

Liberty University School of Divinity

**Resolving Intergenerational Conflict
Within the Rural Black Churches of Central Virginia**

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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RESOLVING INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT WITHIN THE RURAL BLACK CHURCHES OF CENTRAL VIRGINIA

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The purpose of this project is to assist church leaders and their congregations in the rural black churches in Central Virginia to become more aware of the intergenerational conflict that has governed and, in some instances, legitimated the church. Qualitative and quantitative analysis and academic research revealed a majority of rural black churches in central Virginia are challenged with limited increase in membership because of the frequency of blatant disregard shown among the various generations. This thesis proposes a biblical model for Christian pastors and church leaders to provide resourceful methods of leading their congregations into more productive growth.

Abstract Length: 99 words

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The black church in most American rural locations is experiencing a decline in membership and spiritual legitimacy, primarily due to intergenerational conflict. This did not appear to be a significant conflict in the early years, though potentially there was a lack of awareness. There was a real struggle to facilitate appropriate interactions among the various generations in the rural black church (RBC) and because of this, conflict was present. There was something unmentionable about the gradual disconnect among the various generations in the church. It was more than acceptable to tackle the social issues externally, but internally, members of the RBCs were suffocating. The looming disconnect among the various generations was unaddressed. Without change, there will be an inevitable and gradual decline in the growth of the church. Not everyone in the Christian faith will understand the passion that is relative to this topic; however, it is necessary to continue the conversation that growth may be experienced in the RBC.

For some time, the RBC, like many other institutions, displayed a systematic construct without any concern or any philosophical awareness of intergenerational conflict. It was simply thought to be a normal demonstration of church life. However, after careful review, it appeared that the intergenerational conflict had become toxic to the spiritual and physical growth of the RBC. The older generations struggled to relinquish certain methodologies that had been enabled in the church for years, while the younger generations struggled to accept the lack of change. Once intergenerational conflict had been identified as a challenge, some members became problem-focused agents of conflict rather than functioning as solution-driven agents of change.

Nothing was being accomplished and churches followed existing, uncompromising plans of action.

In *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya shared that “the complexities of black churches as social institutions require a more dynamic and interactional theoretical perspective because they have played more complex roles and assumed more comprehensive burdens in their communities than is true of most white and ethnic churches.”¹ The RBC has a responsibility to address any terminal issues that would be displayed in the church and in the community as well. Those who have recognized or are recognizing the importance of unity among the various generations in the RBC are initiating efforts towards progress. This categorical assertion presents some foundational grounding for hope to stand on in terms of resolving the conflict that has been echoing down through the years. It will undoubtedly require much effort, as well as stern and clear direction regarding God’s desires for leading the RBC in this matter.

All churches are evolving, with some evolving more than others. The RBC is certainly not exempt from this evolution of sorts. However, there must be an intentional gaze at the benefits that the modern churches now have available. Brandon O’Brien suggested that “the congregations that made up the early church didn’t have the impressive presence many ministries have today through television, radio, and the internet. They didn’t have campuses and facilities and programs. They didn’t have educated clergy.”² It is an authentic statement in regards to what the church can do presently. A shift is occurring in the construct of church systems and politics,

¹ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 18.

² Brandon J. O’Brien, *The Strategically Small Church: Intimate, Nimble, Authentic, Effective* (Bloomington: Bethany House Publishers, 2010), 30.

yet the smaller churches are still in danger of not plugging the leak of intergenerational conflict. Church life without accountability is not church life at all.³ It is truly the responsibility of the leadership in the RBC to take the initiative. The church cannot expect sufficient growth until the leaders begin to lead with the heart of Christ. Jesus was sensitive to the needs of every generation and sought to meet those needs accordingly. As will be addressed in later chapters, leaders must be sensitive to the leading of God in the person of the Holy Spirit. According to Joseph Stowell, “leaders who lead by following take the first step toward character-driven leadership.”⁴ Following God’s leading will relinquish a great deal of pressure from any leader and perhaps bring clarity to the vision.

In conjunction with leadership, there are other factors that will be addressed throughout this work that have contributed to the existence of intergenerational conflict, including tradition and culture. Many are becoming more aware of how the church is mirroring the world culturally and minimizing the biblical and spiritual diagram that has been given to the church. Therefore, pride must be served with an eviction notice pertaining to the function and the demonstration of positive interactions among the various generations in the RBC. Tara Barthel and David Edling provided great insight on this in their book, *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care*:

Pride drives us to overlook our own sin while, for the sake of winning, we quickly look for and find the faults of others. Pride motivates us to guard the reputation of the church to outsiders, even a false reputation, more than we guard the relationships already within the church. Pride skews our focus to numeric growth in attendance and financial donations, rather than to the maturing of faithful, involved members of the church.⁵

³ Tara Barthel and David V. Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2012), 156.

⁴ Joseph M. Stowell, *Redefining Leadership: Character-driven Habits of Effective Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 63

⁵ Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts*, 48.

It is this penetrating thought that helps to drive the RBC towards a functional and progressive methodology. The desire is that the subject of intergenerational conflict will now be viewed through the lens of hope with greater clarity and specificity. With further optimism, this project will assist churches and their leaders to be an intentional part of the solution.

Statement of the Problem

Congregants in smaller churches are having difficulty interacting with those from other generations. The growing cultural disparity among the various generations has contributed immensely to this trending awareness. Young adults comprise a smaller generational group within the church, with more than one third of them (35%) indicating that they have reservations about the church's legitimacy because of moral failure in the leadership.⁶ The traditional patterns of older congregants are no longer acceptable to younger congregants, with the more radical and contemporary patterns of the younger congregants conflicting with the patterns of the older generation; particularly in the context of the RBC. While there are some from each generation that gravitate towards the other generations' preference in assembly and style of worship, the prevailing theme is that each generation would rather conduct the service in their own way. The older generation is becoming fearful that even the idea of church growth is excluding them while targeting a younger generation.⁷ It is indeed unhealthy for the people who profess to be in close proximity regarding relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

This intergenerational conflict is not just evident during the worship experience on Sunday, but is evidenced throughout the social and communicative activities of the church.

⁶ "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church," March 4, 2015, Barna Research Group, <https://www.barna.com/research/what-millennials-want-when-they-visit-church/> (accessed September 11, 2017).

⁷ Carol Howard Merrit, *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* (Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2007), 21.

Congregationally run churches practice multiple forms of congregational polity.⁸ Unfortunately, the statement can become infectious when there is a jousting for hierarchal reign among the generations. Conflict is inevitable and it is extremely difficult to try to please everyone, but Scripture is clear that God's people should make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.⁹

Although it occurs in some churches, this project does not address intergenerational congregations who are lured into fist-fighting or engaging in any type of physical altercations with one another, but rather the avoidance of that which is unfamiliar and to some degree, uncomfortable. It is necessary for pastors to mediate for those in the congregation who have found it difficult to conform to other generational styles. If not, there will be many erroneous decisions made by those in leadership. These kinds of experiences will birth a level of exhaustion that is not conducive for healthy church growth. For this reason, it is urgent to find less divisive methodologies for solving the problem of intergenerational conflict in the small RBC.

Statement of Limitations

The content of information that is affiliated with intergenerational conflict in small RBCs is not as prevalent as other subjects. However, the nature of this topic is so expansive that it would be impossible to address every issue pertaining to intergenerational conflict in the small RBC. Furthermore, this researcher did not engage cross-denominational or ethnically diverse settings in which to obtain research, but rather extrapolated information from various scholars coupled with the experiences of a few pastors who lead small Black Baptist churches in rural Virginia. In addition, this researcher did not attempt to extract information from leaders outside

⁸ Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts*, 104.

⁹ Eph. 4:3 NIV.

of the church regardless of their experiences with intergenerational conflict. Our choice to practice or not practice Christian freedom affects our ability to relate to people.¹⁰

The expansive issues relating to intergenerational conflict could include: the generational gap that exists in small RBCs today; the radicalness of the millennials; the grip of traditionalism on the older generation; the lack of effective social skills in the church (inclusive of communication skills); various and diverse worship styles (music, dance and etc.); the preaching modality; the use of technology in the church; and the identity of systems in which there are family cliques and other small cells or infrastructures with motives and agendas. Focusing on each of these issues would present a diversion from developing a functional methodological approach to diminishing the intergenerational conflict in the small RBC.

It would be overwhelming to observe, assess and collect data from different denominations affiliated with Christianity regarding this topic. The researcher limited the focus of this project, not because the other denominations are irrelevant, but to give detailed attention to the small Black Baptist churches in rural Virginia. The same determination applied to focusing on other ethnically diverse churches. This project gave voice to a system that has been silent for too long, with the goal of prayerfully liberating God's people in the process.

