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# Appreciating Every Generation: An exploration of Intergenerational Ministry and its effect on faith formation

Megan Zika

Concordia University - Portland, [megan.zika406@gmail.com](mailto:megan.zika406@gmail.com)

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# **Appreciating Every Generation: An exploration of Intergenerational Ministry and its effect on faith formation**

**A senior thesis submitted to  
The Department of Religion  
College of Arts & Sciences**

In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Religion

by

**Megan Zika**

*Faculty Supervisor* \_\_\_\_\_

**Rev. Dr. Chad Lakies**

**Date**

*Department Chair* \_\_\_\_\_

**Rev. Dr. Chad Lakies**

**Date**

*Dean, College of  
Arts & Sciences* \_\_\_\_\_

**Dr. Michael Thomas**

**Date**

*Provost* \_\_\_\_\_

**Dr. Michelle Cowing**

**Date**

**Concordia University  
Portland, Oregon  
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine you are a child once again. You are sitting in a pew at church, and you hear the pastor say to the congregation, “Let us pray,” but you don’t know what to do. You look around and make eye contact with a little old lady across the aisle; she smiles, motions for you to fold your hands, close your eyes, and bow your head. You do as she indicates and participate in the congregational prayer in the best way you can. In this manner, we all learn from those who come before us.

Imagine now that you are an adult sitting in church during a children’s sermon. You listen dutifully and enjoy seeing the children engaged in the message. Then, the pastor asks a question you don’t quite have an answer to, and one of the littlest children speaks out and shares a profound statement about God and faith that you have never thought of before. In this manner, we learn from those who come after us.

These two scenarios are the essence of intergenerational ministry - the sharing of wisdom, whether it be in teaching a little one how to pray or listening to her profound thoughts, and the promotion of faith formation in all ages because of intentional intergenerational interaction between people of faith.

According to Karl Pillemer, author of *30 Lessons for Living: Tried and True Advice from the Wisest Americans*, “this is the most age-segregated society that’s ever been. Vast numbers of younger people are likely to live into their 90s without contact with older people.”<sup>1</sup> According to Cigna’s U.S Loneliness Index, a “survey of more than 20,000 U.S. adults ages 18 years and older revealed some alarming findings: Nearly half

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<sup>1</sup>Karl A. Pillemer, *30 Lessons for Living Tried and True Advice from the Wisest Americans* (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2012).

of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone (46 percent) or left out (47 percent).”<sup>2</sup> According to the Public Religion Research Institute, “today, nearly four in ten (39%) young adults (ages 18-29) are religiously unaffiliated—three times the unaffiliated rate (13%) among seniors (ages 65 and older).”<sup>3</sup> The problems of age segregation and loneliness are very clear and very present dangers. The growing rate of those unaffiliated with the church is also very clear, thus making intergenerational ministry all the more important.

Intergenerational ministry promotes faith formation by mitigating the problems of age segregation, both in society and in the church, loneliness, and religious non-affiliation. In order to further the kingdom of God and address the lack of strong faith formation and retention in the church, I argue that, for the purpose of healthy faith formation, intentional intergenerational ministry is necessary not only on Sundays but throughout every day of one’s life.

## **Chapter 2: The Problems**

### **Age Segregation In Society**

One contemporary problem that divides, negates, and degrades the health of society is that of age segregation, and the effects of its growing prevalence in religious organizations and society are exacerbated by the ignored and unchecked aspects of the issue. It is, however, a problem that is viably solved through intergenerational ministry.

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<sup>2</sup>Ellinor Polack, "New Cigna Study Reveals Loneliness at Epidemic Levels in America," Multivu, May 1, 2018, accessed February 2019, <https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/>.

<sup>3</sup>Betsy Cooper et al., "Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion-and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back," PRRI, September 22, 2016, 3, accessed September 2018, <https://www.prri.org/research/prri-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>.

Peter N. Sterns highlights the sad reality that society faces prevalent and extreme age segregation. It is his assertion that, “there are less regular structured interactions between old and young in the later 20th Century than ever before. Not only families but also other institutions in modern society have reduced the chance for old and young to share activities in meaningful ways.”<sup>4</sup> This variety is the catalyst for the many problems society faces when age segregation is taken too far and supported too much. Sterns describes the growing issue that creates and widens the age gap and lack of structures dedicated to intentional, intergenerational interaction. His analysis, however, only scratches the surface of the momentous problems that come from too much age segregation.

Leon Neyfakh, an American author, radio host, and journalist for the Boston Globe, echoes concern that the issue of age segregation is present in more than just the church body, and the negative consequences of it bleed into society as a whole; he states, “today we divide people into generations and micro-generations almost obsessively, spending energy and marketing dollars trying to understand how millennials are constitutionally distinct from Gen-Xers. In dividing everybody into categories—twens, thirtysomethings, senior citizens—our society implicitly treats age as a force that separates us.”<sup>5</sup> Neyfakh examines the negative results that occur saying,

Among the broad societal effects that age segregation can have, experts say, is ageism, with young people regarding senior citizens as alien or feeble, and older

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<sup>4</sup>Stearns, Peter N. "Historical Trends in Intergenerational Contacts." *Journal of Children in Contemporary Society* 20, no. 3-4 (1989): 30.

<sup>5</sup>Leon Neyfakh - Reporter, "What 'age Segregation' Does to America - The Boston Globe," BostonGlobe.com, August 31, 2014, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/08/30/what-age-segregation-does-america/o568E8xoAQ7VG6F4grjLxH/story.html>.

folks dismissing younger generations as untrustworthy hooligans. “If you don’t have places where people can connect, if you have institutions that are focused on different age groups,” said Nancy Henkin, executive director of Temple University’s Intergenerational Center, an organization that promotes age-mixing, the result can be “negative stereotypes and people feeling isolated from each other.” This hurts both sides. Studies have shown that seniors in retirement homes benefit when they spend time reading to children and playing with them, while young people are given the chance to absorb wisdom and life experience.<sup>6</sup>

Negative assumptions are made by each group about the other, creating barriers to discussion, dialogue, and the sharing of wisdom; they deny each person the chance to grow and change. The sharing of wisdom and the sharing of youth, through the intergenerational interaction that is suppressed through age segregation, is detrimental to the growth of all age groups involved. It perpetuates negative stereotypes, dialogue, and experiences which aggravate the divide that already exists. According to a study in *Psychology Today*, “age segmentation fosters distrust, stereotypic thinking, and misunderstanding.”<sup>7</sup> As such, the dialogue between generations as well as decisions that affect the livelihoods of those involved are negatively impacted. Age segregation pits generation against generation in a fight for resources when it should be encouraging them to work together for mutual benefit. Wrangling for resources and creating divisions makes sharing wisdom—and imperative action—a complicated process.

Peer groups composed of those very close in age are also being denied benefits. Neyfakh explains this when he shares that, “age segregation can even have costs among more closely linked groups.”<sup>8</sup> Citing a study by husband and wife anthropologists

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Steve Mintz, "Generations Divided," *Psychology Today*, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-prime-life/201502/generations-divided>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid



Beatrice and John Whiting, that looked at age-mixing among children in six different cultures, Neyfakh notes that “older kids who spent time with younger ones learned to be nurturing, while the younger ones learned valuable lessons about how to be part of a system where they were less dominant. Kids who only played with their exact peers, on the other hand, learned to be competitive.”<sup>9</sup> The consequences of splitting people into age groups results in furthering the individualistic culture that permeates society today thus making life a competition and lone wolf journey as opposed to one within a community working together.

Neyfakh goes on to highlight the work of Barbara Rogoff, a psychologist at the University of California Santa Cruz who has studied age segregation for many years, who remarks, “we have a lot to learn from people who are in different phases of life than us.”

<sup>10</sup> It is important that we not ignore the valuable relationships that could be shared between generations and age groups; we need to nurture and encourage them to flourish. Age segregation, when taken too far, has extremely negative consequences for the whole of society in both the secular and religious world.

Age segregation in the modern world is a huge and alarming issue that continues to worsen as contact between generations dwindles. According to an article in the Harvard Business Review (HBR),

Research in 2013 from demographer Richelle Winkler shows that in the U.S., age segregation is often as ingrained as racial segregation. Using census data from

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<sup>9</sup> Leon Neyfakh - Reporter, "What 'age Segregation' Does to America - The Boston Globe," BostonGlobe.com, August 31, 2014, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/ideas/2014/08/30/what-age-segregation-does-america/o568E8xoAQ7VG6F4grjLxH/story.html>.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

1990 to 2010, Winkler found that in some parts of the country, old (age 60+) and young (age 20–34) are roughly as segregated as Hispanics and whites.<sup>11</sup>

The notion that age segregation is as deeply rooted in society as racial segregation raises the stark possibility that lack of intergenerational interaction is taking the United States down a dark and extremely negative path.

Along with the mental and emotional advantages that result through intergenerational interaction, there are fiscal advantages. Age segregation leaks into more than just the personal lives of people. It leaks into the workplace where “the average person spends more than 90,000 hours in their lifetime.”<sup>12</sup> As a result, thousands of hours of intergenerational interaction and the many benefits that come from it are denied. This, as noted in the same HBR article, speaks of the benefits experienced through intergenerational interaction in the workplace because,

Age segregation also constitutes a missed opportunity for combining the unique assets of age and youth in the workplace... Two management school professors found that an age-integrated assembly line resulted in improved productivity, reduced absenteeism, and fewer defects. And at the end of the experiment, none of the workers wanted to leave the team.<sup>13</sup>

This suggests that intentional intergenerational interactions create better and more productive working environments which benefit workers as well as employers.

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<sup>11</sup>Marc Freedman, Trent Stamp, "The U.S. Isn't Just Getting Older. It's Getting More Segregated by Age.," Harvard Business Review, June 06, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/06/the-u-s-isnt-just-getting-older-its-getting-more-segregated-by-age>.

<sup>12</sup>Rachel Premack, "17 Seriously Disturbing Facts about Your Job," Business Insider, August 02, 2018, <https://www.businessinsider.com/disturbing-facts-about-your-job-2011-2>.

<sup>13</sup>Marc Freedman, Trent Stamp, "The U.S. Isn't Just Getting Older. It's Getting More Segregated by Age.," Harvard Business Review, June 06, 2018, <https://hbr.org/2018/06/the-u-s-isnt-just-getting-older-its-getting-more-segregated-by-age>.

Age segregation also creates an environment where people live without contact with and among those outside their own generation; such action furthers isolation and its detrimental side effects of it. Lack of intergenerational interaction because of age segregation is detrimental to the health and success of all involved. An article from *Forbes* magazine makes this very issue clear when it reveals that

The most significant longitudinal study of happiness in adult life, the Harvard Study of Adult Development, shows that older people who invest in, and connect with, younger generations are three times as likely to be happy as those who fail to do so. Meanwhile, longitudinal studies of young people growing up against the odds demonstrate that these children are far more likely to succeed if they have the support of caring adults.<sup>14</sup>

Older people are being denied happiness through meaningful relationships as well as through connection to a world outside the normal scope of those their age, and young people are being denied the opportunity for success in all facets of life because of a lack of support from those who have been there and done it.

