to work fine with all ages engaged in the biblical storytelling. Even younger attendees seemed to be able to engage at some level the

symbolic understanding of the symbols on each tile. There was a slightly more lively discussion time than the previous Godly Play experiment.

**Analysis.** Did it meet IG specifications, with at least Mutuality, Accommodation, and Reciprocity present with an attempt at Equality and Inclusivity? Yes. Was it successful? Yes, in as much as the entire body present was engaging with one another across generations both with the story, the meanings behind it, and some of the questions raised. This time, when I pulled in observations from each small group after the discussion time, it seemed to help tie everything up together.

### *Larger Sized Church Contexts*

I would like to return to discussion of applicability to other church contexts. Would the same style of IGCF experiments work in larger church contexts and prove successful? Preliminary responses by leadership in larger church contexts within the intergenerational formation learning cohort<sup>6</sup> my church is a member of seem to indicate a much harder transition. Intentional intergenerationality within both Christian education programs as well as worship is harder to introduce, gain momentum with, and provide hard data assisting in understanding its impact when the corporate structure of larger church organizations.

---

<sup>6</sup> Cascades Presbytery Intergenerational Formation learning cohort is made up of ten churches in our region and one from Eastern Oregon Presbytery. We have met monthly in video conferences and twice in person on retreat at Menucha Retreat and Conference Center. Each participating church also receives individual coaching from one of our facilitators by video conference with regards to their specific context. Churches participating range from family sized churches such as the twenty-three-member rural congregation referenced in this study to program sized churches with regular Sunday School hour offerings to corporate sized churches with multiple services on Sunday and throughout the week. We are members of a closed FaceBook group for ongoing interaction and support: Cascades Cohort for IG Formation.

Additional implementation of this research in multiple church contexts would be beneficial for ongoing study. To spread this process and study, some examples might include formulating this material into sets of approachable presentations, offering them in a workshop series or retreat format to other congregational leaders and interested parties, and intentionally targeting an audience of intergenerational teams for each represented church. With the additional insight from chapter 5 that pastors and key congregational leadership have to be involved and on board, I draw the conclusion that it is imperative for them to be members of this team and open to creative proclamations of our faith stories.

Next, each church would then have to return to their congregational contexts and implement both short- and longer-term IG experiences. Appropriate pre-and post- testing instruments would need to be created and administered. Creating these instruments would be an incredible boon to further researchers. Ideally they would determine quantitatively and qualitatively if intentional integration of IG practices results in higher retention rates for younger generations in membership of mainline Protestant churches such as the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest.

### **Alternative Experiments in Other Contexts**

#### *Urban*

Undoubtedly, my experiments in the small rural church context are only one approach moving forward. Another example I discovered that bears ongoing monitoring

in the future as a model for IG experimentation is in the context of an urban setting: A traditionally liturgical Presbyterian Church (USA) in the Pacific Northwest utilized a community center model to revitalize its ministries.

A church that had drastically declined from a thriving, multi-generational, program sized church at 350–1,500 members in its heyday shrunk to a family sized church, made up of about eleven to thirty-five older-generation official members, not all of which could even make it to church on Sundays. Their leadership deliberated on whether to close its doors but instead chose to take a leap of faith. It became a center of hospitality through entrepreneurial partnerships. The church invited multiple nonprofit rental interest groups with broadly compatible Judeo-Christian values to be housed in the old education wing.

The old chapel adjacent to the sanctuary became the hub of this community center style outreach and housed the Bell Tower Café. Bell Tower Cafe hosted a new Sunday morning coffee house service with regular attendance of twenty to thirty. Other aspects include use as an event space; music lessons; spiritual counseling with broadly Judeo-Christian compatible foundations; and a weekly sing-along music program for parents of preschoolers. The church has also hosted informal “pub theology” gatherings at various nearby microbreweries. Depending on perspectives inside and outside the organization, this has been both successful and stressful, the crucible of their contextual ministry or an experience of flitting nonconformists with no real commitment.

At my last observation in 2013—before serving my current church—neither the coffee house service nor the traditional service had families with young children in it on Sunday morning, though the coffee house service was double the later traditional service



in attendees. However, the interest groups housed in the old education wing had mid-week activity that included many young families engaging their services.<sup>7</sup> Since that time, the church has experimented with mid-week evening prayer services, which I have not been able to attend for observation and comparison, so I am unsure of their attendance or demographic data.

For this urban setting experimental worshiping community, to move intentionally toward an IG culture, it would need to integrate the mid-week families and children into weekend services and vice-versa for the older generation members that only come on Sunday. That would be their first step.