The Apostle Paul said to avoid adapting to worldly systems, challenging the Jews in Rome then and the believers now to improve self by making mental modifications.¹¹ Paul's challenge has been accepted to not reach out to community leaders even though they may have experience with intergenerational conflict. This is not an indictment on the character of those community leaders, but rather an intentional guard for the dynamics of the church. The purpose

¹⁰ J. Paul Nyquist and Carson Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian: Dealing with the Generational Baggage of our Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 58.

¹¹ Rom. 12:2 NIV.

of this project is not to cause ambivalence, but rather to inspire hope and to clear up layers of ambiguity.

Perhaps the focused model presented here can also serve as a template for addressing other denominations and ethnicities in the future. It could strategically give attention to the matter of social and ministerial injustice that is harbored in some churches and denominations. Also, after small churches have experienced some strength-building, the findings could aid external structures in better resolving conflicts in their organizations and community endeavors. The researcher intended this project to be a call to be the light of the world illuminating the darkness with love, but ultimately glorifying God.¹²

Theoretical Basis

As representatives of Christ, the church should be a unified body that seeks primarily to do the will of God. This project revealed that smaller RBCs continue to endure the relentless pain caused by intergenerational conflict, finding that an increased number of older individuals will quote scriptures on unity in the Body of Christ while engaging emphatically in intergenerational conflict, thereby having a form of godliness, but denying its power.¹³ The researcher found that youth, if given the opportunity, would choose not to be in the same company as the older congregants. There is a sense of hypocrisy on the part of two-thirds of the millennials (66%), who don't trust the fellowship with individuals in other generations.¹⁴

Churches of all sizes have problems, but with the blessing of a new day should also come a resurgence to correct the wrongs of yesterday. No church should feel relegated by the complexities of faulty church systems nor should any church feel excused by the failure of

¹² Matt. 5:14-16 NIV.

¹³ 2 Tim. 3:5 NIV.

¹⁴ "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church."

yesterday. Leaders and congregants have a responsibility to show up and intentionally unite with others in love. With this project, the researcher identified the conflicts, as well as the issues causing the conflicts. If such assessments can be made with a keen attention to detail, then progress can be made in the smaller RBCs.

It is imperative that both pastoral leaders and congregants engage in a dialogue to unite the generations. It cannot be a minimal effort on either part, but rather requires investing in hope for the future of the small church. The language we use in talking to and about people in our various relationships reveals a great deal about ourselves and how we view others.¹⁵ The building of relationships in the church should be accompanied by a willingness to communicate through that which is not easily understood. The various entities must meet with integrity and strategically corroborate on ideas that will work to build the kingdom of God and eradicate intergenerational conflict. These problems did not evolve in an instant, and neither will they be resolved in an instant. However, with great intention and effort, unification among the various generations can manifest. There have been relevant observations made to recognize the very real issues that exist in the small church and an acknowledgement that there are no easy elucidations to the situation.

The church is indeed the body of Christ that consists of various parts. The Apostle Paul shared with the church at Corinth that Christ is the head of that body and each part should celebrate its own abilities, capacities and propensities.¹⁶ Paul did not share this with the church because there was an absence of conflict, but rather because of the presence of conflict. One could argue that the conflict was very much intergenerational. Nevertheless, the

¹⁵ Kenneth O. Gangel and Samuel L. Canine, *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 78

¹⁶ 1 Cor. 12:12-30 NIV.

interconnectedness of the leadership and the congregants using the tool of communication assists with progressing beyond the conflict. Sarah Cunningham profoundly suggested that we are wise to acknowledge that we are not the first to find fault in the church or the first to seek to reform it, but that we are one of many generations that have tried to figure out the best faith models for their eras.¹⁷ It is about finding solutions rather than further maximizing the challenges and problems. More times than not, the expectancy of one's success comes when the strategy begins with realizing that God gives him or her the victory as he or she follows Him.

The various generations that exist in the smaller churches have many gifts to contribute to the kingdom of God, but also those that will benefit others. Constant communication is the key, accountability is essential, and being solution-driven will inevitably produce a reduction in the amount of conflict that many small black churches in rural Virginia have been experiencing. There must be an urgency regarding forging into every opportunity and to avoid becoming agents of self-righteousness. The energy, the motivation, the inspiration to stay focused all exists within the body of Christ. Creative ideas and strategies will reignite God's divine will for his people to be one in spirit, in faith, in love, and in the assembly. There is an intense awareness that intergenerational conflict is not the only conflict in the church, but it is a major issue that will often go unnoticed if not assessed properly.

Statement of Methodology

Data has been extracted from various sources about the subject of intergenerational conflict in the small church. There are those who have given much attention to detail regarding the subject of conflict in the church. However, those who labor in the vineyard of pastoring RBCs have an aptitude about the internal happenings of this organization. Therefore, in

¹⁷ Sarah Cunningham, *Beyond the Broken Church: How to Leave Church Problems Behind Without Leaving the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 111.

conjunction with the substantial use of published data, the researcher interviewed twenty African-American pastors of small RBCs. The researcher used the data collected from multiple sources to make thorough evaluations.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis project, the researcher presents a dialogue on the lack of growth in the RBC because of intergenerational conflict, bringing to light some observations made over a span of many years. This chapter will aid the reader in understanding the current intergenerational dynamics found in the RBC. The information in this chapter is meant to generate some serious thought and dialogue about a topic that has been dormant for too long. It further discloses some of the conditions in which smaller churches have experienced intergenerational conflict.

In Chapter 2, the researcher communicates the analysis of the research regarding the lack of growth in the RBC because of the existence of intergenerational conflict. The researcher interviewed twenty pastors regarding their leadership responses to intergenerational conflict in the churches in which they pastor. Each of those pastors responded to questions regarding actions that ultimately led to prevention of and/or intervention into the conflict. Interview questions also sought their honest examinations of whether or not they even recognize contention among the generations in conflict in their respective churches.

Chapter 3 outlines some factors that both negatively and positively impacted the RBC. The researcher's intention is that the information in this chapter will prayerfully ignite enough attention about this topic to spark others to sound an urgent alarm. In this chapter, the researcher addresses the legacy of the RBC as a powerful component of America's history, reviewing how culture and tradition played a significant role in the evolution of the activity in the Black church. This chapter also details leaders' roles amidst such conflict and strategies for effectively moving

the various generations in the church towards progress. Lastly, the researcher uses this chapter to shed light on resolving the conflict that exists among the various generations in the RBCs.

In Chapter 4, the researcher presents a solution-oriented model to assist RBC pastors and members with better managing conflict in their churches in order to experience both qualitative and quantitative growth. The researcher presents four strategies as resourceful methodologies for fostering reconciliation among the generations within the RBC. The researcher intended this chapter to leave readers inspired and hopeful regarding efforts to diminish or resolve conflict in the RBC. God wants his church on earth to be present through every age.¹⁸ In this chapter, the researcher provides a summation of this thesis project, offering final thoughts and reflections regarding the conflict between various generations in the church.

Review of Literature

Books

Without published sources as a guide for completing a thesis project, it would unbearable and to others unbelievable. The researcher extrapolated data from published books to glean material that would increase understanding regarding intergenerational conflict. Journal articles and validated websites were also used to shape the work. Relevant scriptures added legitimacy to the data and researched works.

Donald Hilliard shared insight on developing a healthy, growing church in *Church Growth from An African American Perspective*. He was strategic and adamant about the church becoming transformed through the components of love, edification and emancipation. Hilliard shared distinctive and clear explanations of what a healthy and unhealthy church can be and how to insert appropriate modifications. The power of prayer and preaching are conveyed as powerful

¹⁸ Howard Vanderwell (ed.), *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together* (Herdon: The Alban Institute, 2008), 27.

resources in this book, with Hilliard insisting that they must be demonstrated with authenticity and truth. This book is not just theoretical, but extremely practical for anyone to acquiesce to foundational nuggets shared throughout this book.

Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya provided this project with great energy through their book, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Lincoln and Mamiya went to great lengths to remind readers that the Black church is a significant and important thread in the fabric of American religious history. They take the readers on a journey down the historical and sociological trail of understanding the validity of the Black church's origin. The book shares information about the Black church's contribution to the civil rights movement and the intentional impact of black liberation theology. The book empowers America as a whole to remember the impact that the Black church made in American history.