The loss of youth connection with older people is also occurring in reverse and is presented in "Age-segregation in Later Life: An Examination of Personal Networks." The study by Peter Uhlenberg and Jenny DeJong Gierveld found that, "just 6% of people over 60 said they discussed 'important matters' with non-family members under age 36."<sup>15</sup> Thus, young and old aren't interacting and are, thus, being denied the positive, helpful benefits and the simple opportunity to interact with someone outside their normal social

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<sup>14</sup>Marc Freedman, Trent Stamp, "Can The Fight Against Age Segregation Unite Us?" *Forbes*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2018/06/21/can-the-fight-against-age-segregation-unite-us/#105b3038265d>.

<sup>15</sup>Uhlenberg, Peter, and Jenny De Jong Gierveld. "Age-segregation in Later Life: An Examination of Personal Networks." *Ageing and Society* 24, no. 1 (2004): 5-28.

group. Though it is cliché, variety is the spice of life, and in spending time only with those in one's peer age group, many enriching and life improving relationships are missed. As seen in the aforementioned studies concerning better workplace environments, positive effects and skills for living life, connection to those outside of everyday peer group interactions, and variety brought forth by intergenerational interaction are being ignored which prevents improvements in the lives of all concerned.

In such segregation, the sharing of wisdom and creation of relationships is hindered, and it is important to note that wisdom needs to be shared in both directions, from old to young and young to old. Uhlenberg and De Jong Gierveld continue, "If older people do not interact with and learn from younger people, they risk becoming increasingly excluded from contemporary social developments as they age through their later life. Older people may not need or want to know everything that younger ones know, but acquiring some new knowledge is essential to avoid being marginalized later in life."<sup>16</sup> This marginalization comes from not being able to understand or work with modernized technology, even in its simplest forms, and thus not being able to keep up with the workforce and current realities of the world. Moreover, this creates a dependence on the younger generation to help do what was never learned. If intergenerational interaction is not well fostered and if relationships are not made, the

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<sup>16</sup>Uhlenberg, Peter and DeJong Gierveld Jenny. "Age-Segregation in Later Life: An Examination of Personal Networks." *Ageing and Society* 24, (01, 2004): 5-28.  
doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X0300151X>.  
<http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/195641014?accountid=10248>.

older generation has nowhere to turn because it is a world of age segregation. Age segregation leads to the marginalization of the age groups, helping no one in the end.

Marginalization inhibits the sharing of wisdom and positive contributions to youth and to society as a whole. Uhlenberg and DeJong Gierveld affirm when they state that “older people may have resources that could promote the wellbeing of young people (and vice versa). The absence of interaction, or age segregation, promotes ageism and insensitivity to the challenges faced by others who differ in age.”<sup>17</sup> Not only is wisdom not being shared for the well-being of generations, but negative dialogue and misunderstanding is promoted when there is a lack of healthy communication between generations. They go on to point out that, “in general, it seems likely that age-integration promotes a more civil society.”<sup>18</sup> Intentional intergenerational interaction encourages civility and health through association with one another. When dialogue is open and understanding as well as empathetic, a more productive and positive society is created. This is eclipsed when age segregation is prevalent in a community or society.

### **Age Segregation in the Church**

Age segregation is a continuous and growing problem. There is no limit to the impact that it can have, as it stretches into the religious world as well. Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross discuss this issue in their book *Intergenerational Christian Formation*. Specifically, they explain that, “there are less regular and structured interactions between old and young...than ever before. Not only families but also other institutions in modern society have reduced the chance for old and young to share

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 6.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, 6.

activities in meaningful ways.”<sup>19</sup> They further relate that, “during the last hundred years, steady changes have occurred in society that has separated families and segregated age groups, not only in educational settings but in life in general.” These changes are visible in the divisive nature of living situations set apart by income as well as age.

Mark Freeman and Trent Stamp in "The U.S. Isn't Just Getting Older. It's Getting More Segregated by Age," share that “a 2011 study from MetLife and the National Association of Homebuilders found that nearly one-third of people over the age of 55 live in communities that entirely or mostly comprise people 55 and older.”<sup>20</sup> Not only does age segregation occur in education, religion, the workplace, and social environments, but it occurs in housing which indicates that isolation of generations exists in every possible facet of life. One has to seek intergenerational interaction to move away from the isolation, and there are very few venues or opportunities for that because age segregation is so prevalent.

Ben Sasse explores the prevalence of age segregation in our lives with special concern for its effects in churches, in his book *The Vanishing American Adult*, when he states that

Generational segregation now touches upon all facets of life from the ways we socialize and work to the ways we worship. Fifty years ago it was the norm for multiple generations of a family to worship together. But that began to change in the 1980s and 1990s. The rise of the mega-churches illustrates the ways retail categories have remade our conceptions of community. Just as ‘mom-and-pop

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<sup>19</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 30.

<sup>20</sup>Marc Freedman,Trent Stamp, "The U.S. Isn't Just Getting Older. It's Getting More Segregated by Age.," *Harvard Business Review*, June 06, 2018,<https://hbr.org/2018/06/the-u-s-isnt-just-getting-older-its-getting-more-segregated-by-age>.

stores' and neighborhood supermarkets evolved into 'big-box' anchor stores with demographically targeted specialty shops arrayed around them, mall-like churches now offer services and programming tailored to the market segments inside their congregations: high schoolers, college kids, GenXers, Baby Boomers, and even holdover 'liturgical traditionalists.'<sup>21</sup>

Sasse presents the issues that age demographic targeting creates within society, noting how it oozes into all facets of life, and how it becomes present and very harmful in the Church, not only for community and relationship building but for the the sharing of wisdom and ultimately, the faith formation of all involved.

For example, separate worship services for older adults and younger adults and pure physical separation of the two groups are two of many offenders. Christian education classes are separated by age, and separate group community time is the norm for adult groups, young adult groups, youth groups, and children's groups. Though peer groups are important, when associating with one's peer group is over-emphasized, there is greater detriment than benefit. Older members of the community are being denied helpful exchanges that improve their health and quality of life through interaction with younger members of the community. The younger members of the community are being denied the opportunity to grow and learn from the older members, taking away access to wisdom and help navigating life.

### **Loneliness**

The prevalence of loneliness in society is made clear through a study performed by Ipsos in which "fifty-four percent of Americans report feeling as though no one knows

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<sup>21</sup>Sasse, Benjamin E. *The Vanishing American Adult : Our Coming-of-age Crisis--and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-reliance*, 98, First ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2017.

them well at least sometimes, if not always. Additionally, at least two in five also say they sometimes/always feel as though they lack companionship, that their relationships are not meaningful, that they are isolated from others, and/or that they are no longer close to anyone.”<sup>22</sup> Not feeling known, lacking companionship or meaningful relationships, and isolation are all alarming and heart-wrenching issues that pervade the life of so many in society. Cigna’s loneliness index affirms that “roughly one in four respondents rarely/never feel as though there are people who really understand them (27%), that they belong to a group of friends (27%), can find companionship when they want it (24%), or again feel as though they have a lot in common with others (25%). Another one in five rarely, if ever, report feeling close to people (20%) or ‘in tune’ with others (21%), while similar proportions don’t feel as though there are people they can turn to (19%) or talk to (18%). Another 16% of those surveyed admit that they rarely/never feel outgoing and friendly.”<sup>23</sup> These startling statistics show the dangerous prevalence of loneliness in society. Cigna further relates that “loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, making it even more dangerous than obesity.” The fact that loneliness is a significant hindrance to personal wellbeing and is more dangerous than two of the most detrimental effects on human mortality among citizens of society makes the need for a solution imperative. Loneliness in society is an increasingly alarming

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<sup>22</sup> Chris Jackson and Negar Ballard, "Over Half of Americans Report Feeling Like No One Knows Them Well," Ipsos, May 1, 2018, , accessed March 2019, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/us-loneliness-index-report>.

<sup>23</sup> Ellinor Polack, "New Cigna Study Reveals Loneliness at Epidemic Levels in America," Multivu, May 1, 2018, accessed February 2019, <https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/>.



epidemic. According to the *Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index*, the loneliest group are the generation Zers.

Generation Zers (adults ages 18-22) surveyed are significantly more likely than any other generation to say they experience the feelings described in the statements associated with loneliness (e.g., feeling alone, isolated, left out, that there is no one they can talk to, etc.). In fact, more than half of Gen Zers (adults ages 18-22) identify with 10 of the 11 feelings associated with loneliness. Feeling like people around them are not really with them (69%), feeling shy (69%), and feeling like no one really knows them well (68%) are among the most common feelings experienced by those in the Generation Z (adults ages 18-22).<sup>24</sup>

Knowing this loneliness exists so prevalently in society, one understands that a basic human need is not being met.

### **Non-Affiliation**

In today's society, forty percent of young adults are not attached to a church; this is almost triple the amount of seniors not attached to the church.<sup>25</sup> For many church workers and church goers, these statistics are not only startling but extremely unsettling. The harsh reality that four in ten young adults are religiously unaffiliated is frightening to many congregations and seems to cause many to worry about the church's survival. "Among the reasons Americans identified as important motivations in leaving their childhood religion are: they stopped believing in the religion's teachings (60%)[and] their family was never that religious when they were growing up (32%)."<sup>26</sup> This statistic, alone, indicates the impact of the absence of faith formation and growth. "The church has

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<sup>24</sup>Douglas Nemecek, "Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index," Cigna, May 2018, 6, [https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport\\_1524069371598-173525450.pdf](https://www.multivu.com/players/English/8294451-cigna-us-loneliness-survey/docs/IndexReport_1524069371598-173525450.pdf).

<sup>25</sup>Betsy Cooper et al., "Exodus: Why Americans Are Leaving Religion-and Why They're Unlikely to Come Back," PRRI, September 22, 2016, 3, accessed September 2018, <https://www.prri.org/research/prri-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 6.

provided youth ministries, camps, conferences, and professional youth workers, and yet... our best studies show that faith formation itself is lacking, giving us a limp theological commitment, without the Holy Spirit, where God does little more than ask us to be good and, in turn, offers us good feelings.”<sup>27</sup> This “limp theological commitment” enables one to become part of the aforementioned statistic. One can easily abandon beliefs or decide that raising children in the church is neither necessary nor valued.

Increasingly, youth are deciding that church isn’t requisite. Those who continue in church are faced with a personal theology that lacks the structure or roots to hold them through a spiritual storm and carry them into mature discipleship. It also lacks a distinctive view of world, self, and role to help one imagine his or her place in the world, much less God’s Kingdom. Though the statistics primarily focus on the youthful side of the spectrum, the ideas may be applied to the elderly side as well.