There is still the question concerning larger churches that have traditional Sunday school offerings in age-segregated or somewhat age-blended contexts already in place. Would integrating an intentional IG mix of experiences increase participation and engagement of younger generations in the church, and more importantly, would the faith of the older generations be transferred to the younger resulting in a growth of disciples and ultimately stem attrition from the church? Intergenerational attempts at Christian education have occurred in the past at larger churches. The following section illuminates one of them.

---

<sup>7</sup> Observations of the author upon anonymous visitations throughout the past three years. The most recent visit revealed a music for parents and young children (preschool-aged) activity led by two skilled musicians. An estimated forty attendees, including the children, were present.

*Suburban*

Sharee and Jack Rogers catalog their attempt<sup>8</sup> at making intergenerational experiences an additional program offering during a traditional “Sunday School hour” time frame from September through May. Families in their church expressed a wish to be together interacting in class, with some exceptions in youth who opted for peer-group choices instead. They used an “all five senses” approach in learning to engage the whole person, designed to respond to the whole context of their lives as a family, outside and inside the church.

Orchestrating an environment that fostered intentional interaction between children and adults, they gathered both crafting materials and manipulatives for all ages to encounter or play with in a new way, following specific themes. They decorated the learning space artistically to assist with appropriating a weekly discussion topic.<sup>9</sup> This early experiment in IG practices in the church reflects another contemporary expression, *Messy Church*.<sup>10</sup>

Eventually, participants were encouraged to bring their own questions and interests to the class, utilizing educational theory’s learner-directed discovery. They started with visuals, or sight encounters, then added others senses bit by bit. When they added smell, they brought in incense, flowers, and baking bread. Bread also introduced

---

<sup>8</sup> Sharee Rogers, *The Family Together: Intergenerational Education in the Church School* (Los Angeles: Acton House, 1976).

<sup>9</sup> Vygotsky’s environment as the third teacher.

<sup>10</sup> In *Messy Church*, an international movement, thematic centers are the norm. Instead of quiet sanctuaries, play spaces with manipulatives and crafting supplies for children and all those who may be young at heart, no matter what age, are the environment of choice as a worshiping community. “Fresh Ideas for Building a Christ-Centered Community,” Messy Church USA, accessed October 27, 2019, <https://messychurchusa.org/>.

taste and tactile exploration as they made it together and baked it. When they came to adding sound, they brought hymns and music that was played during their gathering. The facilitators chose discussion topics and questions thoughtfully to engender the beginning of conversations reflecting the day's theme. As part of the process, each gathering had a project, so the families had to work together on something for the whole group, which they then were able to take with them, building scaffolding between concept and practice on an intergenerational level.

When the Rogers evaluated the experiments, they observed that participants were more open to the Holy Spirit and to Christ's leading as all ages in the family experienced being loved and listened to. They also discovered that participants felt positive about being a part of a learner-directed process. They were able to influence the direction of each week's topic, exploration, and discovery. Through their yearlong study, the Rogers identified specific attitudes that assisted with success:

1. Being people-oriented
2. Having everyone participate, even the facilitators and their children
3. Being open and accepting of everyone just as they were. In terms of classroom management during these experiments, this meant offering alternatives, reconciling relationships, facilitating forgiveness, and modeling lessons that applied scripture to life
4. Cooperating, not competing, is a group value focus with each project as criticism crippled and cooperation enhanced community and increased acceptance

5. Being open to appreciate all God's good gifts. This means accepting each other, their families, their church, and the world
6. Emphasizing learning, not teaching.

As a model for intergenerational formation, their experiments illustrated a project-based, hands-on experiential approach. Thematic in nature, it utilized the environment as the third teacher with learner-directed inclusivity. In this author's experience as a camp/retreat leader for over a decade, how they managed it in their setting is similar to how a team building approach is utilized when working with new groups. They moved from low-risk engagement in the beginning to higher-risk engagements in terms of vulnerability. They did it over the course of the year in hour and half weekly increments whereas in camp/retreat ministry we do it over the course of three to four intensive days altogether. This approach assisted with formation moving at a pace that did not go too deep too fast, which would have scared away "once a week" participants for sticking with it for the full year's experimentation.

Ultimately, the Rogers concluded their version of IG was contextually relevant to the felt needs of their demographic. Some specific challenges exist today, however, that would need to be managed if a similar experiment were to take place now. Namely, how would an encounter model like this work in the digital age? "Own interests" could mean withdrawing into a corner to play on a digital device. Or to do "personal research," ultimately not interacting with mutuality and reciprocity with other intergenerational participants in the room. Managing this challenge as an "accommodation" would be an important variable, and may look like a firm rule that digital devices be turned off for the duration of class.