Tara Barthel and David Edling's book, *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care*, is an incredible book that provides great resources for overcoming conflicts in the church. This book is a practical resource to assist both leaders and congregants in avoiding conflict. Barthel and Edling extract pertinent information from Acts 15 to provide churches with a godly model for avoiding conflict. The authors share their personal experiences as a transparent transport towards reaching the lost. The book gives four defining principles that help to shape any church in a godly direction perspective, discernment, leadership, and biblical response.¹⁹

In *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation*, Carol Merritt fills the gap in the church by reaching for the young adults. While reaching for the young adults, she does not forget about the older generation or the younger generation. The book does a good job of giving

¹⁹ Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts*, 23.

equality to each of the generations. The theme of the book offers a message of hope. So many churches; particularly small churches, have been damaged by intergenerational conflict. The book is not difficult to read and it will serve as a guide towards unifying the church. Merritt is extremely theoretical in tone, but offers a practical model to parallel that tone.

Howard Vanderwell's compilation of multiple writings in *The Church of All Ages* is a refreshing perspective of intergenerational congregants worshipping together. The authors who contributed to this work tackled the issues of faith development and worship planning. Although this book was used as a resource for the development of this thesis project, it is also suited for use as a resource from which to extrapolate sermons. The book emphasizes the interactions among various generations; calling each generation to plan, lead, and participate in worship. Intergenerational worship is not only about how members of a congregation relate to one other in their worship, but is also about the ethos surrounding their worship.²⁰

Paul and Carson Nyquist's *The Post-Church Christian* is a breathtaking read about the future of the church about the millennials, bringing awareness to the well-being of the millennials. Carson Nyquist shares his youthful perspective regarding the reasons young people are leaving the church and offers his thoughts about regaining them back. Paul Nyquist applies his language and his experience toward the effort to bring others in his son's generation back to church. It is an easy read and helps to bridge the gap between the baby boomers and the millennials. Paul was extremely honest in his exposition about his own generation and the hypocritical ways in which they have been behaving for years. A strong theme of the book is that your image is how you are perceived by outsiders. It's your reputation.²¹

²⁰ Vanderwell, *The Church of All Ages*, 82.

²¹ Nyquist and Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian*, 86.

This researcher gleaned great appreciation from *The Strategically Small Church* by Brandon O'Brien. While so many authors have directed their information, tools and resources towards the mega church, it appears that the small church has been ignored. O'Brien appears to be mission-minded and he chooses not to handicap small churches by presuming that they don't have the resources to be included in such thinking. One of the major sounds of the book is that even though the infrastructure may be small, the vision and thinking do not have to be small. The kingdom of God is larger than each of our churches. Indeed, it is larger than all our churches.²² This notion by O'Brien speaks volumes to the small church leader who can sometimes feel intimidated by the structure and systems of the larger churches.

In terms of intergenerational conflict, Sarah Cunningham's *Beyond the Broken Church: How to Leave Church Problems Behind Without Leaving the Church* speaks loudly to the heart of the disillusioned individual. Particularly for a small church, there are those who do not want to entertain any type of drama or chaos. Now that this kind of behavior is presented, the disillusioned person will seek refuge somewhere else. Cunningham does a great job of speaking to the emotionality of an individual such as that.

In *Communication and Conflict Management: In Churches and Christian Organizations*, Kenneth Gangel and Samuel Canine provide an extensive perspective on resolving conflict in Christian organizations. The authors do a good job of expressing the importance of communication in churches and other Christian organizations. The relevance to the topic of intergenerational conflict is that this book causes individuals to actively listen to one another. Internally, it shapes one to really look at self and examine his or her own capacity to relate to

²² O'Brien, *The Strategically Small Church*, 98.

others. This writer is particularly grateful to Gangel and Canine for their emphasis on the conflict in both the Old and New Testaments.

Journal Articles

This researcher's concern regarding the appropriate functioning of the generations within the church led to an interesting read in John Roberto's article, "Our Future Is Intergenerational." Robert argues that God is at work in every generation, just as in every human being. It is reflective of God's favor over this researcher's own grandparents, who worked for little or nothing but yet raised a family and built homes. It is also reflective of God's favor over this researcher's mother, who was the first in the family to graduate from college and pursue a career in education. God's favor continues with this researcher himself, as he seeks to obtain a Doctor of Ministry degree. God reached into the generality of each era to speak to us individually. He has begun growing us all into the one image of Christ. Learning the stories of God's work in wildly different situations leads to wonder at His power and character.

Representatives of each age group can also reflect God's nature in different ways. The young show strength and energy and optimism. The middle-aged exhibit more intentional family care and a variety of experiences. The elderly display wisdom and sobriety in the shadow of death. Just as we need every tribe and nation to display the manifold glory of God, so too we need every generation and age group if we are to see and celebrate His full nature. According to Roberto, intergenerational faith formation may seem "new" to today's congregations, but it has deep roots in our Jewish and Christian heritage. The call for one generation to share its faith and story with future generations is deeply embedded in the Jewish tradition.²³

Roberto points out that uniting the generations in the church is beneficial for everyone involved in the formation. Remembering that God is intentional in creating a community is important in building an appropriate system of intergenerational operation. Also, it expresses that everyone in the community has value. This model teaches churches to foster an ethic of caring for one another. Committing effort to

²³John Roberto, "Our Future Is Intergenerational," *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 105.

engage one another by investing in relationships build intergenerational faith formation. Intergenerational faith will also help develop humility. And though there are more reasons we could list; intergenerational faith formation will also help churches grow in personal holiness. Like perspectival blind spots, generations can also have moral blind spots that others expose. Racism, sexual immorality and greed are just a few of those blind spots.

Allen Harkness provides a great deal of substance regarding the intergenerational church in his article, “Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church.” When the church is at its best, it is a complete body filled with numerous diverse parts all doing their part to further the kingdom of God. This notion includes not only the diversity of spiritual gifts, but the diversity of the generations and what each generation brings to the table. It may be hard work to create an intergenerational church, but it is worth it. According to Harkness, our theology demands it. He writes:

Intergenerationalism was a feature of the faith communities in both the Old Testament and New Testament eras. Such a perspective was inherent in the sense of corporateness of the Old Testament Hebraic tradition, with the outcome that children, representing the new generation were not merely included in the religion of Israel, they were assimilated or incorporated with a deep sense of belonging into the body or the family of God's covenant people.²⁴

Maintaining and investing in all relationships across generational divides is crucial for long-term survival. It is relatively easier to connect with people our own age, but what we need is the insight, wisdom, and experience from those who are older. We need one another for the long haul. To be a church that will last multiple generations you should have multiple generations worshipping together. Intergenerational churches enjoy a perspective of the church that is rich and healthy. Churches would benefit from the educational advances that build relationships among the generations. Young people can have elderly people mentor them. They

²⁴Allan Harkness, “Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church,” *Religious Education*, no. 4 (2006): 431.

may not be their grandparents, but how sweet it is to “hang” with someone their grandparent’s age. Seeing faith in people of all ages renews the soul. It reminds us of our differences, and though it may lead to worship style preferential fighting which occurs all too often, it can also lead to beautiful illustrations of sacrifice.

In this project, the researcher conveys components from Jocelyn Hill’s article, “Intergenerational: What's in a word?” The other articles shared information pertaining more to the establishment of intergenerational church and the systems that connect with it. This article served as a conversation about the term intergenerational in general. This researcher currently serves as pastor of generational church that is quickly becoming an intergenerational church. It is an extraordinarily pertinent point that a church can be a multigenerational church and still not have people from various generations growing together. The term intergenerational implies that the generations are mixing together in a synergistic, life-giving way that promotes spiritual formation.

There are multiple advantages of being inter-generational. Specific advantages include: (a) older generations can mentor the younger generations; (b) the younger generations can keep the church from becoming irrelevant; and (c) the effort involved in keeping generations unified leads to spiritual growth and character development. According to Hill, the term initially referred to settings and times in which children, youth, and adults might come together for Christian education. In the summer, when everyone was looking for different ways to cope with skimpy and spasmodic attendance, intergenerational worship was a possibility. The obvious way this might be done was to use the new methodology called learning centers.²⁵

²⁵ Jocelyn Hill, “Intergenerational: What’s in A Word,” *The Clergy Journal* 77, no. 5 (2001): 18.