There are many people, regardless of age, who are negatively affected by the common yet shallow faith formation in churches today. The structure of faith cannot support the myriad of issues that shake it. Within the Christian community, there is a growing obsession with making church “cool” so that it appeals to the unaffiliated. This often manifests in the division of the church into peer groups. This is not, in and of itself, entirely problematic as it is in an effort to ensure that there is a place for all ages to find commonality. However, no matter how well intentioned the divisions, they are still just

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<sup>27</sup>Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Cited in Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), xvi.

that, divisions, and they squelch the flow of ideas, opinions, interpretations, and sharing of knowledge within congregations.

The segregation creates barriers and boundaries that negate helpful and important means to allow faith formation. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Kara Powell relates that, “as I’ve looked at the research, my best estimate is that between 40 and 50 percent of seniors from youth groups really struggle to continue in their faith and connect with a faith community after graduation.” This struggle for young adults to keep their faith and continue their connection to a religious community is, in part, a result of too much age separation. The ability to keep young adults is hindered by the lack of interaction with anyone outside their peer group. When they grow out of one peer group and are pushed into the next one, the security of their previous peer group is lost. It is difficult to connect with the next age group, and they have no roots with the church outside of the peer group from which they are transitioning. There is no longer any incentive to continue in that church, and they are left with little to no knowledge in how to find another one. Powell explains, “a lot of kids aren’t going to both youth group and church on Sundays; they’re just going to youth group. As a result, graduates are telling us that they don’t know how to find a church. After years at the kids’ table, they know what youth group is, but they don’t know what church is.”<sup>28</sup> The separation in age is leaving wisdom out of the lives of the youth; it is excluding the knowledge they could have gained from those who stayed in church, those who transitioned from one group to

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<sup>28</sup>Kara Powell, "Is the Era of Age Segmentation Over?" CT Pastors, 2009, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2009/summer/istheeraofagesegmentationover.html?share=>.

another, those who grew up in their faith and know how to live within it. The wisdom of how to continue faith outside of the peer group isn't shared so that when the time comes to handle adult faith, they aren't equipped with the insight they could have gained without age segregation. The separation from the rest of the religious community hinders the ability to make lasting connections; it inhibits the ability to tie them to faith and the people who may assist them with it. There are valuable relationships being denied to those separated by age groups.

Interactions are important for all facets of life, and evidence shows that people understand the benefits of intergenerational interaction whether secular or religious. *Forbes* highlights the findings of another set of studies saying, "Generations United and the Eisner Foundation finds that nearly all Americans (94%) agree that older people have the skills to help address young people's needs and 89% believe young people have what it takes to help their elders."<sup>29</sup> The opinion that the value of intergenerational interaction on all persons involved is widely held with great importance by Americans underlines the importance and begs the question of why then, intergenerational interactions are so uncommon?

The problems in and faced by the secular world seep into the world of the religious and create the very same issues. Negative effects from segregation are not only present in the religious community but go further to affect faith and the faith formation of

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<sup>29</sup>Marc Freedman and Trent Stamp, "Can The Fight Against Age Segregation Unite Us?" *Forbes*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nextavenue/2018/06/21/can-the-fight-against-age-segregation-unite-us/#105b3038265d>.

those involved. Age segregation prevents people from sharing faith focused, and everyday life, wisdom.

The problems of age segregation, both in society and in the church, of loneliness, and of non-affiliation are all frightening and faced by society, both religious and secular. From the startling statistics to the saddening studies, it is clear that faith formation is being hindered, and a solution is needed. As previously mentioned, the solution I propose, and will explore in the next chapter, is that of intergenerational ministry.

### **Chapter 3: The Solution**

The unintended consequences that come from division of the church into peer groups and age focused worship services, though well intentioned, are those that threaten the faith formation of all involved. With the existence of these negative consequences from generational divide, many different ministries have been created in response. One of the most effective is Intergenerational Ministry.

Christine Ross, Christian Education professor at Concordia University-Irvine explains that “intergenerational ministry occurs when a congregation intentionally combines the generations together in mutual serving, sharing, or learning within the core activities of the church in order to live out being the body of Christ to each other and the greater community.”<sup>30</sup> The entirety of intergenerational ministry presents an answer to the unintended consequences of church division. When congregational relationships between people of all ages are made a priority through intergenerational ministry focused

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<sup>30</sup>Ross, Christine, and Stephen, Mary L. A Qualitative Study Exploring Characteristics of Churches Committed to Intergenerational Ministry, 2006, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses.

programming, faith formation and church stability are a natural result. “In an age when statistics prove the attendance and participation in the Protestant church in America is declining, and yet people are frantically searching for a place to belong and fit in, it becomes obvious that the traditionally age segregated church is not working to further the kingdom of God.”<sup>31</sup>

The growing problem of age segregation in the church and in congregations mirrors the age segregation occurring in society as a whole. Though it is centered on the religious side of life, intergenerational ministry can be used as a solution to the problem in both the religious and the secular worlds. According to prominent child development theorist Urie Bronfenbrenner and as shared by Ross, “intergenerational ministry helps bridge the ‘generation gap.’ Bronfenbrenner asserted that a society in which the generations do not relate to one another will experience social discord and eventually its demise.”<sup>32</sup> The extreme detriment of age segregation and the generation gap require the implementation of intergenerational interaction and ministry for creation of a stronger, more cohesive, and unified society. The different tools and models used within intergenerational ministry can easily be transferred to help begin unification and curb, if not completely end, harmful age segregation.

### **What is Faith Formation?**

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<sup>31</sup>Burns-Marko, Robyn. "Intergenerational Ministry: Bringing the Generations Back Together." Order No. 10638263, Azusa Pacific University, 2017.  
<http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/2008669933?accountid=10248>.

<sup>32</sup>Ross, C. “Being an intergenerational congregation.” *Issues*, 41(2), (Fall 2007) 29.

Faith formation is an all-encompassing term used in many different contexts for a variety of reasons. Andrew Root presents a simple yet profoundly meaningful definition for faith formation when he states “to be formed [is] the authentic process of faith becoming lived.”<sup>33</sup> Faith, a very idiomatic idea and concept, becoming a lived and even somewhat tangible practice. This idea—though the vocabulary switches slightly from “faith” to “spiritual,” the concept remains the same—is explored and explained by John R. Throop, in *Christianity Today*. He states that “to be formed spiritually means to engage in specific practices and disciplines with one clear goal: to draw nearer to God in Christ and so focus less and less on self.”<sup>34</sup> Spiritual formation, interchangeable with faith formation, describe practices that bring one closer to God and is an idea elaborated by the United Church of Christ who claim that Faith formation is an integral part of the Christian Life.

Faith formation is at the heart of what the Christian life is all about. In many ways, we engage in the practices of our daily lives and the rituals of our faith communities—through worship, mission, working for justice and peace, evangelism, and education—so that our faith may be nurtured, enlivened, sustained, and *formed*.<sup>35</sup>

This definition accounts for every aspect of what it means to be a Christian and to continue to form one’s faith through strengthening, adapting, and maturing. The

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<sup>33</sup>Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 3.

<sup>34</sup>John R. Throop et al., “5 Facets in Spiritual Formation,” *Christian History | Learn the History of Christianity & the Church*, May 24, 2011, accessed December 2018, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/articles/spiritualformation/beingformed.html>.

<sup>35</sup>“Faith Formation and Christian Education,” United Church of Christ, <http://www.ucc.org/education>.

importance of faith formation in the life of a Christian is so great because faith in Jesus is the most important part of Christianity. If faith is not strong, the potential to lose it becomes greater and greater, thus making faith formation invaluable to the Christian life. Faith formation is supported with intergenerational ministry.

### **What is “Intergenerational Ministry”?**

A plethora of ideas and definitions for the term exist, and there are many different ways to describe intergenerational ministry. According to Ross,

Multigenerational, transgenerational, and intergenerational are all terms used to describe a recent trend of deliberately considering the various generations within an organization... A congregation focused on intergenerational ministry... will enable the various generations to communicate in meaningful ways, to interact on a regular basis, and to minister and serve together regularly. In a congregation based on an intergenerational philosophy, congregational leaders create opportunities for people of various generations to share their lives in regular and meaningful ways.<sup>36</sup>

Intergenerational ministry, importantly, is more than simply including multiple generations in conversation or reaching more than just one or two multiple generations. Though this is a very important part of intergenerational ministry, it must be taken beyond simple recognition of a difference. Being intergenerational means to take the recognition of these many generations and expand on it to deeper levels. Supporting each generation and encouraging intentional community through ministry in breaking through age barriers and creating intergenerational interaction is the heart of intergenerational ministry. It is promoting interaction between generations, rather than simply recognizing them to be different.

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<sup>36</sup>Ross, C. “Being an intergenerational congregation.” *Issues*, 41(2), (Fall 2007) 26.



Ross also asserts that Intergenerational ministry is a biblical ideal. Looking to the Scriptures, she finds that, “the term ‘generations’ itself is often used in Scripture, but more importantly, Scripture reveals God’s desire that people of one generation would tell of His works to the next generation, and that people of every generation would unite to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.”<sup>37</sup> Not only is intergenerational ministry an important practice for church communities to implement, but it is something that goes to the very foundation of Christianity and faith with God himself. Looking at intergenerational ministry in the context of scriptural support, one can easily see how integral intergenerational interactions and ministries are to Christianity.

### **The Shape of Intergenerational Ministry.**

Intergenerational ministry can be manifested in a variety of ways and can be implemented in even the simplest of forms. Intergenerational approaches to all the workings of the church have benefits that are easily attained. These benefits include, but are not limited to, the sharing of wisdom and youth between age groups, the connection between youth and elders to establish lasting roots in the church and faith, the breakdown of stereotypes assumed of and by people in different age groups, among many others.

Ross presents an example of a congregation she studied for intergenerational ministry and found that even the simplest of practices of putting adults with children in a daycare setting at the church improved relationships and experiences in the church to promote faith formation. “A unique way in which one of the research congregations supported emotional needs was through the implementation of both a preschool and an

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid, 27.

adult day-care. Common activities brought joy to the older adults and helped children to be comfortable around older adults.’<sup>38</sup> She further explains that “although the original goal was building healthy relationships between the youngest and oldest generations, leaders discovered that elementary youth through adults could also volunteer in the preschool or adult day-care, resulting in even more intergenerational relationships being built than originally intended.”<sup>39</sup> Not only does this model of intentional intergenerational ministry result in the youngest and oldest building relationships, but it results in every person in between these extremes building relationships as well. These relationships are vitally important to faith formation as “intergenerational ministry helps support the emotional needs of church members.”<sup>40</sup> This is basic to a Christian understanding of what it means to be human. “The LORD God also said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make for him a suitable helper.’” (Genesis 2:18) Humans need interaction with others to live healthy lives. Ross references Erik Erikson’s theory which “highlights activities that each age group needs to promote emotional health. Children need interaction with adults who can be trusted role models as well as with adults who will both teach children about the faith and live out their faith among children.”<sup>41</sup> Using intergenerational ministry, especially in models like those Ross presents, encourages healthy interactions with adults and thus healthy relationships that provide each age group with the role-models needed for healthy faith formation. “As intergenerational ministry leaders work to bring the various age groups together to work, learn, play and

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid, 29.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid, 29.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid, 29.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid, 29.

serve within the activities of the church, opportunities for role models and for sharing expand.”<sup>42</sup> These opportunities are vital to healthy faith formation and are created by intergenerational activities. Success doesn't always have to come from elaborate activities; it can simply come from methods of altering practices that are already in place or that are needed to have an intergenerational element.