Contemporary examples outside the Protestant mainline church exist as well. Despite some mixed reviews by participating congregations,<sup>11</sup> curriculum has been generated and implemented for around a decade in some Roman Catholic parishes. However, for these contexts, experiments in IGCF that have been positive so far still have to be evaluated for longer-term ongoing Christian maturation and involvement of graduates in their spiritual communities. No such longitudinal reports have yet to be forthcoming.

### **Critical Summative Analysis**

One hoped-for outcome for applied IG practices is that small or shrinking protestant mainline congregations would see an revitalization of their worshipping community resulting in an upswing in younger generations. This would be evidenced by an increase in instances where all generations would be seen interacting together in church and out of it. The corollary to deepened discipleship of all ages ultimately points to a hope for growth of membership stemming denominational, or at least congregational, decline. Through the course of this study and research, it has become apparent that changing the lens from one of survival interests to one of deepening disciples of all ages would be helpful.

---

<sup>11</sup> One such example that has been implemented in Catholic parishes in recent years is the Generations of Faith curricular approach. It has had mixed reviews, depending on the theological perspective of the one reporting. See “An Analysis of the Catechetical Program ‘Generations of Faith,’” accessed September 4, 2019, [http://www.catholicmediacoalition.org/analysis\\_generations\\_faith.htm](http://www.catholicmediacoalition.org/analysis_generations_faith.htm). The training manual for this curriculum is in print form: John Roberto, *Generations of Faith Resource Manual: Lifelong Faith Formation for the Whole Parish Community* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2005).

According to McIntosh, Smothers and Smothers, an intergenerational research team on next generation church research, if survival is the lens, the church's attempts to grow are likely to fail. If growing disciples and looking outward in missional activity is embraced, an upswing in congregational vitality and even growth is more likely to occur.<sup>12</sup> With this in mind, a more nuanced question needs to be raised: Does a more IGCF style of engagement integrated only into an hour to hour-and-a-half worship gathering on Sunday morning develop a stronger body of Christ, an ongoing growth of regular participation in church by younger generations, and a deeper developing faith for all ages?

If so, one difficulty I have working in my current context reflects back to the research above on the importance of intergenerational relationships in spiritual formation. I do not live in the community wherein the church sits, so I do not have ongoing relationships with constituents throughout the course of the week. As a Stated Supply pastor, defined in our denomination as a temporary position usually with a one-year contract at a time, living over ninety miles away from the community, I am only in the community on Sundays, with some stay-over occasions through Monday morning. In my opinion, for this church to grow further into the intergenerational model espoused throughout this project, the pastoral leadership will need to be someone who lives in the community. Ideally, s/he would be willing and able to engage in relationships throughout the course of the week in all aspects of community life together, especially as this relates directly to the youngest, and missing, generations in the church. S/he might volunteer at the one K-12 school for starters!

---

<sup>12</sup> Lia McIntosh, Jasmine Smothers, and Rodney Thomas Smothers, *Blank Slate: Write Your Own Rules for a Twenty-Second Century Church Movement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), x.

Identified above is the need for a pastoral presence to live in the community itself for further application and growth into an intergenerational model of ministry practice. To that end, I initiated the steps needed for one of the Ruling Elders on Session who had expressed interest in preaching to begin what my denomination designates Commissioned Ruling Elder training. This training comprises some academic coursework paired with practical mentoring to train a local lay leader to assume all the roles and duties of an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament, without having to go through an accredited PC (USA) seminary and pass the denomination's five ordination exams. To date, she has completed the academic piece and nearly completed her mentorship with another female pastor. She has substituted for me on numerous occasions with successful andragogical teachings. One area of growth for her would be expanding her substantial andragogical abilities to include children's and youth involvement.

When recruiting a team from the congregation to join me in a presbytery-wide pilot program for an intergenerational formation learning cohort, I made sure to invite both the youngest (and newest) member of the congregation (Gen X member) along with the aforementioned Commissioned Ruling Elder in training (a Boomer) to join me in representing the congregation. While slowly gaining interest and gaining ground, there is still more work ahead to truly integrate intergenerationality within all aspects of the worshiping community.

To date, the younger family that brings around four to six children has been coming fairly regularly considering their generational demographics in contrast with weekly attendees and the official church membership roster. They attended about four to five times throughout the summer. During the fall they began to be more regular until

soccer season. The family and youth have requested an instigation of a youth group paired with service once soccer season ends. Encouragingly, they have been back this winter and invited another family to come with them. A third young family has now attended a few times since Christmas. I have asked the intergenerational team of lay leadership to explore DeVries and Palmer's 2004 edition (eBook 2015) of *Family Based Youth Ministry*,<sup>13</sup> Allen and Ross's *Intergenerational Christian Formation*,<sup>14</sup> and Allen's *InterGenerate*,<sup>15</sup> an anthology of IG literature, to equip themselves in making this a truly intergenerational endeavor.