A generationally unified church witnesses to the power of the gospel in the surrounding community. What does it take? It takes willingness to give and take regarding ministry, worship and relationship styles. Currently, it will require a mix of the old and the new to create worship unity, as well as preaching that is relevant to people in different stages of life and faith. In worship, we know community as we share music, and prayer, and the challenge of scripture and sermon. In another setting, we can participate through interaction, learning from each other as we share ideas and explore questions that concern us all, at whatever age. We can learn together using art and videos, and Bible study in small groups. One church recently used a summer Sunday school setting and invited parents to join their children in a common learning experience. Sometimes they separated into adult and children's activities, but always they were together for a major part of the time, Hill explained.

The intentional mixing of generations in various environments affect the community in a relevant manner. Having leadership teams with representatives from various generations contribute positively to the body. But what are the challenges to such an environment? As always, sin causes problems. As people, we naturally gravitate towards what we want rather than what is best for all, lacking the humility needed to learn from one another. There is also often a lack of solid models to follow, which negatively influences the body of believers as well. And the enemy is always seeking to undermine any God-honoring expression of unity in the church.

Faith communities are often the only places in our society where we learn to think intergenerationally. The church offers individuals with opportunities to care for one another from cradle to grave. In the challenging times ahead of us, this researcher hopes that churches can continue to be places where we understand the unique positions of the young, the old, and everyone in between.

This writer will reflect on work that Brenda Snailum presented in her article, “Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry Within Existing Evangelical Church Congregations: What Have We Learned?” In the face of generational differences in present-day culture, evangelical Christian churches tend to respond in one of three ways when it comes to planning congregational worship. In the inherited tradition, a congregation seeks to conserve past practices, working to maintain inherited norms. In a blended congregation, a conscious effort is made to appeal to all generations represented in the congregation and community. In generation-specific worship, the worship is designed to address the cultural characteristics and needs of a particular generation or age group, with worshipers from other generations simply discounted or provided with their own age-specific, alienated environment.

Snailum asked a panel of intergenerational ministry experts about the strategic or methodological issues that are critical for youth ministry pastors and leaders to consider when establishing intergenerational community in their existing congregations. For the purposes of this study, intergenerational was understood as referring to members of two or more different generations having some degree of relationship developed through cooperative interaction to achieve common goals.²⁶ It is important to emphasize that mutual, influential relationships are the distinguishing characteristics of intergenerational community and multigenerational settings wherein several generations are in proximity with each other, but not necessarily in relationship.

This researcher also reflected on Linda Cannell’s work in “Family and Intergenerational Learning Experiences.” In making family ministry into a specialized industry and in viewing young people as the “hope for the future,” we isolate the young and ignore our own responsibility to participate in their formation. Of course, even when we invite mismatched

²⁶Brenda Snailum, “Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry Within Existing Evangelical Church Congregations: What Have We Learned,” *Christian Education Journal*, no. 1 (2012): 165.

people to eat together, the people will err on the side of self-segregation, opting to eat with their own and avoid awkward exchanges. But over time and with some encouragement to mix it up, the potential for friendship exists at a much higher rate than if there were not a shared meal. According to Cannell, as you work with families and congregations over a period, you will want to develop a balanced “menu” of learning experiences. The template provided in this study is intended to serve as a guide for the development of these experiences. As you read through these sources, you will find activities that can be used in the following categories. Subheadings in each category are suggestive of the sorts of experiences you can create.²⁷

If church leaders do not model and prompt intergenerational learning, they won’t happen. It is the responsibility of the leaders to nurture a space for the older and younger and those in between to be together in normal, mundane ways. In these moments, no one is set apart as special. Yet, in these moments, each of us has the potential to see one another as Christ sees us, with compassion, love and friendship. The difficulty is helping parents and other caregivers learn how to guide their own children in the faith, and helping congregations incorporate significant family and intergenerational learning experiences into a program that often has no room for them. Short-term experiences for family clusters and intergenerational groupings can serve a variety of purposes, providing opportunities for: (a) parents to see other parents relating to children; (b) parents to try out experiences at church that can then become part of family rituals; and (c) members of congregations to experience interaction in settings where children are part of the experience. However, suitable curriculum is difficult to find. The abundance of literature now available that describes activities for families can be used by educational planners in the design of learning experiences, according to Cannell.

²⁷ Linda Cannell, “Family and Intergenerational Learning Experiences,” *Christian Education Journal*, no. 2 (2001): 79-80.

When we share the love of Christ with one another in the ordinary moments, sharing the Word, the peace, and the bread in worship takes on new dimensions and power. In these friendships, we are all participating in the future of the church. Mentoring, guiding, and shadowing provide great learning experiences for all ages. This can occur through friendship, career and vocational support, business mentoring or tutoring. This researcher believes that intergenerational learning will improve well-being, self-esteem, and health for all involved and will inspire greater awareness of the issues facing both generations. It also will serve to develop stronger links to the community and break down age-based stereotypes as generations work together on community projects or issues and solve problems together.

Websites

The Barna Research Group shared profound research on in “What Millennials Want When They Visit Church.” This writer was thoroughly impressed with the legitimacy of the Barna Group’s research and the group’s attempt to solve the problems that churches face today. This research was invoked by the depressing decrease in the intergenerational unification as well as the diminishing of the millennials in church. The Barna Research Group investigated the reasons that things were happening in the church. Surely the traditional minded congregants were not going to advocate for the millennials when it appears that they are threatened by them. In the same manner, the millennials have developed disdain and distrust towards the older, traditional-minded congregants. The Barna Research Group’s work was a timely contribution to this researcher’s quest to heal the wounds that have been left from intergenerational conflict and to prevent others from being wounded.

In “Leadership Issues in the Small Group,” Rod Dempsey discusses the effectiveness of competent Christian leadership. Dempsey guides this article with distinct characteristics of

Christian leadership, arguing that a Christian leader must have vision to appropriately navigate through the tough terrain of any ministry endeavor. He expresses sentiments from both Habakkuk 2 and Proverbs 29 regarding the establishment of vision and the clarity of the vision. Secondly, Dempsey notes that a Christian leader will influence those whom he or she is leading while being influenced by the Holy Spirit. Thirdly, Dempsey points out the importance of effective leaders being able to develop followers into leaders. It is an expression of humility and trust in the God of the process. Lastly and most importantly, a Christian leader must be sensitive to the leading of God's plan. Following God's plan will not only present clear vision, but will also provide strong influence that will help to develop others into effective Christian leaders.

In "What Is a Disciple," Jonathan Parnell offers a thorough perspective of being Christ-like. A disciple is not one who is associated with the church or just simply bears the name of a Christian, but rather one who intentionally and intensely emulates the character of Jesus Christ. Parnell describes a disciple of Christ as a worshipper, a servant, and a witness and as one who will not conform to societal popularities and give homage to the ways of humankind is the one who has decided to follow Jesus. In regard to dismissing intergenerational conflict in the church, it is the role of each generation to follow Jesus as disciples rather than embracing the preferential allowances of any particular generation.

Carl Ellis' "The African-American Church: Past, Present, and Future" is a fascinating piece in which he adamantly conveys that the black church has been, is, and always will be a formidable component of this nation's spiritual makeup. Ellis addressed the cultural variances and transformations throughout time, a concept that is important in the context of this researcher's assertion that the RBC is a powerful resource in the faith of this nation. There was

never a discredit to the existence of the RBC on this writer's behalf, but rather a perspective that sought to make it better and more compliant with the scriptures.

Scriptures

The Apostle Paul illustrates a blueprint in I Corinthians 12:12-30, likening the church to the human body. There has never been a single generation of humanity that has been worthy of being enthroned as the head of that body. However, each generation has been given different capacities as members of that body. No one member is more unique or more sufficient than the others. If only the multi-generational congregants would labor with this text and recognize that it is God's church. The believers are just leasing it, with instructions to manage it with excellence.

In Ephesians 4:3, Paul challenges all believers to invest in unity with others because of the relationship with God through Christ Jesus. The further revelation is that when believers invest in this type of unity, the result is God's peace. Although Paul's context was very different in this text, the small church needs to adhere to the words that are divinely inspired by God to stop engaging in intergenerational conflict. It is God's will, it is God's way, and it is God's wisdom that will guide His people through the difficulty of poor social interaction, if there is an investment in faith.

In Romans 12:2, Paul instructs the believers to appreciate individuality and the ability to be who you are in Christ. The urgency of like-minded people who associate with one another in fellowship should shield themselves from the deception of the commercial standards of the world. It is our obligation as a church, even during intergenerational conflict, to be transformed by the refreshing of the mind.

As indicated in the Barna report, millennials have a certain disgust and disdain for those in the older generation who appear to be hypocritical. This hypocrisy stems from individuals

who quote the sacred scriptures and yet behave in a way that disregards the scriptures that have been quoted. In 2 Timothy 3:5, Paul exposes those who entertain such behavior and emphatically suggest that God is powerless.