Intergenerational ministry is not only a trickle down form of ministry from old to young; it is a trickle up ministry as well. “The traditional school model of Christian education and nurture, which continues to maintain the roles of adult-as-teacher and child-as-learner, needs to be re-examined and a greater codependence encouraged which allows for mutual teaching and learning.”<sup>43</sup> There is so much wisdom to be shared between all of the people on the spectrum of age. As Allan Harkness explains, the adult is not the only one who holds knowledge to be shared. “This perspective recognizes that different people have different lands of knowledge, skills, and experiences, and all need more than one kind of these.”<sup>44</sup> Healthy faith formation includes the perspectives of every member of the church; it is not exclusively those held by the oldest.

The spectrum of mentorship is not limited to the young and old; it includes elders to emerging adults. Emerging adults are absent from churches and faith communities at a time when being a part of these communities is crucial. There is a need for mentorship throughout the transition into adulthood. Jana L. Sundene and Richard R. Dunn explain that “emerging adults desire the guidance of seasoned Christians—not because they can't

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid, 29.

<sup>43</sup>Harkness, Allan G. "Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church" *Religious Education* 93, no. 4 (1998): 439.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, 439.

‘make it’ in this world or because the challenges they face are completely insurmountable but because they are charting new territory.”<sup>45</sup> Those in the middle of the age spectrum need guidance as much as the younger end, especially from fellow Christians who have navigated the territory they are about to embark upon. “Emerging adults long for mentors who will provide navigational guidance as they face a challenging societal landscape where values and markers are no longer clear.”<sup>46</sup> For healthy faith formation to occur throughout the tough transitions from one chapter of life to another, relationships need to be formed, and they are formed through intergenerational ministry. Emerging adults who are part of a faith community can gain mentors through intergenerational events, giving them the help to navigate new terrain as well as preserving faith and even adding to it.

It is in this same text, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, that the idea of being an adult disciple maker is presented. Being an adult disciple maker is not only helpful for emerging adults, but it is helpful for those guiding them. Helping others with faith formation encourages one’s own faith formation. One has truly learned a concept when he can teach it to others, and there is always the opportunity to learn something new in the process. If one has successfully navigated challenges in life and can share how it was accomplished through faith, they can help those about to go through it while they learn more about themselves. This way they gain a deeper understanding of the journey than they would, had they not explored it for the purpose of helping others. Sundene and Dunn spend an entire chapter of their text to help disciple makers get “a stronger handle

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<sup>45</sup>Jana L. Sundene and Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 24

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid*, 25.

on [their] own journey as a mentor so that [they] can maximize [their] ability to shape and *be shaped* by the disciple making process.”<sup>47</sup> Not only would mentors shape their mentees, they would be shaped by the process. This intergenerational interaction helps faith formation for all involved in the portion of the age spectrum often neglected.

One can look to intergenerational ministry as it provides for and fills needs we have as humans. Allen and Ross discuss Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and how intergenerational ministry can play in to fulfilling the need to belong saying, “healthy belongingness offers support for people in difficult situations, relief from shame through forgiving Grace and opportunity for authenticity. Intergenerational faith communities provide experiences that foster this deep sense of belonging, in children, teens, and adults; all feel welcomed and received.”<sup>48</sup> The need to survive and live a healthy life is filled with intergenerational ministry. Relationships and connections made through it create a community whereby faith can be affirmed and further formed. Not only does the practice provide space for forgiveness and help in times of trouble, but it provides space to have help moving through everyday life.

It is important to remember that all generations need to be included in the creation of relationships and the importance of belonging. Harkness explores this idea saying, “that all age groups need to be considered in intergenerational worship/learning to enhance the sense of belonging and unity within the faith community, even though this may require special sensitivity to ensure genuine mutual acceptance of the participation

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid, 210.

<sup>48</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 48.

and contributions of, for example, adolescents and youth.”<sup>49</sup> The need to belong runs through all ages and is not limited solely to one age group. Intergenerational ministry helps to incorporate people of every age to fill the need to belong, and though changes may need to be made to help that inclusion, it is vital to the faith formation of all involved. Belonging to a community where all viewpoints are considered and drawing from the wisdom each generation has to offer fills that basic human need and is well worth the possible allowances or changes that need to be made for total inclusion.

The enhancement of the community by intergenerational interaction, that is mentioned by Harkness, is reinforced by Chad Hall in *All in the Family Is Now Grey's Anatomy*. “Both young and old have resources to share. Generational homogenization results in an over abundance of one type of resources in certain congregations. Many older generation churches have plenty of money and facilities, but lack the energy and fresh vision young congregations have aplenty.”<sup>50</sup> Generations provide resources and support in situations that arise where one might be more suited than the other. The obvious resource is monetary. Older members of the community are more commonly associated with having more money to share whereas younger members are commonly associated with debt and inability to give anything more than volunteer hours. The monetary support from the elders of the community and the ability to more easily give

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<sup>49</sup>Allan G. Harkness (1998) Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church, Religious Education, 93:4, 431-447, DOI: 10.1080/0034408980930404

<sup>50</sup>“Chad Hall, ‘*All in the Family Is Now Grey's Anatomy: Today's Segregation Is by Age*,’ *Leadership* 27 (Fall 2006): 33” Referenced in Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 51.

physical labor to support the community is only one small example of the give and take that can occur in intergenerational relationships and interactions. Through give and take, the community is strengthened and grows. To see the complementary abilities each generation has rather than focusing on the differences and barriers that hinder interaction is a step towards progress and promotes healthy faith formation and the formation of healthy relationships.

Ross and Allen continue this thought process and discussion of mutual resources saying:

While thirty- and forty-something leaders of the younger churches may have a plethora of fresh ideas and plenty of energy, they lack the experience and deep spiritual resources of more seasoned leaders who have navigated repeatedly the multifarious, often troubled waters of a rapidly growing faith community. Young leaders sometimes flame out in the absence of older, wiser heads who can hold the course and traverse tricky terrain. Intergenerational faith communities bring together the young, fresh thinkers with the older, wiser veterans, creating an integrated profusion of resources.<sup>51</sup>

Though the two groups can stand alone, for the most part, congregations and communities last longer and flourish even more when they work together using their unique differences to complement each other and the community. There is wisdom to be shared and growth to be embraced from both communities, and intergenerational ministry creates the opportunity for that to occur. The relationships made from intergenerational interaction not only help to create space for shared wisdom but also create space for faith to grow and form through the interaction. Looking to those who have gone before and

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<sup>51</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 51.

learning from the choices and decisions that they made, help those to more easily navigate the twists and turns of life. Intergenerational ministry fosters relationships in which people can help one another more easily, and, thus, form a more mature faith to pervade all aspects of life rather than a faith just for Sundays.

John Roberto discusses the importance of intergenerational interaction and its effect on those involved, specifically teens and emerging college aged students. Roberto references Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, and Cheryl Crawford when he shares that, “in their book *Sticky Faith*, Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, and Cheryl Crawford examine the factors that make for ‘sticky faith’ in the college years. One of those critical factors is the importance of congregations that maximize intergenerational relationships.”<sup>52</sup>

Intergenerational interaction fosters an agent that creates a “sticky faith” for students to hold on to in years where falling away from the church is most common. Roberto continues discussing Powell, Griffin, and Crawford’s research when he relates that, “first, they discovered that involvement in all-church (intergenerational) worship during high school is more consistently linked with mature faith in both high school and college than any other form of church participation.”<sup>53</sup> Simply worshiping those outside one’s age group, just attending a service that includes others outside one’s age group, helps to solidify and continue to form one’s faith in a time in life where faith is regularly challenged. Roberto continues sharing the Powell, Griffin, and Crawford research in stressing that, “second, they found that the more teenagers serve and build relationships

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<sup>52</sup>Roberto, John. "Our Future is Intergenerational." *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 2012): 107. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/073989131200900108>.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid, 107.



with younger children, the more likely it is that their faith will stick: ‘The students we surveyed who had served in middle school or children's ministry while they were in high school seemed to have stickier faith in college.’”<sup>54</sup> Teaching and learning from those younger than they continues to help form and solidify and create a lasting faith. Roberto’s third and final point is that “when adults in the congregation show an interest in young people and build relationships with them, young people feel welcomed and valued. ‘More than any single program or event, adults' making the effort to get to know the kids was far more likely to make the kids feel like a significant part of the church.’ And the influence of adult-youth relationships continues into the college years.”<sup>55</sup> Making each and every member of the congregation feel as though they belong and fostering a family-like environment for every member, regardless of age, helps form faith to last through times spent away from church and home congregations.

Faith formation is vital to being a Christian. Ross and Allen explain that faith formation can flourish in a community environment. “Christian commitment is formed and strengthened as persons develop relationships and actively participate in faith communities that teach, model and live out the communities belief.”<sup>56</sup> When one participates in faith communities, one can learn and grow in faith. Ross and Allen explain opinions, held by Christian Smith and David Kinnaman, about the importance of

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<sup>54</sup>Kara Eckmann Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 75. Referenced in Roberto, John. "OUR FUTURE IS INTERGENERATIONAL." *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring, 2012): 107. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/073989131200900108>.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid*, 77.

<sup>56</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 130.

*intergenerational* faith communities and how they improve upon the prior comment saying, “Smith takes that point somewhat further by saying that these communities must be cross-generational. David Kinnaman agrees... ‘Intergenerational relationships in faith communities are crucial.’”<sup>57</sup> Not only are intergenerational relationships critical, but they add to the already amazing impacts that intergenerational relationships possess. Ross elaborates on this saying, “intergenerational Christian communities uniquely and profoundly nurture Christian faith and development.”<sup>58</sup> Not only must churches have rich faith communities in which all members may participate, but they must have intergenerational faith communities that allow for the growth and strengthening of faith.