During fellowship/coffee hour on several occasions, two of the members of the church, one of the oldest Early Silent Generation members and the youngest/newest official congregational Gen X both came up to me and said they thought the intentional changes to welcome multiple ages in worship and fellowship have been going very well. It seems to have been a draw for the younger family, and at least some of the older members of the congregation are in favor of the modifications to worship that have been taking place as intergenerational "experiments."

Further research that could follow this study has been mentioned in passing above. First, a longitudinal study of integrating IG in mainline Protestant congregations of the Pacific Northwest, with an eye to creation of a measurement instrument or technique useable to gage whether faith transference between generations increases after

---

<sup>13</sup> Mark DeVries and Earl F. Palmer, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), ProQuest.

<sup>14</sup> Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Holly Catterton Allen and Jason Brian Santos, eds., *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018).



implementation or not. Second, if a stepwise shift from age-segregated Sunday School to multiple pods of mixed-aged Sunday School classes would be a successful interim step in moving a program sized church toward the cultural shift needed for intergenerationality. Third, would be specific development, implementation, and evaluation of an Enneagram integration method for transformation of leadership teams, and/or whole congregations for personal and communal group spiritual formation and growth. Finally, a much longer longitudinal study of IG programs and whether or not it increases retention of younger generations past the threshold of “graduation” of youth is needed.

There is one more set of variables not fully addressed in this dissertation which came to light in the author’s research. There has been considerable work done in the United States and Canada in the area of attribution theory and the secularization debate. According to some researchers members and clergy of churches that are declining blame/attribute their decline to forces outside their control. It is postulated by both Flatt, Haskell, and Burgoyne<sup>16</sup> and McMillan<sup>17</sup> that a self-fulfilling prophecy takes over, keeping these declining churches locked in a vicious cycle of further decline. Members and clergy of these churches then unwittingly support an overall view of increasing secularization.

On the other hand, members and clergy of churches that are growing observe that declining churches are not being effective enough in their ministry models, and tend to attribute the growth of their churches to more of a “supply side model,” meaning they are

---

<sup>16</sup> Kevin N. Flatt, D. Millard Haskell, and Stephanie Burgoyne, “Secularization and Attribution: How Mainline Protestant Clergy and Congregants Explain Church Growth and Decline,” *Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 1 (February 28, 2018): 79. <http://academic.oup.com/socrel/article/79/1/78/4563828>.

<sup>17</sup> Steve McMullin, “The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches,” *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 1 (2013): 54–55.

more nimbly able to make internal changes to attract congregants to their way of doing things. Their positive outlook also becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, offering the opposite of a vicious cycle, called a “virtuous cycle.” While this also echoes an acceptance of secularization, there is an important additional consideration embedded within it: that church is another product of market economy with stronger programs, worship, and preaching, leading to a stronger church.

What was revealed in the Flatt, Haskell, and Burgoyne work referenced above, however, was a trend in more theologically conservative churches to follow the supply side model, and to embody a slightly more secularization resistance outlook. This was paired with growth. More moderate to liberal theological spiritual churches tended to be in decline. One potential reason is that fundamentalism is on the rise—churches that embrace ambiguity and wrestle with meaning do not give hard and fast answers in an age of rapid changes when a growing number of people are actually looking for hard and fast answers as a reaction to rapid changes all around them. Pursuing additional studies in these areas could offer additional insights to compliment church paradigm shift to intergenerationality.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 1 began by identifying a challenge facing mainline Protestant congregations: regular and progressive declining membership. Examining underlying factors showed that younger generations in particular were greatly reduced or absent altogether from involved church membership. Factors relating to faith transference from

generation to generation became the focus of research, resulting in inquiry through the lenses of generation theory, leadership and educational theories, spiritual formation, and intergenerational formation practices. Discovered in the process or research were multiple complex variables. How generation types shift through generational cohorts and life stages revealed patterns of communication and leadership affecting faith transference, church vitality and denominational decline.