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul encourages Timothy to be a model of Christ in the community. He compels Timothy to do so because of his abilities, rather than his age. A healthy church is a church that is willing to delegate based on what individuals are able to do and willing to do, rather than that what he or she is considered old enough to do. Paul's challenge to Timothy is one that will keep unity in the body of Christ and will ultimately diffuse the influence of exclusion that erupted among the generations in the church.

The pressure of conflict is oftentimes overwhelming and even unbearable, but forgiveness is a tool that often provides relief in those moments. This is the very point that Paul makes in Colossians 3:13, 14. In the context of this research, each generation is responsible for rebuilding the unity in the church by forgiving one another and loving one another. It takes a willing heart to move beyond the hurt to get to reconciliation and love is the vehicle that transports the church from its hurt to its healing.

Psalms 133:1 provides an expression of the joy found in the unity of those with common beliefs. It is a welcoming theme for the churches today who continue to struggle with internal conflict that leads to disunity. It is good that each generation has their own uniqueness which can be rationed in the church in various forms and in many ways. It is pleasant that each generation in the church can bridge the gaps that have been created between each generation. Ultimately, there is satisfaction in knowing that there is great excitement affiliated with unity in the body of Christ.

Chapter 2

Analytical Research

Intergenerational conflict has been a significant factor in the decline of membership and spiritual legitimacy in many RBCs in America. Lincoln and Mamiya shared that “the black church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low-income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development.”²⁸ The RBC has been and still is a formidable component of this nation. As an institution of faith, it has endured a great number of hardships and challenges since its inception, but it has also managed to sustain its presence. The “presence” perspective alone is not enough to resolve the intergenerational conflict. Therefore, it is with hopeful expectation that this project will help to ignite a keen perspective of the authentic operation (the essence) of the RBC regarding intergenerational conflict.

The goal for the RBC is not in being absolved from conflict, but rather it is in being good stewards over the issue of conflict. In his article “Conflict in the Black Church,” Robert Newbold quotes Rolla Swanson as saying, “to be able to identify conflict, deal with it openly, and keep it from being destructive of the Christian community” are productive tactics to better manage conflict.²⁹ After all, Christians have a responsibility to not embrace schism in the body, but rather to be connected by an integrated ethic of caring.³⁰ According to Alexander Strauch, “There is nothing wrong with Christians disagreeing with one another or trying to persuade another of the

²⁸ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 8.

²⁹ Robert T. Newbold, “Conflict in the Black Church: The Black Church Has Often Failed to Manage Conflict Because it Believes Conflict is Wrong,” *Christianity Today*, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/1980/spring/80l2099.html>.

³⁰ 1 Cor. 12:25 NIV.

rightness of a particular position. What is wrong, however, is loveless conflict that ends in hate and bitterness.”³¹ It is through the lens of this researcher that this project frames and fosters a model of intergenerational inclusion because of better conflict resolution.

Henry and Richard Blackaby said: “Wise leaders continually learn from the events of their lives as well as from their studies. They take time after major events to process what happened and to learn from the experiences.”³² In that light, the researcher gathered the input of twenty African American leaders who serve as vocational or bi-vocational pastors of rural black Baptist churches in central Virginia. The researcher’s intent was not to be even further exclusive, but rather to bring healing to a deep and complex divide in the RBC. Through this project, the researcher provides a model for better enhancing the growth of the RBC by facilitating positive interactions among the various generations. The researcher also provides a detailed analysis of the research to better resolve the conflict in the church.

The interviews with the pastors provided a primary and relevant perspective of the happenings of the RBC. Even though each of these churches are autonomous, the inner-workings of the RBC share many commonalities. Using the interviews as a resource tool helps to validate the legitimacy of working or non-working methodologies. According to Anthony Bradley, “in ongoing dialogue between individual selves, people can be liberated from personal psychological demons as well as from outside oppression. It is this construction that secures the uniqueness of the self.”³³ At some point, there should be prayerful inclusion of the congregants’ perspective because it will advance the discussion on the intergenerational unity in the church. But for now,

³¹ Alexander Strauch, *A Christian Leader’s Guide to Leading with Love: Study Guide* (Colorado Springs: Lewis & Roth Publishers, 2006), 166.

³² Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God’s Agenda* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 331.

³³ Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010), 29.

the perspectives of the twenty pastors begin the active, ongoing conversation. There is no definitive way of assessing whether the interviews and the scholarship on this topic will completely eradicate the problem as it is known, but it will provide a working process whereby gradual growth can occur.

Result of Interview Analysis

The purpose of this project was to challenge RBC pastors and the churches they lead to recognize that intergenerational conflict will cause stagnation in the growth of the church if not managed properly. The information composed from the interviews will assist in maintaining active dialogue about this subject. This composition of information revealed relevant perspectives seen through the responses of twenty RBC pastors. As noted in the previous chapter, some of the information extracted from the interviews as well as the scholarship of divinely inspired authors, helped to shape five strategies that can be used as a model to better manage intergenerational conflict in the RBC.

Description of the Participants

This researcher aimed to gather responses from a total of twenty pastors, understanding that a larger number would be contacted in order to generate those responses. Therefore, the researcher contacted a total of thirty-five pastors of rural black Baptist churches in central Virginia. The researcher contacted a total of ten female pastors, three of whom consented and followed through with the process. The researcher contacted a total of twenty-five male pastors, seventeen of whom consented and followed through with the process. Participants' ages ranged from 35 to 68, with all pastors having at least five years in the pastorate. Thirteen of the participating pastors have been pastoring for 5-10 years; one has pastored for 10-15 years, two have pastored for 15-20 years, and four have pastored for more than twenty years. All

participating pastors had some formal seminary training, with many of them holding multiple degrees. Regarding their highest earned levels of education, three obtained doctorate degrees, three earned master's degrees, five earned bachelor's degrees, three completed certificate work, and six are currently working toward obtaining a degree.

Description of the Interview Process

The participants were chosen because of their experiences as pastors of RBCs. Participants were interviewed in Central Virginia, either in their homes or in their offices. Each interview space was safe, with an atmosphere that was conducive for relevant and intelligent conversation. After the warmup moments, each participant was given a more thorough and detailed description of the research, prompting many to share much more than just the answers to the questions. This researcher guided the conversations back towards the intended topic because of time restraints. Each interview took at least forty-five minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed data by extracting information from the various pastors and converting it into a variety of chart forms. The extraction of information was determined by the adamancy of the responses as well as by the repetition of the responses.

Findings

The findings presented below illustrate the results of the simple graphic analysis. The analysis reflects the demographic of the pastors' churches and reveals interactive activity among the various generations as well as the leadership in the pastors' churches. The researcher also reports the pastors' perspectives regarding present makeup of their churches as well as the future of their churches.

Research Instrument

The researcher relied on the interview process as the research instrument used to extract data for this project. The interview consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to gather authentic perspectives from the twenty pastors regarding the activities among the various generations in their churches.

Interview Questions

Question 1

Tell me whether your church size is small or large in population; whether it is made up primarily of younger, middle aged, or older people or a blend?

The first part of this question was asked of the twenty pastors because the goal for resolving conflict is to produce healthily growing churches. Hilliard shared some interesting insight on the state of the church, writing: “Healthy churches are growing churches, but the key factor is how this growth is measured. Contrary to the assumption of many, a healthy, growing church cannot always be measured by greater numbers or a bigger budget. Healthy church growth is not always, nor is it even primarily, numerical.”³⁴ The pastors who were interviewed spoke candidly about growing their respective churches, explaining where they are in regards to size and reporting that they trust growth can occur no matter the numerical makeup of the church.

The pastors had differing views as to what made their churches small, mid-size or large. However, for this research, the information was converted to reflect the range of size. In responding to the question about church size, ten of the pastors (50%) reported that they pastor mid-size churches, eight of the pastors (40%) indicated that they lead smaller churches, and two

³⁴ Donald Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006), 4.

pastors (10%) reporting leading larger congregational churches. It is safe to say that the larger churches, if planted in a different demographic, would be considered small churches.