Intergenerational ministry encompasses more than simply fostering relationships between non-related church goers. It fosters opportunities for families more easily to explore faith together as they are no longer broken up by age. Ross and Allen assert that, “families need to be worshiping together.”<sup>59</sup> They continue explaining that the practice of family worship is one from the beginnings of Christianity. “Children in Old Testament times worshipped with their families on feast days, special celebrations and on Sabbath. Children in the early church worshipped in house churches with their families.”<sup>60</sup> The faith of children in the beginning of Christianity was formed in familial worship, and it is something many children and adults miss out on today. This is a gain of faith that they simply aren’t afforded. Ross and Allen elaborate more on the importance of familial

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid, 130.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid, 130-131.

<sup>59</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 193.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid, 193.

worship when they reference Eddie Prest who “recommends particularly including children in worship, saying, ‘The optimal spiritual impact upon children will take place in a warm, belonging, caring and concerned interaction with the gathered people of God, particularly in worship.’”<sup>61</sup> Children learn so much by simply just being in worship not to mention actually participating in it. Though they may not seem engaged or actively participating, they are still learning important practices like how to pray, how to act in church, how to view different traditions, and just exactly what worshipping God looks like. To deny children the opportunity to worship with family and to deny the family from worshipping with the children, puts a stop to important shared experience that greatly enhances faith.

The importance of the relationships formed with intergenerational ministry and how it affects the congregation is explored more by Ross and Allen when they reference Caroline Fairless saying, “mixing the generations ‘is about an entire community being involved in the design and offering of worship, from adults to the smallest children. More than education it is spiritual formation.’”<sup>62</sup> More than simply educating one another and learning different things from one another, these relationships help to form faith for all involved. Both adults and children experience faith formation from intergenerational interactions and relationships.

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<sup>61</sup>Eddie Prest, *From One Generation to Another* (Capetown, South Africa: Training for Leadership, 1993), p. 20 referenced in Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 193.

<sup>62</sup>Angie Ward, “Let the Little Children Come,” *Leadership* 30 (summer 2009):57 referenced in Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 203.

The benefits of intergenerational ministry are countless and are explored more heavily by a study done by The Search Institute. Ross and Allen reference this study when they share, “the Search Institute’s ‘Effective Christian Education’ study found that intergenerational interaction helps young people grow in their faith in the following ways: contact with older adults is more likely to give young people mentors with mature faith; it builds for young people a sense of community, that is, they feel more comfortable in the church and more like part of the family of God; it fosters mutual respect among the generations; and it creates shared experiences for youth and parents.”<sup>63</sup> Intergenerational interaction gives youth mentors for nurturing faith; it helps youth find a place in a community that can tend to be somewhat difficult to find a place in as well as welcome them into the family of God, and it allows families to share experiences and help church members create relationships of respect and understanding to further the kingdom of God.

It is also important to understand that intergenerational ministry is a biblical practice. According to Harkness, “intergenerationalism was a feature of the faith communities in both the Old Testament and New Testament eras.”<sup>64</sup> The practice of intergenerational interaction as a means to further faith formation has existed from biblical times. Harkness continues saying, “from its Old Testament Jewish roots, the early Christian church maintained its intergenerational entity with persons of all ages

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<sup>63</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 214.

<sup>64</sup>Allan G. Harkness (1998) *Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church*, *Religious Education*, 93:4, 431-447, DOI: 10.1080/0034408980930404, 436.

considered to be integral parts of it.”<sup>65</sup> The early church understood the importance of intergenerational inclusion and how every Christian is part of the body of Christ regardless of age. Ross reiterates this point in her dissertation about four different churches that practice intergenerational ministry. She shares that, “several people mentioned the biblical concept of the body of Christ and how the body meant all ages.”<sup>66</sup>

Holly Catterton Allen elaborates on the Old Testament practice of including all generations in worship when she states, “in Scripture, coming to know God is typically presented as a family and community-based process.”<sup>67</sup> Though age specific groups have merit, the age segregation that occurs in church today does not reflect Scriptural history. Allen continues saying, “God’s directives for his people in the Old Testament clearly identify the Israelites as a relational community where the children were to grow up participating in the culture they were becoming.”<sup>68</sup> Children aren’t separated from the whole congregation as they often are now; they were included in the body of Christ. Allen furthers this saying, “in the religion of Israel, children were not just included, they were drawn in, assimilated, and absorbed into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging.”<sup>69</sup> Not only are they included in the community, but they are welcomed as an

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid, 436.

<sup>66</sup>Ross, C. M. (2006). *A qualitative study exploring characteristics of churches committed to intergenerational ministry* (Order No. 3237443). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (305274056). Retrieved from <http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/305274056?accountid=10248>, 89-90.

<sup>67</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton. "Bringing the Generations Together: Support from Learning Theory." *Christian Education Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall, 2005): 319-333. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/073989130500200207>, 322.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid, 322.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, 322.

important part of the community and are made to understand that they belonged in that community, belongingness being a major part of faith formation earlier discussed. Allen continues with examples of this saying, “the directives for feasts and celebrations illustrate this point best. These commanded festivals were celebrated annually and included elaborate meals, dancing, music, singing, and sacrifices. All of Israel participated, from the youngest to the oldest.”<sup>70</sup> All of Israel participated. It was not just certain age groups and limitations who were allowed to participate by age; *all* of Israel participated.

Ross discusses the churches in her study and their interpretation of the biblical roots of intergenerationality in more depth when she shares that “three of the interviewees referred to Scriptural ideas such as Jesus welcoming the little children and adults needing to be around children to learn to have faith as a child.”<sup>71</sup> The passage referred to here is Matthew 18:2-4, and it says “He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus speaks of the faith of children, how important it is for adults to understand the value of a child’s faith, and how to take themselves back to that faith. Jesus illustrates the importance of children

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid, 322.

<sup>71</sup>Ross, C. M. (2006). *A qualitative study exploring characteristics of churches committed to intergenerational ministry* (Order No. 3237443). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection. (305274056). Retrieved from <http://cupdx.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/305274056?accountid=10248>, 90.

and learning from them, and intergenerational ministry fosters an environment for that to occur.

Ross continues explaining opinions held by the churches she studied quoting a Pastor who refers to Psalm 145:4, saying, “One generation shall commend Your works to another and set forth Your mighty deeds,’ and stated that he didn't think this meant just the older generation teaching the younger, but that the younger generations could teach older ones about faith as well.”<sup>72</sup> In addition to the New Testament and how Jesus explains the importance of learning from each other, the Old Testament explains this as well. The church is made up of many generations that all bring something to the table, and this was recognized in both Old and New Testament times. Young can learn from old and vice versa, and it is important, for the church body as a whole, to recognize this for the sake of faith formation for all.

Ross also explores the biblical backing and importance of looking after those in generations outside of our own. She explains that being involved with other generations enabled us to understand God and the body of Christ better and that ‘there is a Biblical precedence for caring about other generations.’”<sup>73</sup> We are all part of the body of Christ, regardless of age and generation, and we are made to care for one another regardless of age. A way to do this is through intergenerational ministry.

Harkness touches upon the importance of intergenerational interaction, and learning from children and what they have to offer the church states, “the impact of this

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid, 90.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid, 90.

interaction can be especially striking as adults allow themselves to learn from children.”<sup>74</sup>

He continues quoting Paul Welter saying, “Welter, for example, provides data from numerous interviews with adults to demonstrate that children can teach adults faith, hope, love, the healing process, and growth as a way of life.”<sup>75</sup> Adults find that, through intergenerational interaction, children have more insights and understanding of the things they aren’t commonly associated with being able to handle. Much credit is taken away from children and their ability to deal with the harder aspects of life.

Allen and Ross, referencing Paul Welter and his research from the “Learning From Children” workshops, explain the idea of children being more able to understand and grasp harder concepts in life saying, “the six hundred contributors reported they had gained new spiritual ideas from children particularly regarding faith, hope, and love. These adults also said they had drawn fresh insights regarding how to heal, how to continue to grow, how to become honest again, how to regain trust, how to challenge their fears, how to forgive, and how to mourn.”<sup>76</sup> Often these concepts are seen to go outside of a child’s ability to comprehend. It is assumed that the subjects are simply too complex or too hard for children to understand when, in many cases, they are better able to understand these concepts than adults are.

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<sup>74</sup>Allan G. Harkness (1998) *Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church*, Religious Education, 93:4, 431-447, DOI: 10.1080/0034408980930404, 439.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid, 439.

<sup>76</sup>Welter, Paul. *Learning from Children* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House 1984), p. 13, referenced in Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 157.



Intergenerational Ministry and interactions help children better articulate their relationship with God as well as have a greater grasp with it. Holly Catterton Allen expresses this point with results from her dissertation study saying,

“For my dissertation I interviewed children in Christian families in two settings: children who participate regularly in intergenerational settings (they worship with their parents and attend an intergenerational small group at least twice a month) and children who have no regular opportunity to be in intergenerational Christian settings (they regularly attend Sunday school and children's church during adult worship, but do not participate in an intergenerational small group). In general, though both groups of children gave eloquent testimony to their relationships with God, the children in the intergenerational sample were more aware of their relationship with God, that is, they spoke more often and more reciprocally of that relationship than...the children in the non-intergenerational sample.”<sup>77</sup>

Intergenerational interactions help foster environments where children can better express themselves and ask questions about beliefs and practices. Humans learn from those around them, so children spending time with fellow Christians learn about the beliefs of their own church community while they establish their own beliefs and form their faith.

Throughout this chapter, intergenerational ministry and the positive additions it makes to society by fostering multigenerational interaction, fostering church affiliation, and fostering relationships, ultimately supporting faith formation have been addressed. Through evidence provided throughout this chapter supporting the positive benefits that intergenerational ministry creates, one understands that intergenerational ministry is one solution and answer to the issues society faces. The next chapter explores the many different ways of implementing intergenerational ministry, both in religious and secular communities, to support faith formation and society as a whole.

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<sup>77</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton. "Bringing the Generations Together: Support from Learning Theory." *Christian Education Journal* 2, no. 2 (Fall, 2005): 319-333. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/073989130500200207>. 322.

## **Chapter 4: Models for Intergenerational Ministry Programming**

One of the first intergenerational events I actively participated in and understood was hosted by my home church. I organized a “Back-in-Time” decade dance. It was a simple event. I had a family member DJ; we bought a few decorations and asked the congregation to provide different ingredients for a sundae bar. During the planning process, I was worried about the response I would get from the congregation. I feared that no one would want to attend, that no one would be willing to help make it happen, and that it would end up being a sad attempt at reaching the congregation. What actually happened was much, much greater. Many different members of the congregation stepped forward, offering their gifts to help the event occur without a hitch. One member stepped forward and offered to do a photo booth. Another offered to contribute to the ice-cream bar. Others stepped forward to help set-up, and one woman and her husband offered to give swing dance lessons. There weren’t many people, in addition to those who were already helping, in attendance, but the impact was felt. Each person from a different generation had a chance to share experiences through music and dance. They simply joined together for a fun event where music and costumes from different decades were explored and common interests were shared. Community was created through participating in the simplest of activities like dancing along to favorite songs from the past in period costumes and sharing a bowl of ice-cream with fellow members of the congregation. The event built relationships and furthered the Kingdom of God.