Chapter 2 examined generation theory in more detail, including identifying specific generational characteristics impacting faith transference. Within the cycle of four Turnings, two generation types generate cyclical peaks of a particular stretch of societal ethos. The Civic and Idealist types (First and Third Turnings), through their leadership years, take on and broadly characterize what happens in society as a whole, with each peak spanning approximately forty years. Whenever the Idealist generation type reaches their leadership years, the four-generation pattern seems to herald the Third Turning societal upheaval, which gets reflected in the church. Whenever the cycle returns to the leadership years of a Civic generation type (First Turning), that generation's characteristics shape around half a century's worth of what the whole of the United States culture looks like, including religious leadership and the ethos of congregational life and structure.

Chapter 3 examined educational and leadership theories and their effect on faith transference between generations. It was revealed that educational models established during the birth and expansion of Sunday school have prevailed down to the current generational configurations. Examination of the youth group movement and subsequent

silo effect of the ages during spiritual formation and Christian education revealed a difficulty with integrating all the generations together in a whole family of faith.

Chapter 4 revealed biblical examples of intergenerational formation from the times of the early church, a model that has been lost in post-modern age-segregated educational and spiritual formation. Illustrations of the importance of intergenerationality in light of faith transference were described. The adaptive challenge of paradigm shift within the culture of congregational life was identified, revealing a need for transformation of the whole congregation.

Chapter 5 showcases the crossroads of theory from each of the previous chapters discussed and offers two examples for practical application of transformation to effect congregational change. The first step is inner transformation of the leader or leadership team of the church. Effecting personal change to allow and engender a broader formational model of intergenerationality then is modeled for the rest of the congregation. One step-by-step process is described for subsequent congregational transformation.

This chapter delivered practical examples of experimental intergenerational formation practices adopted by the author's church for further analysis, evaluation, modification, and adoption by leadership of small churches. Further research is suggested for larger church contexts. In the end, this dissertation has been about exploring if intentional intergenerational Christian formation is of benefit for the ongoing growth and development of all faith seekers and questioners with the hopes that younger generations will embrace it and begin showing up. Undoubtedly, intentional intergenerational

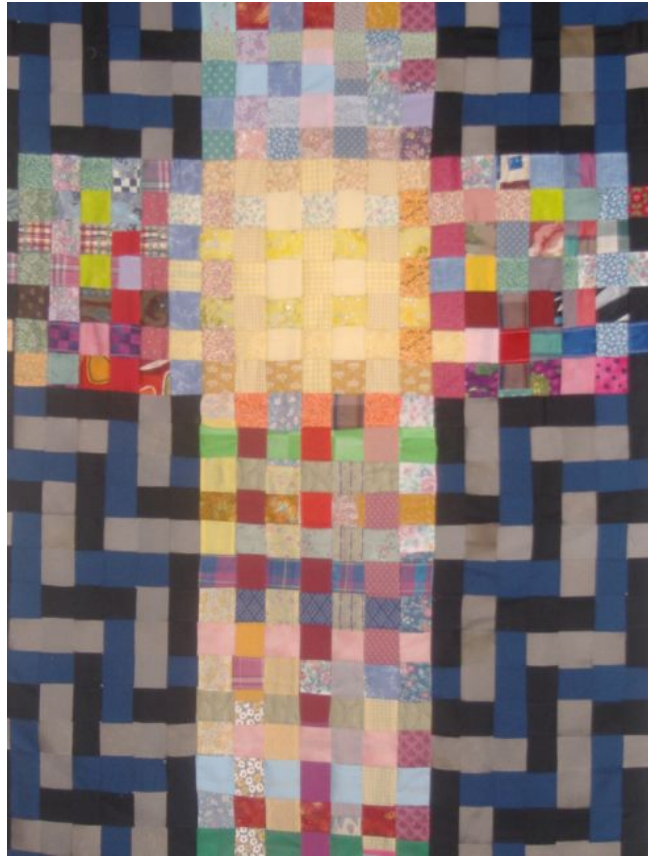
Christian formation has proven to be impactful. Go, therefore, take, and adopt this material for your own context and InterGenerate!

## APPENDIX A: MODEL OF MENUCHA ROSE GARDEN LABYRINTH



This computer-generated drawing by the author is a unique design incorporating elements of two labyrinths into one. Found on the grounds of Menucha Retreat and Conference Center in Corbett, Oregon, this author helped to design and install it. The physical labyrinth is pictured at: <http://menucha.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Luminaria-walk-for-Family-2012.jpg>.