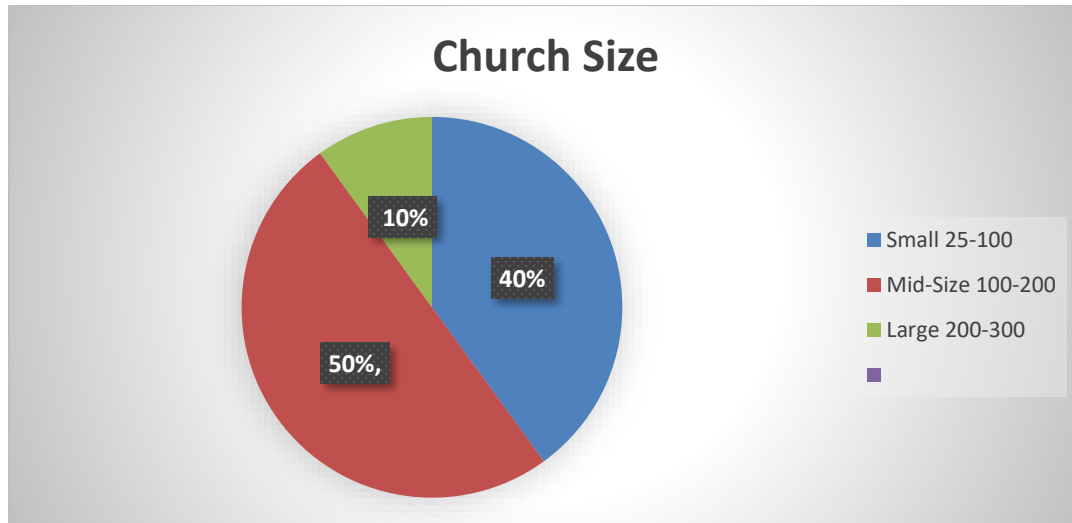


Figure 1. Church size.

The second part of the question was designed to assess the functionality of the generations that were operative in each of the twenty pastors' respective churches. According to Christine Ross and Holly Allen, "truly intergenerational communities welcome children, emerging adults, recovering addicts, single adults, widows, single parents, teens whose parents are not around, the elderly, those in crisis, empty nesters and struggling parents of young children into a safe but challenging place to be formed into the image of Christ."³⁵ Each of the pastors interviewed seemed to have shared sentiments with Ross and Allen as it was suggested that a healthily growing church has to have representatives from each generation.

The question also inquired about the blend of generations in the churches in which the pastors led. Each of the pastors reported having some type of generational blend in their

³⁵Christine Lawton Ross and Holly Catterton Allen, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 63.

respective churches. Thirteen of the pastors (65%) reported having each of the generations in their church ministries (youth, younger adults, middle-aged adults, and senior adults). Many of them shared that they have a desire to have more people from any one of the generations, but a blend nevertheless. Five of the twenty pastors (25%) reported having a blend of youth and the older generation, but had no younger adult from the millennial generation or Generation X. Two of the pastors (10%) reported having a blend of younger adults, middle-aged adults, and senior adults, but had no youth (children or teenagers).

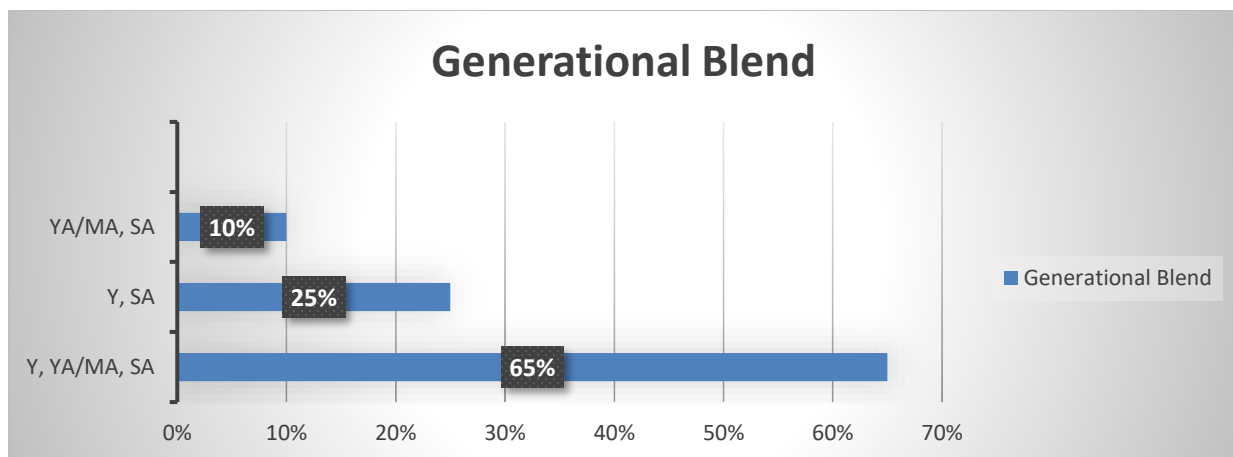


Figure 2. Generational blend.

Each of these findings suggest that there is a great deal of work yet to be done in the RBC to better manage intergenerational conflict. The participants were greatly generous in sharing this information and some expressed that more could be done from a leadership perspective. Some of the pastors expressed that it was difficult to assess the size of the church because the metric of evaluation process varies from one setting to the next. The participants' willingness to give a numeric value of their churches' membership helped to better categorize the sizes of their churches. The further breakdown of how many of those members were youth, younger adults, and adults assisted in charting the blend of the generations in those pastors' respective churches.

Question 2

Which generational group (if any) have the most difficulty relating to one another? What do you think could be done to improve church unity?

Many of the participants agreed that the older generation (50 years of age and older) and the combined age group of youth and millennials (10-35 years of age) were the pairing that exhibited the most difficulty relating to one another. Some of the pastors shared that members of the older generation have difficulty listening to the thoughts, feelings and opinions of those in the younger generations, while members of the younger generations have become uninterested in traditional ways of doing church. According to Craig Blomberg and Elizabeth Nesbit, the Baby Boomer generation views “themselves as possessing greater traits of accountability, integrity, and responsibility than younger cohorts, having more empathy and understanding for the effects of war, and being more intentional and dedicated to the work they do, whether in a vocation, volunteer position, or parenting.”³⁶ On the other hand, children in particular, “need to feel a deep sense of belonging, and they know if they are welcome or not,” according to Ross and Allen.³⁷ One of the interviewed pastors noted that a family component is intertwined with the generational component, saying that generational families are in conflict. Another participant shared that the generations relate with one another well in his particular church and that the members relate as a family. Again, each of the participants have at least five years of experience pastoring RBCs and their statements are taken from their experiences.

³⁶ Craig Blomberg and Elizabeth A. Nesbit Shanotto, *Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical and Practical Insights for Transforming Church Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 4.

³⁷ Ross and Allen, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, ” 48.

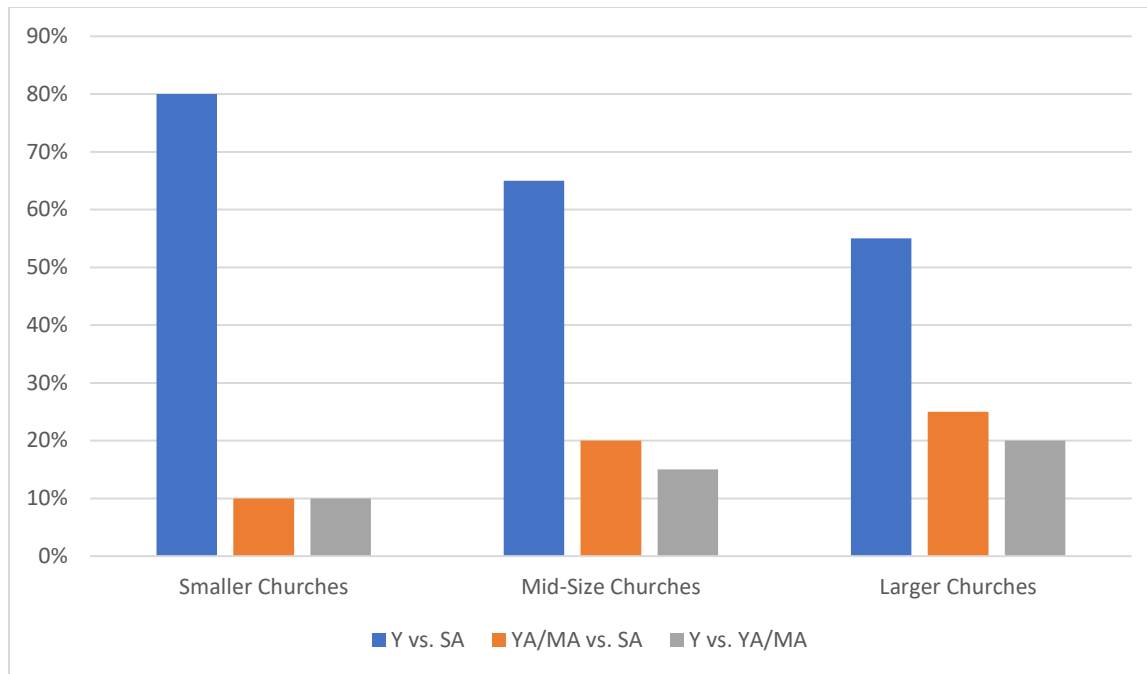


Figure 3. Generational groups/most difficulty relating to one another.