There are many different models for intergenerational programming that churches can use for intergenerational ministry, and they range from extremely simple and easily

implemented, such as a decade dance, to more complex programs. The Southern Early Childhood association references Generations United saying, “Intergenerational programming has been defined as the purposeful bringing together of different generations in ongoing mutually beneficial activities designed to achieve specified program goals.”<sup>78</sup> The benefits that can be achieved with intergenerational ministry are easily attained with many different events and activities. Intergenerational ministry is not a ministry that needs elaborate and extreme events or practices. It is simply creating intentional interactions between members of every generation and encouraging the sharing of wisdom.

## **Worship**

Ross and Allen explore the possibilities for intergenerational worship and reiterate the accessibility and ease of intergenerational interaction in worship. They explain how they “have noticed that the historically liturgical churches have been more deliberate about engaging all ages in their worship times together”<sup>79</sup> by including all ages in the lighting of candles, reading the scriptures, leading prayers, and participating in responsive creeds and readings. Simply filling the positions necessary for the service to run smoothly

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<sup>78</sup>Stephanie R. Davidson and Beverly Boals-Gilbert, "What Age Gap? Building Intergenerational Relationships," *Dimensions of Early Childhood* 38, no. 2 (April 2010): 23, [https://southernearlychildhood.org/upload/pdf/What\\_Age\\_Gap\\_Building\\_Intergenerational\\_Relationships\\_Stephanie\\_R\\_Davidson\\_Beverly\\_Boals\\_Gilbert\\_Volume\\_38\\_Issue\\_2\\_2.pdf](https://southernearlychildhood.org/upload/pdf/What_Age_Gap_Building_Intergenerational_Relationships_Stephanie_R_Davidson_Beverly_Boals_Gilbert_Volume_38_Issue_2_2.pdf).

<sup>79</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 200.

with people of all ages creates intergenerational interaction and is part of intergenerational ministry.

They explain another model of intergenerational ministry that fosters intergenerational interaction as well as encourages the sharing of wisdom. This model comes from emerging churches which are, according to Dan Kimball in *The Emerging Church*, simply put, “newly formed or just coming into prominence...being discovered.”<sup>80</sup> There are churches, in recent years, who who have explored different forms of making church happen, and they are exploring different types of intergenerational ministry. Ross and Allen explain this saying,

In recent years emerging churches have experimented with worship stations—multi sensory experiential opportunities for meditating, praying, listening to God, reading the Word or praising God. Not long ago, a small non-denominational church created eight worship-stations one Sunday morning. The gathered body of Christ met as one for a few minutes for greeting and blessing, then the eighty-plus worshipers were formed into cross-generational groups of about ten each. Each group was directed to a station, with the general instruction to process that station in about twelve to fifteen minutes, then the groups would rotate to another station for twelve to fifteen minutes, and then to one more station for twelve to fifteen minutes; Each group experienced three worship stations.

This model encourages both the interaction of family worship as well as cross generational worship that encourages faith formation and growth. Faith formation and growth occur because each participant is able to learn and explore different aspects of each worship station whether musical worship, the reading of text, prayer, or many other activities that can be done at each worship station. The participants are able to experience different, faith-building activities. Ross and Allen explain this saying, “worship stations

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<sup>80</sup>Dan Kimball and Rick Warren, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2004), 13.

offer rich opportunities for fostering spiritual relationships across the generations. Families can experience worship stations as family units, and intentionally formed cross-generational clusters can experience worship stations together.”<sup>81</sup> Worship stations encourage the interaction between all generations as well as families, an important component of faith formation. The interactions create the groundwork to build relationships that enable growth and faith-formation to occur, giving each person involved in the relationship an opportunity to have someone with which to move through their journey of faith. This model can be easily implemented in churches and is another simple way to implement intergenerational ministry into a congregation to support faith formation.

### **Discipleship**

Allen and Ross also reference a model experienced by Drew Zahn saying that

Zahn describes an intergenerational undertaking called Generation Bridge he remembered from his young adult years. The class, made up of participants from diverse age groups, met for three months and studied the book of James; an older person and a younger person shared the teaching task each week. In time, friendships and mentoring relationships were built that last to this day<sup>82</sup>

The creation of a class where multiple age groups work together to interpret Scripture and teach the word is another simple, yet meaningful and impactful way to promote intergenerational interaction and further faith formation. Reading and then interpreting scripture is an important part of both the Christian life as well as faith formation.

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<sup>81</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 201.

<sup>82</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 208.

Learning from and understanding the Bible and its teachings helps those growing in their faith. By looking straight to the source where God has revealed himself directly and the accounts of God revealing Himself through Jesus are recorded, those developing in faith can learn and understand what it means to be a Christian. Reading scripture with other Christians exemplifies this practice. Many times, reading scripture is taken as a requirement that needs to be completed rather than a privilege and an insight into beliefs and, ultimately, into God himself. Stanley Hauerwas makes an abrasive yet thought-provoking statement about the privilege of reading scripture in his book *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America*. He states that “the Bible is not and should not be accessible to merely anyone, but rather it should only be made available to those who have undergone the hard discipline of existing as part of God’s people.”<sup>83</sup> Though this seems counterintuitive to how Christianity is commonly understood—making the Gospel available for all—it actually supports the Gospel by ensuring it is taken on with the utmost care and understanding of importance. Reading the Bible with fellow Christians teaches one how to read it and be able to engage with it more deeply. Space for this study and growth is fostered in this model for intergenerational ministry. This model helps faith formation while allowing for lasting relationships to occur, strengthening the body of Christ and furthering the kingdom of God.

Ross and Allen also explore the importance of the sharing of stories as a form of intergenerational ministry saying, “Everyone has a story to tell, and one of the best ways

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<sup>83</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* (Nashville, Tenn: Abingdon, 2001), 9.

to bring the generations together is through telling those stories. One purpose for sharing narratives is simply to get to know one another. But beyond that, seeing God's story and each other's stories is a key spiritual blessing of story sharing in intergenerational faith communities."<sup>84</sup> The telling of stories can be done with guided questions over dinner, by the interviewing of the elders in the community by the younger members of the community, and many other events where questions are intentionally asked to learn one another's story. Sharing experiences through storytelling is important for fostering relationships and creating environments in which wisdom can be shared and expanded, and thus people can grow and faith can form.

### **Service**

Another very important and advantageous way to participate in intergenerational ministry is through service. Ross researched the effects of intergenerational ministry on congregations in her dissertation and she found that "service activities and mission trips were the most natural means of uniting generations to work together towards the common goal of serving others."<sup>85</sup> This is an especially important form of intergenerational ministry as it not only furthers the creation of relations between members of the participating church intergenerationally but furthers the Kingdom of God. Service to others is the basis for Christian action in the world. In Mark 10:43-45, Jesus explains that

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<sup>84</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 217.

<sup>85</sup>Ross, Christine, and Stephen, Mary L. *A Qualitative Study Exploring Characteristics of Churches Committed to Intergenerational Ministry*, 2006, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. Referenced in Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 229.

“whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Christians are meant to serve others because we have been served, and service is one of the many, and arguably most important, ways to foster intergenerational relationships. Ross and Allen elaborate on this idea about service and its two-fold benefits saying, “not only does inviting older generations increase the team’s ability to minister more broadly, it has the added advantage of simultaneously breaking down generational relationships, which may create a more positive environment within the congregation after the event.”<sup>86</sup> The ability to serve more people in more diverse ways, as well as the ability to foster healthy relationships among fellow Christians of many different ages, increases immensely and is an important and vital form of ministry that shouldn’t be overlooked when finding ways to implement intergenerational ministry.

The importance of intergenerational service goes beyond just building relationships within a church. Ross and Allen explain that, “in a period of time when the term missional is used to describe congregations that focus on reaching out beyond the church building to create relationships with those who do not know God, and in a time when faith communities are updating mission statements to reflect the change from a predominantly churched to a predominantly unchurched culture, it is time for the congregational body to move away from service projects and mission trips being

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<sup>86</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 231.



something that ‘the youth do’ to being a focal ministry for the whole faith community.”<sup>87</sup>

Missions can no longer be left solely to one group of the congregation; missions are increasingly important for Christianity as a whole, and it is important that all of the congregations take part. It is an effort that needs to be undertaken by all.

Intergenerational service not only opens up opportunities for relationships with other members of the church but also fosters an environment for families to participate in ministry. Ross and Allen explore the benefits of family ministry referencing Eugene Roehlkepartain who says, “youth from families that talk about faith together, that participate in family prayer or devotions, and that participate together in service projects are more likely to have a mature faith than those youth whose families do not partake in any of these activities.”<sup>88</sup> Familial interaction in faith-based service fosters healthy, life-long, faith formation for the youth participating. The “mature faith” that they gain from serving others with their families is a faith that can carry them through all aspects of life, and goes even further to help the faith formation of others throughout their lives. Christians are called to live questionable lives. This is done by serving others for no other reason than as a response to Jesus’ ultimate act of service. Those who are served by intergenerational service events will experience what it means to be a Christian, helping to spread God’s love through actions and in turn, bring those being served closer to God.

### **Mutual Modeling**

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<sup>87</sup>Ibid, 231-32

<sup>88</sup>Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *The Teaching Church: Moving Christian Education to Center Stage* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), p.170, referenced in Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 232.

Another approach to implement intergenerational ministries described by Ross and Allen is that of “intergenerational small groups.”<sup>89</sup> They present one form of what an intergenerational small group meeting looks like, and it is as follows: Icebreakers, Worship, Prayer, and Lord’s Supper. Each element can be taken in different ways. For Icebreakers, they give examples for questions that help each person in the small group get to know one another such as “What are you afraid of?”<sup>90</sup> and “My name is \_\_\_\_ and my favorite ice cream is \_\_\_\_.”<sup>91</sup> Simple questions and prompts that allow for conversation to get to know one another and open space for conversation. Allen elaborates on this saying “What happens cumulatively is that participants come to know each other by name, they acquire interesting pieces of information about each other and they simply enter each other's lives—the funny parts, the sad parts, the hopeful parts, the fearful parts. Children see adults as whole, multidimensional people, and adults see children as complex growing *people*.”<sup>92</sup> The icebreakers not only break the ice over starting conversation; they break down walls and barriers that come with, and from, age gaps and age segregation. This provides a great start to what intergenerational small groups are set up to accomplish.

The next portion of an intergenerational small group meeting that Allen explains is worship. In this portion, members of the small group, whether it is a child and parent or a college student or teen from the group, lead a song of worship. This provides an

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<sup>89</sup>Allen, Holly Catterton., and Ross, Christine Lawton. *Intergenerational Christian Formation : Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012, 239-245

<sup>90</sup>Ibid, 240.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid, 241.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid, 241.

opportunity for each member to further open up and understand one another. Allen explains this saying, “worshiping together in a close intimate setting reveals our inner spiritual lives to our children and theirs to us.”<sup>93</sup> Worship like this allows for relationships and understanding to continue to be fostered and grow.