## APPENDIX B: WOVEN PATCHWORK CROSS



This woven patchwork tapestry is located at Northminster Presbyterian Church in Chattanooga, TN, a Presbyterian Church (USA) congregation. Pictured on their website, <https://northminsterchatt.org/>.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Achenbaum, Andrew. "How Theory-Building Prompts Explanations about Generational Connections in the Domains of Religious, Spirituality, and Aging." In Giarusso and Silverstein, 205.
- AGS Info. *Bring Back the Table - Leonard Sweet (Tabor e-Lab #6)*, n.d. Accessed April 25, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=389RR-DjB4g&feature=youtu.be>.
- Allen, Holly Catterton, and Christine Lawton Ross. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012.
- Allen, Holly Catterton, and Jason Brian Santos. *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018.
- Alper, Becka A. "Millennials Are Less Religious than Older Americans, but Just as Spiritual." *Pew Research Center*, November 23, 2015. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/23/millennials-are-less-religious-than-older-americans-but-just-as-spiritual/>.
- Artress, Lauren. *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice*. Rev. ed. New York: Riverhead Books, 2006.
- Azevedo, Marcello de C. "Basic Ecclesial Communities: A Meeting Point of Ecclesiologies." *Theological Studies* 46 (1985): 602.
- Barna Group. "Atheism Doubles Among Generation Z." *Barna Group*. January 24, 2018. <https://www.barna.com/research/atheism-doubles-among-generation-z/>.
- Barna Group. *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*. Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2018.
- Beckwith, Ivy. *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2004.
- Berryman, Jerome. *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*. Rev. ed. Denver, CO: Morehouse, 2009.
- Bolsinger, Tod. *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018. Kindle.



- Bradley, Randall C. *From Memory to Imagination: Reforming the Church's Music*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012.
- Brown, Sarah. "How Generations X, Y, and Z May Change the Academic Workplace." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 64, no. 4 (September 22, 2017): 11–19. EBSCOhost.
- Carroll, Jackson, and David Roozen. "Congregational Identities in the Presbyterian Church." *Review of Religious Research*, 31 no. 4 (1990): 351–69.
- Carter, Christine Michel. "The Complete Guide to Generation Alpha, The Children Of Millennials." *Forbes*. December 12, 2016. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinecarter/2016/12/21/the-complete-guide-to-generation-alpha-the-children-of-millennials/>.
- Chechowich, Faye. "Intergenerational Ministry: A Review of Selected Publications Since 2001." *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 182–93. ProQuest.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy, and Ron Foster. *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Trending for Youth Ministry*. Nashville, TN: Upper Rooms Books, 1998.
- DeVries, Mark. *Family-Based Youth Ministry: Reaching the Been-There, Done-That Generation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- DeVries, Mark, and Earl F. Palmer. *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004. ProQuest.
- Eeman, Carl G. *Generations of Faith: A Congregational Atlas*. Bethesda, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002.
- Evans, Hugh. *What Does It Mean to Be a Citizen of the World?* N.d. Accessed April 23, 2019. [https://www.ted.com/talks/hugh\\_evans\\_what\\_does\\_it\\_mean\\_to\\_be\\_a\\_citizen\\_of\\_the\\_world](https://www.ted.com/talks/hugh_evans_what_does_it_mean_to_be_a_citizen_of_the_world).
- Flatt, Kevin N., D. Millard Haskell, and Stephanie Burgoyne. "Secularization and Attribution: How Mainline Protestant Clergy and Congregants Explain Church Growth and Decline." *Sociology of Religion* 29, no. 1 (February 28, 2018): 78–107, <http://academic.oup.com/socrel/article/79/1/78/4563828>.

- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Anniversary special ed. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018.
- Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Revised ed. edition. HarperOne, 1995.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Rev. ed. New York: Continuum, 1993.
- Gangel, Kenn, and Charles R. Swindoll. *Ministering to Today's Adults*. Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 1999.
- Giarrusso, Roseann, and Merril Silverstein, eds. *Kinship and Cohort in an Aging Society From Generation to Generation*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.
- Gould, Meredith. *Transcending Generations: A Field Guide to Collaboration in Parishes*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2017. ProQuest.
- Grant, J. Tobin. "Measuring Aggregate Religiosity in the United States, 1952–2005." *Sociological Spectrum* 28, no. 5 (July 31, 2008): 460–76.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02732170802205973>.
- Greenman, Jeffrey P., and George Kalantzis, eds. *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.
- Guite, Malcolm. *Word in the Wilderness: A Poem a Day for Lent and Easter*. Norwich, Norfolk, UK: Canterbury Press, 2014.
- Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.
- Harkness, Allan G. "Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church?" *Religious Education* 93, no. 4 (1998): 431–47.
- . "Intergenerationality: Biblical and Theological Foundations." *Christian Education Journal*. Last modified March 22, 2012.  
<http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A289360000/AONE?sid=lms>.
- Henry, George. *Malcolm Shepherd Knowles a History of His Thought*. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2011.
- Howe, Neil, and William Strauss. *Millennials Rising: The Next Generation*. 3rd ed. New York: Vintage, 2000.