It was great to see and hear these pastors authentically sharing ideas and suggestions for ways to improve the unity in their churches. Seventeen of the pastors (85%) emphasized prayer to be the leading factor for improving unity in the church. Fifteen of the pastors (75%) also agreed that open communication, active listening, and open-mindedness are key factors in improving unity in the church. One pastor spoke adamantly about compromise being a key factor in improving the unity in the church, while another pastor shared that he believed accountability was a huge part of improving church unity. One pastor expressed the belief that the unity was fine in his church.

The factors in improving unity are significant in theory, but become more powerful when they are made practical. “The best way for the most people to link to the narratives, communities, mentors, traditions and practices of their faith communities is to participate actively in intentionally age-integrated experiences with others in those faith communities,”

according to Ross and Allen.³⁸ It is refreshing to know that dialogue is now being circulated regarding the importance of church unity. It will undergird the work that God has given the pastors and churches to do in the RBC ministry. Prayerfully, each pastor understands that there is always room for growth and development in ministry.

Question 3

Considering age differences, which age group – youth (5-17), young adults (ages 18-34), middle aged adults (ages 35-55), or seniors (aged 56 and above) do you think your church primarily appeals to or has its best ministry with?

The purpose of this inquiry is to gauge the level of involvement of various generations in the churches where these twenty pastors are assigned. The responses will speak to this issue of intergenerational inclusion or the lack thereof in each church. This will also address whether there is intergenerational conflict existing in those churches. The ranges of age have been modified for this question.

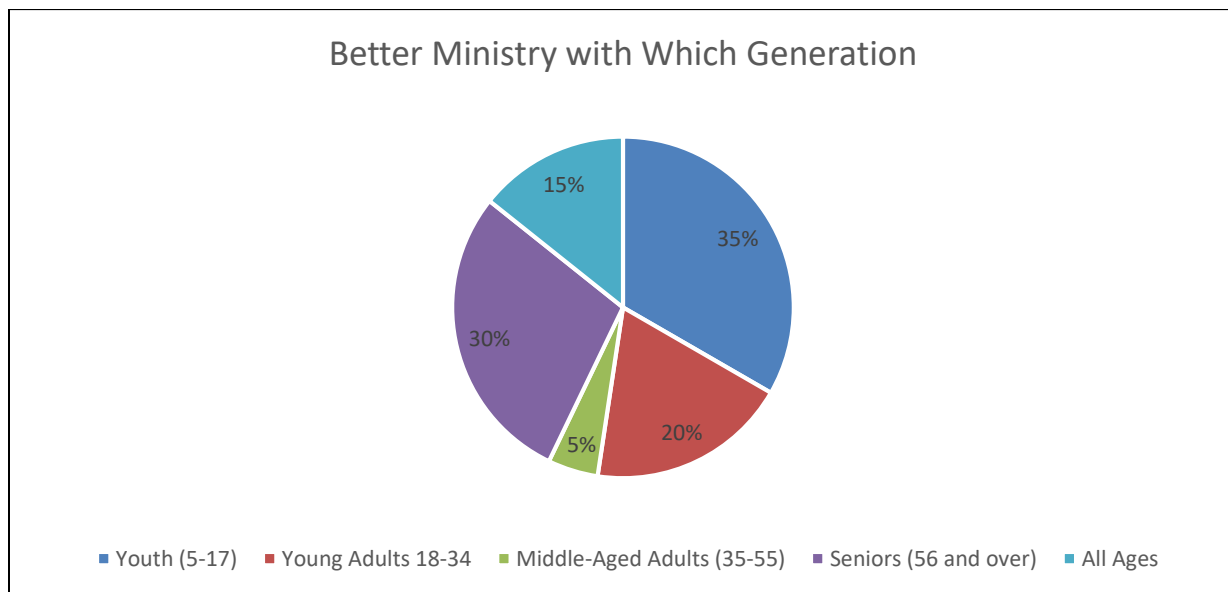


Figure 4. Better ministry with which generation.

³⁸ Ibid., 63.

This question incited great contemplation for the interviewees and this researcher as well, causing each person to reflect on some behaviors that may have been unintentionally insensitive. It is this researcher's desire to help bring healing to years of hurt that has been dormant in the RBC. Seven of the pastors interviewed (35%) said that they appeal more to the youth (ages 5-17), expressing a consensus that young people help to preserve the longevity of the church. Six pastors (30%) suggested that their church ministries appeal more to the senior adults (ages 56 and over), with Pastors C, F and H boldly sharing that the style of their church ministries are still rather "traditional." Three of the pastors (15%) indicated that their churches appeal more to the younger adults (ages 18-34), with Pastor B explaining that "it is the one group that they believe can be a bridge for each of the other ministries." Three of the pastors (15%) said they believe that their ministries are tailored for each age group or generation in the church. One pastor (5%) said his church's ministry tailors more of its efforts toward middle-aged adults.

After answering the question, the majority of the pastors talked about re-evaluating their ministry efforts in order to be more inclusive of people from every generation. Henry and Richard Blackaby shared important insight when they said that "leaders must not be content to merely focus on their organization's current effectiveness. They should be constantly watching for trends and indicators that suggest adjustments are required."³⁹ Adjustments are necessary tools that will help to resuscitate the unity among the various generations and growth in the church. This question was important for this project because much of the intergenerational strife and conflict developed as a result of exclusion. The next question served to unpack this observation with more specificity.

³⁹ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 277.

Question 4

Which of those generational groups might feel as though the church is not meeting their needs or they are underserved?

As shown in Figure 5 below, the middle-aged adults and younger adults are the generations that many of the churches represented in this interview do not tailor their ministries towards. As a reflection of this, it was suggested that both the middle-aged adults as well as the younger adults feel as though the church is not meeting their needs. Pastor D noted: “The middle-aged adults and the younger adults make up the smallest group in my church and therefore, we cater to that demographic less than any other.”

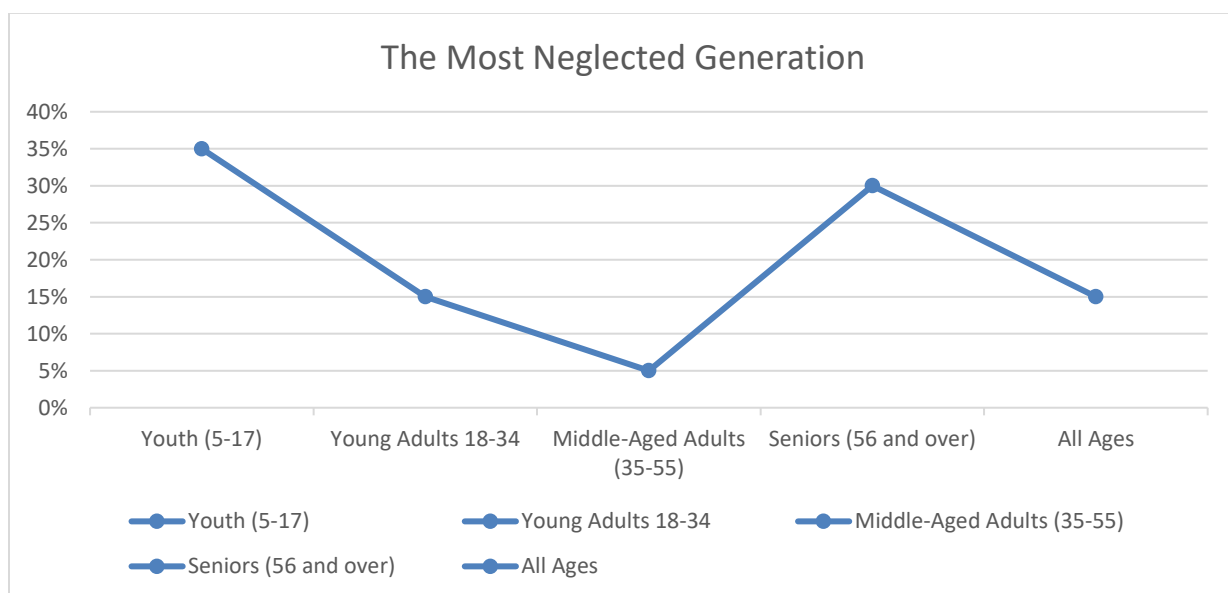


Figure 5. The most neglected generation.