The next part of intergenerational small groups is Prayer. Allen spends a lot of time discussing prayer and the importance of its role not only in small groups, but in general. Allen describes different instances for prayer in a group, for the school aged youth it was passing classes, for older members of the group it was passing of loved ones and concerns about jobs and many other issues. Allen discusses how important prayer is to Christian life and how praying with a group of people from all different age groups and backgrounds, learning about the struggles and thanksgivings and wishes of the members of the group opens each person up even more for deeper relationships and connection. Allen explains different scenarios of instances where children have learned from the group prayer that occurs in the small groups, specifically a story about her son. She describes a situation where she told her thirteen year old son all about the stresses and anxieties she was facing and he says to her, “Do you want me to pray for you?”<sup>94</sup> Allen explains this as a direct reflection of what her son was learning from the small groups and as an example of the impact that the small groups can have on the formation of faith for all involved.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid, 242.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid, 244.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid, 244.

The final element of small groups discussed by Allen and Ross is the sharing of the Lord's Supper. The title "The Lord's Supper" can become an element of controversy as there are many traditions that don't allow for the Lord's Supper to be performed in such a casual setting. This portion of the small group experience doesn't have to occur in the same fashion for every tradition. Simply communing with one another, breaking bread, giving each person involved a specific job in the creation of community over a meal has many of the same effects. Allen explains the observations she and other adults in the small group made about traditional forms of communion saying, "they found that observing the Lord's Supper in small, close settings brought new meaning and depth to what can become a rote ceremony especially for children. The children in the small groups partook of the Lord's Supper with the adults; doing so offered opportunity for children to hear their parents and other adults they knew talk about their feelings and thoughts as they took of the bread and the cup."<sup>96</sup> Taking the Lord's Supper into an intergenerational and intimate setting fostered a learning environment for children and adults to learn and grow and be formed spiritually. Allen continues this thought saying "celebrating the Lord's supper in these intimate intergenerational settings provided spiritually formative opportunities for all involved. The children participated in the spiritual life of the Christians around them; they were taught; they actually served. The adults participated more interactively in the central Christian practice; they were given opportunities to express their spiritual understandings and insight; and parents and children became more comfortable discussing spiritual things."<sup>97</sup> Not only do the children

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid, 244.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid, 245.

have the opportunity to learn from the adults and the members of their family, but the adults have the opportunity to articulate their faith and help the younger participants form their faith, thus forming their own.

The model, presented by Allen and Ross, of Intergenerational small groups provides space for each member of the church to participate in intentional community and form their faith with interaction with the Holy Spirit, encountering Jesus through fellow Christians participating in faith based activities, in the form of Icebreakers, Worship, and the Lord's Supper. These small groups provide Intentional intergenerational interaction with the goal of the sharing of wisdom, creating space to belong, sharing experiences, forming relationships, and with the goal to form faith.

Much of intergenerational ministry programming consists of simply opening space to foster relationships. John Roberto explores this idea in his article for *Lifelong Faith* entitled "Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational: Models and Strategies." Roberto identifies one event from a church in California meant to open the space for relationships saying, "encouraging connection between the generations is a major thrust of the older adult ministry at First Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, CA. One of the primary ways they champion this value is through events called Back to the Future. Junior high students, high school students, and young adults of First Evangelical Free have all participated in the Back to the Future nights."<sup>98</sup> Roberto continues explaining the event saying,

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<sup>98</sup>John Roberto, "Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational: Models and Strategies," *Lifelong Faith*, April 2009, 36, [http://www.intergenerationalfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/becoming\\_intentionally\\_intergenerational\\_-\\_roberto.pdf](http://www.intergenerationalfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/becoming_intentionally_intergenerational_-_roberto.pdf).

“The event involves approximately 24 older adults who come to a regular youth group activity. The entire group is broken into small groups so that one to two older adults are interacting with about 10 to 12 students. The older adults are given a list of questions to discuss with the young people: What was it like for you to be a 12-year-old? A 16-year-old? A person in your mid- 20s? What was your first car? What were the popular dances, singers, and actors of your youth? How did you come to know Christ? Often the older adults will bring their yearbooks, letter jackets, and report cards for the younger people to see. The students are encouraged to ask questions and simply talk with the older adult about dating, family issues and other things of a concern to them.”<sup>99</sup>

Simply asking questions of an older member of their religious community, taking time to show interest in the lives of those before them helps foster relationships and provide lasting effects on faith and the church community as a whole. Roberto elaborates on this when he explains an interview he held with someone close to the events saying, “Rosalyn Encarcion, director of senior adult programs, says there are many benefits that come from these events. ‘Our older adults realize that their lives are significant and valuable as they pass on the lessons learned from their own life experiences. In turn, the youth have a broader worldview as they hear the wisdom of the older adults. The event is also a great way for breaking down the negative stereotypes that each generation may have toward the other.’”<sup>100</sup> Barriers that have been created are broken down to help old understand young and young understand old on a deep and faith forming level, simply by participating in an event that fosters an environment for dialogue and growth between two generations that aren't often in contact with one another. The sharing of wisdom and stories helps to foster common understanding and create a basis for which they can interact with one another, rather than keeping to their own age group and being denied

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid, 36.

<sup>100</sup>Ibid, 36.

the wisdom and growth that comes from intergenerational interaction. This model for intergenerational interaction helps create dialogue, mutual interests and understanding, and simply opens the door to more intergenerational interaction and relationships that form faith for all involved.

Other instances of intergenerational interaction can occur in situations such as interviews where children ask questions of church members in retirement communities.

Edward A. Loper describes this activity in his book *Being an Intergenerational Church*,

At first the questions were bland enough. What was it like to grow up back then? What was school like? When did you vote for the first time? Then things started getting personal, and I sat on the edge of my seat waiting to intervene. Were you married? Jane answered no. Why not? I intervened, but Jane said she wanted to answer the question. For the next 20 minutes she held us riveted as she told us about the young man she was engaged to marry and the tremendous grief she felt when he was killed in World War I. She never found another man to measure up. If that was not enough, she finished her story by saying, "Thank you for ask me that question. I've not talked about this in fifty years but I guess I needed to." It was not more than a month later that she died, and I think that evening she spent with the youth group had something to do with the quality and peace of her dying.

<sup>101</sup>

This experience had great impacts both on the teens participating in the conversation and on the elderly women that made up the panel. Two seemingly incompatible age groups were able to delve deep into personal areas of conversation, helping to open lines of communication, relationships, and support faith formation.

Loper continues with another practice his church adopted to increase intergenerational interaction that deals with confirmation classes and sponsor each confirmand saying,

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<sup>101</sup>Edward A. Loper, *Building an Intergenerational Church*, Older Adult Issue Series (Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 1999), 10.

For this class there were new ground rules. Parents could not be sponsors. Kids had to go out into the congregation to find a sponsor. Help was offered to the introverted. Much to my surprise, nearly all of them came back with an older member. The sponsors were asked to take the course with the kids and to do all the work. Each assignment asked for a careful reading of scripture, and asked for responses to questions that were designed to reinforce knowledge and interact with issues. Each class had three distinct time frames. Each kid and sponsor talked about the assignment as a pair, then we discussed it as a group, and then we had some didactic teaching time. It was awesome to listen to older adults and teens talk to each other about sex and abortion, justice and politics, death and faith, and what the church and worship is really all about. The talking was awesome enough, but even more awesome was the fact that they started listening to each other and learning.<sup>102</sup>

Loper describes the value that came from including other members in the church in the process of confirmation and working with the students as a way of furthering their faith formation, but also furthering the adults faith formation in the process. The children are required to go outside of their comfort zones with working just with a parent and expand to work with an adult member of the church, bringing different perspectives and ideas from what they normally get at home. This diversification of the teens interaction with ideas and opinions held by adults normally outside of their sphere of influence enables them to grow even more than they would with their parent as a sponsor, and they are able to step outside of the guardrails that normally would have been up had they been learning with a parent. The adults are also exposed to ideas and opinions from the teens that they might not have been able to experience and learn from, and they are also required to step outside of their comfort zone and re-learn what they had long ago. They have the opportunity to learn new ideas and opinions, growing their faith, and they also have the

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<sup>102</sup>Ibid, 10-11.



opportunity to solidify the faith they had already developed in their first experience with confirmation.

Every program and event in intergenerational ministry helps to not only enhance faith formation, but to foster a sense of belonging. In the previous chapter, I discussed the Allen and Ross evaluation of the importance of, and human need for, belonging and how intergenerational ministry can fill that need. Each situation mentioned in this chapter incorporates an element of spending time with others to foster a relationship that then creates belonging. Whether it comes in the form of discussing different worship stations, participating in a multi-generational bible study, blended worship services, multi-generational service and mission trips, interviews, confirmation classes, and many more things, they create a place for each person to be involved. The inclusion in activities, the necessity of each person to participate in discussion, simply one needing to show up for the activity to work well, creates a place for a person to belong and all of the activities presented here and that are guided by intergenerational ministry work toward the main goal of supporting faith formation and creating a sense of belonging for all involved.

There are many more easily accessible resources and event planning guides for intergenerational ministry events, found through a simple input into a search engine, in addition to the ones I have laid out here. It is important to remember that each church has a different landscape and capability to achieve different types of intergenerational events. Each model explained in this chapter can be adapted or altered to better fit a church and

its capabilities to execute each event, and ultimately gain the benefits that come from intergenerational ministry and event programming.

Finished with the exploration of the benefits of intergenerational ministry through practical and lived out events, in my next chapter, I will consider the opposite side of the coin. I will be discussing the arguments against intergenerational ministry and the alternative forms of ministry used in its absence.

### **Chapter 5: Anticipated Objections**

Though intergenerational ministry should be considered an extremely important and necessary ministry for the promotion of faith formation, it is important to address objections to it and furthermore, discuss the possible negative aspects of it. Throughout this chapter, I will identify and address objections I anticipate will be made against intergenerational ministry as a means to furthering faith formation and a solution to the growing problems caused by an age-segregated society.