- Hunter, James Davison. *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press USA - OSO, 2010. ProQuest
- Johnson-Miller, Beverly C. "Conversational Teaching and Christian Transformation." *Christian Education Journal; Glen Ellyn* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 378–91. ProQuest.
- Joyce, Bruce R., Marsha Weil, and Emily Calhoun. *Models of Teaching*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2004.
- Knowles, Malcolm S. *The Adult Learner*. 7th ed. New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012. <http://georgefox.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=680833>.
- Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. *Ministering Cross-Culturally: An Incarnational Model for Personal Relationships*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.
- Little, Sara. *To Set One's Heart: Belief and Teaching in the Church*. Atlanta, GA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983.
- Mabry, John R. *Faithful Generations: Effective Ministry across Generational Lines*. New York: Morehouse, 2013.
- Manglos - Weber, Nicolette D., Margarita A. Mooney, Kenneth A. Bollen, and J. Micah Roos. "Relationships with God among Young Adults: Validating a Measurement Model with Four Dimensions." *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 2 (2016): 193–213.
- Magnus, George. *The Age of Aging: How Demographics Are Changing the Global Economy and Our World*. New York: Wiley, 2008.
- McIntosh, Lia, Jasmine Smothers, and Rodney Thomas Smothers. *Blank Slate: Write Your Own Rules for a Twenty-Second Century Church Movement*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019.
- McMullin, Steve. "The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches." *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 1 (2013): 58.
- Mead, Margaret. *Culture and Commitment: A Study of the Generation Gap*. London, United Kingdom: Bodley Head, 1975.
- Moxley, Russ S. *Leadership and Spirit*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.
- New Games Foundation. *The New Games Book*. Garden City, NY: Dolphin Books, 1976.
- Newby, Jim. "The Promise and Purpose of Love and Belonging in Shaping the Spiritual Destiny of Sixth Graders." DMin diss., Portland Seminary, 2019. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/308>.

- Newell, J. Philip. *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1997.
- Niekerk, Marsulize van, and Gert Breed. "The Role of Parents in the Development of Faith from Birth to Seven Years of Age." *HTS Teologiese Studies*. Last modified June 1, 2018. <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A544314118/AONE?sid=lms>.
- Nyhuis, Terry L. "Aging Baby Boomers, Churches, and the Second Half of Life (Challenges for Boomers and Their Churches)." DMin diss., Portland Seminary, 2016. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/13>.
- Northouse, Peter G. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. 7th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015.
- Ota, Carrie, Cynthia F. DiCarlo, Diane C. Burts, Robert Laird, and Cheri Gioe. "Training and the Needs of Adult Learners." *Journal of Extension* 44, no. 6 (December 2006). <https://www.joe.org/joe/2006december/tt5.php>.
- Pazmiño, Robert W. "Christian Education Is More Than Formation." *Christian Education Journal; Glen Ellyn* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 356–65. ProQuest.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015.
- Peterson, Eugene H., and Peter Santucci. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places Study Guide*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Pew Research Center. "America's Changing Religious Landscape." Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, May 12, 2015. <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.
- . "The Age Gap in Religion Around the World." Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, June 13, 2018. <https://www.pewforum.org/2018/06/13/the-age-gap-in-religion-around-the-world/>.
- . "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, October 17, 2019. <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.
- . "Mainline Protestants Make up Shrinking Number of U.S. Adults." Pew Research Center. Accessed October 15, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/18/mainline-protestants-make-up-shrinking-number-of-u-s-adults/>.

- . “Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of ‘Nones.’” Pew Research Center. Accessed October 23, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>.
- Plass, Richard, and James Cofield. *The Relational Soul: Moving from False Self to Deep Connection*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014.
- Pohl, Christine D. *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011.
- Rice, Howard L. *Reformed Spirituality: An Introduction for Believers*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991.
- Riso, Don Richard, and Russ Hudson. *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types*. 3rd ed. New York: Bantam, 1999.
- Roberto, John, and Mariette Martineau. *Generations of Faith Resource Manual: Lifelong Faith Formation for the Whole Parish Community*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2005.
- Roberto, John. *Generations of Faith Resource Manual: Lifelong Faith Formation for the Whole Parish Community*. Twenty-Third Publications, 2005.
- Rogers, Sharee. *The Family Life Together: Intergenerational Education in the Church School*. Los Angeles: Action House, 1976.
- Rohr, Richard, and Mike Morrell. *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016.
- Root, Andrew. *The Relational Pastor: Sharing in Christ by Sharing Ourselves*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013.
- Root, Andrew, and Kenda Creasy Dean. *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011. ProQuest.
- Salkind, Neil J. *Encyclopedia of Educational Psychology*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2008.
- Schachter-Shalomi, Zalman. *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older*. New York: Grand Central, 2014.
- Schlosberg, Jeremy. “My Generation!” *MEDIAWEEK*, July 15, 1991. <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A10992221/AONE?u=newb64238&sid=AONE&xid=6b0f888d>.