#### **“Separate, age segregated services let all involved enjoy services more.”**

This objection is one that is very widely understood as a main issue with intergenerational ministry and asserts that, when children are involved in service along with the rest of the congregation, they are not benefited by the service because they cannot understand what is occurring, they become bored with what is occurring, and they become a distraction for the rest of the congregants as a result of their lack of engagement. Father Michael White, in an article published for *Rebuilt*, goes so far as to say that the distractions and disruptions that occur in a multigenerational service “is why we invest in our children’s programs. We love the children of this parish so much we

want them to have a great time and learn to love the Lord too, through age appropriate messages and worship. Meanwhile their parents can devote their full attention to worship.”<sup>103</sup> Though this message can be intriguing and somewhat convincing, the value that comes from children attending with their nuclear and congregational families is immeasurably more than the slight discomfort that may come with the cry of an unsettled child or infant. Children in a multigenerational service learn and comprehend more than what is commonly believed to be in a child's capability for comprehension, so in age segregated services, not only are the children's learning opportunities being hindered but adult learning opportunities are being hindered as well. This may be seen in something as simple as the absence of the children's sermon from which adults gain knowledge. In response to White's assertions, Timothy P. O'Malley, in “The Liturgy Is for (Little) Kids”, explains that there is no learning ability limit on the liturgy saying, “if participation in the Eucharistic liturgy requires the same degree of intellectual capacity as a scholarly lecture, then the fruits of the Eucharistic life are reserved only for those with the appropriate intellectual understanding. That would exclude many with physical or intellectual disabilities, as well as anyone unable to speak or understand the particular language in which Mass is offered.”<sup>104</sup> The cognitive capacity for one to participate in liturgy should not be the gauge for whether one can participate in the service or determine the level of understanding that can come from participating in the service.

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<sup>103</sup>Fr. Michael White, "Why We Don't Encourage (little) Kids In Church," Make Church Matter RSS, January 26, 2019, accessed February 2019, <http://nativitypastor.tv/?p=2670>.

<sup>104</sup>Timothy P. O'Malley, "The Liturgy Is for (Little) Kids," Church Life Journal, January 31, 2019, accessed February 2019, <http://churchlife.nd.edu/2019/01/31/the-liturgy-is-for-little-kids/>.

O'Malley ends his response saying, "in the end, the Church's liturgy was made for infants. It is us—in our boredom and apathy—who have to change, rather than the children." The service should be made for all ages to understand and engage within; it should not be just a ritual that is participated in by adults who might be able to understand it. Multigenerational services allow for children to be treated as more than just transitional stage humans who need to be dealt with until they grow to be valuable members of the congregation. Matthew 19:14 explains the importance of including children in worship when Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Jesus does not specify that they are to be the quiet and non-disruptive children, or that the little children should be in their own service apart from the rest of the congregation so that all parties can listen better and not be distracted.

**"Age segregated peer groups are important for faith formation."**

This objection comes with the assumption that intergenerational ministry aims to eliminate peer group interaction and age specific activities all together, leaving no room for the benefits and relationship building that comes with age segregated activities. Investing time into intergenerational ministry does not mean that peer group interaction must be eliminated or discounted or that the faith formation and benefits that come from peer group interactions are unimportant or non-vital to Christians. Investing time into intergenerational ministry means that a congregation wants to build upon the faith formation that happens in peer group interaction by expanding relationships outside of exclusively coming from peer groups.

**“Staying relevant, keeping up with the times, and being authentic is how we will survive. This can't happen with intergenerational ministry.”**

This idea comes from the growing obsession with youthfulness and staying up with the times—what has often been called “being relevant”—that the church has adopted in an effort to survive and recapture the growing number of younger people unaffiliated with a church. Andrew Root explains this idea in *Faith Formation in a Secular Age* saying, “the more I thought about it, the more sure I became in that one reason faith and faith formation had become so difficult for us was that, against our best intentions, we had not recognized how we’d gotten to this place where we were obsessed with the idea that youthfulness could save us.”<sup>105</sup> The obsession with youthfulness, in the effort to be authentic to reach people and get them in the pews, goes against the purpose of authenticity itself and also negates the people youthfulness is trying to reach. Root explains this saying,

“While authenticity is good, it also has its traps. One is youthfulness. ‘Youthfulness’ is a kind of cultural idolatry that believes that those who take on a ‘youthful frame of mind’ are best positioned to glean the rewards of authenticity itself. Youthfulness, then, is not necessarily the lived and concrete experience of young people, but *a disposition or frame of mind that best delivers authenticity*. To draw from the contemporary singer and songwriter Katy Perry, youthfulness, is our cultural ‘teenage dream’; the promises a life that is exciting, meaningful, and sensual.”<sup>106</sup>

Rather than truly attempting to understand the youth and reach and actually create space to share experiences and create a dialogue, “youthfulness” has the propensity to create an

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<sup>105</sup>Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), xx.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid*, xx.

inauthentic shroud attempting to gain followers but actually alienating them in the process.

**“We need to get people in the doors and we do that by being relevant and attractive.”**

This objection follows the same vein as the previous objection in that the attempt is to modernize the congregation and bring it up to date to fit the standards of society and make church more appealing or “cool.” Rachel Held Evans raises this issue in her editorial, “Want millennials back in the pews? Stop trying to make church ‘cool.’” Evans paints the picture of the youthfulness and the negative effects it has on church involvement by the age group that is increasingly absent from church. Evans explains that,

“Many churches have sought to lure millennials back by focusing on style points: cooler bands, hipper worship, edgier programming, impressive technology. Yet while these aren’t inherently bad ideas and might in some cases be effective, they are not the key to drawing millennials back to God in a lasting and meaningful way. Young people don’t simply want a better show. And trying to be cool might be making things worse.”<sup>107</sup>

The efforts to make church more appealing are actually doing the opposite: presenting an image of inauthenticity and pushing the targeted audience further away. Evans presents evidence of the lack of interest in a “cool” service noting,

research from Barna Group and the Cornerstone Knowledge Network found that 67 percent of millennials prefer a “classic” church over a “trendy” one, and 77 percent would choose a “sanctuary” over an “auditorium.” While we have yet to warm to the word “traditional” (only 40 percent favor it over “modern”),

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<sup>107</sup>Rachel Held Evans, "Want Millennials Back in the Pews? Stop Trying to Make Church 'cool,'" The Washington Post, April 30, 2015, accessed February 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jesus-doesnt-tweet/2015/04/30/fb07ef1a-ed01-11e4-8666-a1d756d0218e\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.1f30711f6463](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/jesus-doesnt-tweet/2015/04/30/fb07ef1a-ed01-11e4-8666-a1d756d0218e_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.1f30711f6463).

millennials exhibit an increasing aversion to exclusive, closed-minded religious communities masquerading as the hip new places in town.<sup>108</sup>

The striving for authenticity in church isn't negative until the strivings try to imitate the worldly and secular, and this is what happens when youthfulness is the goal.

Intergenerational ministry helps a congregation to be authentic in that it fosters relationships where the experiences of all involved are valued rather than used to attract more people. Through intergenerational ministry, relationships that encourage the sharing of experience and genuine interest in one another are fostered, thus creating the authenticity all parties desire.

**“Family ministry needs to take precedence. If our family ministry is strong, we won't need intergenerational ministry.”**

This is another instance of the belief that if intergenerational ministry is encouraged or implemented, it is a replacement for all other forms of ministry. This is not the case and in most instances, intergenerational ministry can strengthen the other ministries the congregation participates in because the relationships built through intergenerational ministry work to foster a sense of one big congregational family. In this sense, intergenerational ministry is best understood as shaping a congregation's ethos, and from there, the concrete forms of its practices and programs. This sense of a congregational family provides spaces for families to learn from one another and foster more strength within their own family. Intergenerational ministry helps not only to strengthen family ministry but all other forms of ministry in which a church might participate.

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<sup>108</sup>Ibid.

While there may be other objections, these are perhaps the strongest, most common arguments against intergenerational ministry. These objections seem to come from goals very similar to that of intergenerational ministry, getting people back into the pews as part of a congregation involved with faith forming activities, creating community for all involved, and making church a place where young people want to be. These goals come to combat the previously discussed issues of the growing non-affiliation to church, the existence of loneliness caused by a lack of community, and the lack of impactful, deep, faith formative interactions. The objections, though they support goals similar in nature to those of intergenerational ministry, misunderstand what intergenerational ministry actually is and what it can do, failing to realize that it is the better solution to the problems than the ones suggested by the objections. The objections are all addressed and solved by intergenerational ministry in different forms of programs and activities.

### **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

Re-imagine being a child at church. This time, you are in a service among peers, separated from your family and the elders of the congregation. You are listening to the youth pastor, singing children's songs, and participating in a craft or playing games with friends. You have no interaction with those outside of your age group, experience no liturgy or hymns, and don't participate in any congregational prayers or communion.

Re-imagine your current age, sitting in a church service; there are no children present, no children's sermon, and no children there to partake in the liturgy, Holy Communion, or congregational prayers. You hear the slightest sound of the children



singing in the room far enough away from the sanctuary so as not to interrupt the adult service.

These scenarios are the essence of the problems we see today in churches and society as a whole. Age segregation, non-affiliation, and loneliness are all played out in churches and society, negating the health of society as a whole and ultimately negating faith formation and the Kingdom of God. These problems and these scenarios are solved by intergenerational ministry, and it is an extremely valuable solution for the problems faced by both the church and the United States as a whole.

In many instances in my life, I have actively participated in intergenerational ministry, and by doing so, I have actively participated in the faith formation of those around me while adding to and strengthening my own. Intergenerational ministry creates the space for opportunities to actively participate in the faith formation of those we come into contact with in our lives. Christians are called to be Christ for others and spread the Gospel of the Lord. We are called to serve others, to embrace the opportunities where we are able to aid our brothers and sisters in Christ and those who have not yet met Him, grow closer with Him, and share the love of Christ with others. Intergenerational ministry helps us fulfill those callings.

As a student and adult emerging into the “real world,” I will be faced with challenges and scenarios that I have been prepared for, not by peers and those close in age, but by professors, family, friends who are older and wiser than I, who have guided, formed, and provided me with the tools I need to face them. I will also be entering the world with knowledge from those who are younger than I, who have taught me new ways

or have reminded me of simpler ways, to look at problems and face them, aiding in my ability to handle problems thrown my way. I can say, with much confidence, that I have learned more from those older and younger than I than I have learned from my peers.

This is not to say that my peer interaction wasn't necessary or beneficial, but it is to say that intergenerational ministry, in conjunction with peer group interaction, has made me an adult who is prepared a productive member of society and a Christian able to spread the Gospel and further the Kingdom of God. Intergenerational ministry has made the entirety of this thesis come to fruition. As a participant in intergenerational ministry, I know it works.

Throughout this thesis, the problem of age segregation, a growing rate of those unaffiliated with faith and church, and the plague of loneliness have all been explored. These problems continue to pain society and push it to more negative levels. Such issues also directly affect the church, but the church is not bound to simply go along with the culture. Understanding these issues and the church's freedom to diverge from the trends occurring in common culture, I have presented intergenerational ministry as a solution to problems in and for the church. I have also suggested practical ideas and programs to implement intergenerational ministry in a congregation to begin to solve said problems and to show that, for the purpose of healthy faith formation, intergenerational ministry is necessary on Sundays and throughout one's daily life.

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