- Schwartz, Richard C., and Martha Sweezy. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press, 2019.
- Scobey-Polacheck, Annemarie. "Come One, Come All." *U.S. Catholic*, Chicago, IL, (June 2008). ProQuest.
- Seemiller, Corey, and Meghan Grace. "Generation Z: Educating and Engaging the Next Generation of Students." *About Campus* 22, no. 3 (July 1, 2017): 21–26. <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/abc.21293>.
- Seymour, Jack L. *Mapping Christian Education: Approaches to Congregational Learning*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Smit, Tori. "Intergenerational Worship." *The Presbyterian Record* 140, no. 10 (2016): 3, 32–35.
- Smith, Christian, and Patricia Snell. *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Smith, David I., and Susan M. Felch. *Teaching and Christian Imagination*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016.
- Smith, Gordon T. "Generation to Generation: Inter-Generationality and Spiritual Formation in Christian Community." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 182–93.
- Snailum, Brenda. "Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry Within Existing Evangelical Church Congregations: What Have We Learned?." *Christian Education Journal; Glen Ellyn* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 168. ProQuest.
- Soto, Luis. "Team Approach to Ministry: Effective Strategy against Pastoral Burnout." ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2015. ProQuest.
- Stabile, Suzanne. *The Path Between Us: An Enneagram Journey to Healthy Relationships*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018.
- . *The Path Between Us Study Guide*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018.
- Stewart, Sonja M., and Jerome W. Berryman. *Young Children and Worship*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989.
- Stone, Lyman. "The Boomers Ruined Everything." *The Atlantic*, June 24, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/06/boomers-are-blame-aging-america/592336/>.
- Strauss, William, and Neil Howe. *Generations: The History of America's Future 1584 to 2069*. New York: William Morrow, 1991.

- . *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy: What the Cycles of History Tell Us About America's Next Rendezvous with Destiny*. New York: Broadway Books, 1997.
- Tickle, Phyllis. *The Great Emergence: How Christianity Is Changing and Why*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008.
- Tickle, Phyllis, and Jon M. Sweeney. *The Age of the Spirit: How the Ghost of an Ancient Controversy Is Shaping the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014.
- Turchin, Peter. *Ages of Discord: A Structural-Demographic Analysis of American History*. Chaplin, CT: Beresta Books, 2016.
- Twenge, Jean M. *Generation Me - Revised and Updated: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled—and More Miserable Than Ever Before*. Rev. ed. New York: Atria Books, 2014.
- . *IGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. New York: Atria Books, 2017.
- Vanderwell, Howard A., ed. *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*. Herndon, VA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007.
- Whitesel, Bob. *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gap in Your Church*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God*. San Francisco: Harper, 1998.
- Winograd, Morley, and Michael D. Hais. *Millennial Momentum: How a New Generation Is Remaking America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011.
- Wood, Douglas. *Grandad's Prayers of the Earth*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick, 1999.
- Woodley, Randy. *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.
- Yılmaz, Hasan. "A Good Parent is Not Always the Parent Who Does Everything, Every Time for His/Her Child: A Study to Develop Helicopter Parent Attitude/s Scale (HPAS) / İyi Ebeveyn, Çocuğu İçin her Zaman her Seyi Yapan Ebeveyn Değildir: Algılanan Helikopter Ebeveyn Tutum Ölçeği (AHETÖ) Geliştirme Çalışması." *Erken Çocukluk Çalışmaları Dergisi; Eskişehir* 3, no. 1 (2019): 3–31. ProQuest.
- Young, Kevin. "The Efficacy of Late Antique Spiritual Practices for Family-Based Adolescent Faith Formation." DMin diss., George Fox University, 2017. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/210>.

“Young Souls in Transition: An Interview with Christian Smith” *Reflections* (Boston: Yale Divinity School, 2014). <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/seeking-light-new-generation/young-souls-transition-interview-christian-smith>.

Zahn, Drew. “Connecting the Generations: How Churches Are Building and Sustaining Age-Integrated, Multi-Generational Ministry. (The Underparented Generation).” *Leadership Journal* (March 22, 2002). <http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A96626960/AONE?sid=lms>.