Some of the pastors predicated their answers on worship style; while some based their answers on other cultural variances. Others simply made assessments based on the activity of their weekly ministry. As shown in the preceding figure, only 5% of the pastors interviewed felt as though their ministries gave much attention to the middle-aged adults, while 15% said their

churches catered to the younger adults. Terry Dittmer concluded that the middle-aged adults, particularly Generation X, have “largely disassociated themselves from the institutional church.”⁴⁰ Pastor D’s responses pointed to similar conclusions, expressing a lack of participation among the middle-aged and younger adults in the church. There should be attention shown to each generation represented in the church, even few church members represent a particular generation. According to Ross and Allen, “intergenerationality enables the whole church to benefit from each individual’s God-given gifts and enables believers to fully live out being the body of Christ and the family of faith.”⁴¹

Again, this question prompted much reflection, with many of the pastors immediately beginning to formulate ideas that would help to develop and frame more inclusivity among the various generations in their churches. The overwhelming consensus from the pastors was to develop a better system of communicating more effectively. Dave Earley suggested that “people feel closer to you and more responsive to what you say when you take the time to communicate with them.”⁴² Not one generational group in the church should feel neglected or left out if effective communication is being implemented. According to Shaw and Kolbaba, “once we see the generational differences behind many of our conflicts in our homes and churches, it’s impossible to miss them the next time.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Terry Dittmer, “Ministry Among the Generation: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Issues in Christian Education* 4, no. 2 (2007): 8-15.

⁴¹ Ross and Allen, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 47-48.

⁴² Dave Earley, *Turning Members into Leaders: How to Raise up Your Group Members to Lead New Groups* (Houston: Cell Group Resources, 2004), 46.

⁴³ Haydn Shaw and Ginger Kolbaba, *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn't Dying, Millennials Aren't the Problem, and the Future Is Bright* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), 20.

Question 5

Describe the characteristics of the “leaders” in your church (either the ones who have the official titles or the ones that the congregation looks to for direction)? Are they older or younger?

Many of the pastors were humored with sarcasm by this question while others were straightforward in their answers. With this question, the researcher sought to explore the parameters of whether the leadership of the church was intergenerational or not. “Our relationships are enhanced when we have multiple generations around the table,”⁴⁴ John Ortberg wrote. Therefore, it is necessary to have discussions that may ultimately expose weaknesses and vulnerabilities in the RBC. The table below presents information extracted from the interviews with the twenty pastors regarding the construct of the leadership in the churches in which they pastor.

Table 1.
Characteristics of Leadership

Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
A few of the pastors reported that their leaders were coachable. They added that those leaders wanted to learn.	Some of the pastors reported that their leaders were not willing to accept training. Many felt a sense of entitlement.
Some of the pastors reported their leaders were honest and integral. They talked about these leaders having strong morality and ethical fortitude.	Others reported that their leaders were indecisive and lack confidence.
Others emphasize that their leaders were loyal and dedicated. Some who lead multiple ministries because of the size of the church.	Some of the pastors reported that there was no commitment to the ministry. There was a struggle to model Christ-like behavior.

⁴⁴ John Ortberg, “Can Your Church Leadership Represent Every Generation? Christianity Today. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2009/summer/can-your-church-leadership-represent-every-generation.html>.

Positive characteristics	Negative characteristics
There were a couple of pastors that added that their leaders were supportive of the pastor's vision and progressing the ministry.	There were those who were leaders in some of the churches prior to the pastor's arrival and there has been a struggle to support the new vision.
One characteristic that some of the pastors agreed upon was that their leaders were flexible.	Some of the leaders are more committed to secular formations than they are to the things that pertain to the ministry in which they lead

This question invoked moments of reflective humor and sarcasm, largely stemming from a mutual understanding of the process and the observations that have been made from the pastoral perspective. Although articulated differently, many of the pastors reported that the leaders of their churches have like characteristics. The pastors of the smaller rural black Baptist churches suggested that their leaders were dedicated to the ministry of the church and that many of them led multiple ministries in the church. It was further suggested that the leaders have good intentions, but they are sometimes indecisive and lack confidence in the role of leadership. Furthermore, these pastors shared that many of the leaders in their respective ministries reject opportunities to learn and to be trained appropriately for their leadership positions. One reason for this kind of lethargic leadership is because “many of our church or moral leaders are afraid to expose the vulgarity of many cultural fads and fashions.”⁴⁵

The pastors of larger churches reported that their leaders were flexible and willing to transition with the ministry. Many of these leaders have secular jobs and although flexible, the secular job can sometimes take priority over the church's ministry. Pastors of both the larger and smaller churches suggested that there are remnants of leaders with great integrity, but that some have been in the role of leader for so long that it seems difficult at times to relinquish the reigns.

⁴⁵ Paul Cannings, *African American Church Leadership: Principles for Effective Ministry and Community Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2013), 37.

According to Paul Cannings, “responsible church leaders must be organizational, spiritual, and educational innovators who eagerly grasps new horizons in the twenty-first century.”⁴⁶ To manage intergenerational conflict, leaders have to be aware of what is best for the growth of the church. According to Peter Scazzero, “the overall health of any church or ministry depends primarily on the emotional and spiritual health of its leadership.”⁴⁷

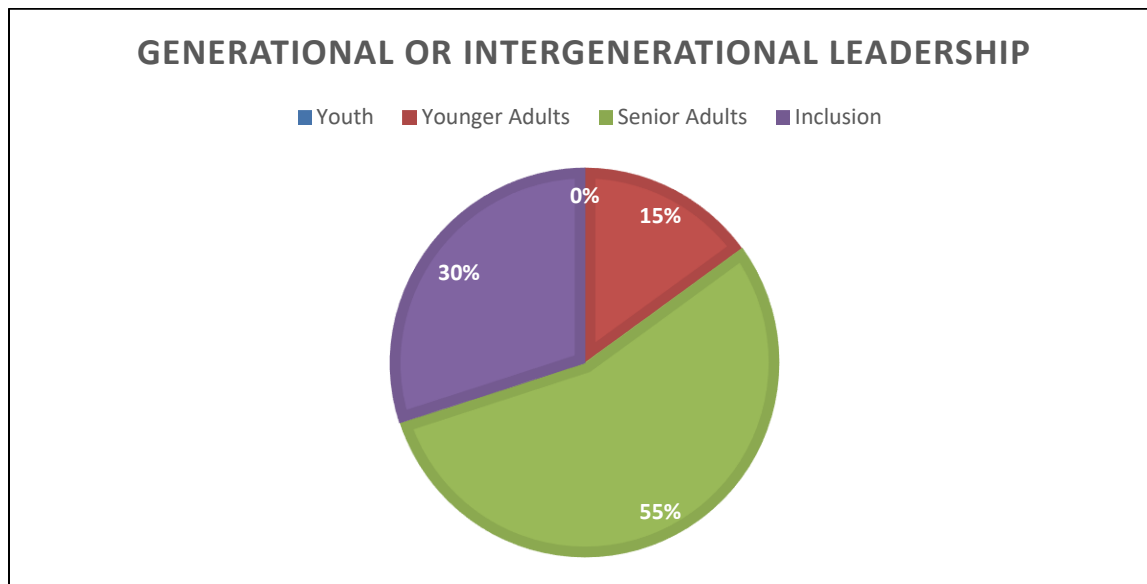


Figure 6. Generational or intergenerational leadership.

After evaluating the characteristics of those churches, this researcher explored with the twenty pastors whether the leadership was generational or intergenerational. Eleven of the interviewed pastors (55%) reported that their churches’ leaders consisted of senior adults. In the context of the RBC, it was more astonishing to hear that six pastors (30%) reported that their churches’ leaders were intergenerational (youth, younger adults and senior adults). Only three of the pastors (15%) reported that their churches’ leaders consisted of younger adults. None of the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁴⁷ Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church: A Strategy for Discipleship that Actually Changes Lives* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 20.

pastors reported that their churches' leaders were exclusively youth. The consensus from many of the pastors was that they should transition into more of an intergenerational leadership ministry, employing persons from every generation to lead and to train others to lead. The unity in the body of Christ is so important for spiritual development as well as the development of intergenerational leadership. According to Melissa Cooper, "young people learn to lead by working alongside leaders. Young people find their passions and callings when those of us older get to know them and recognize gifts in them that they might not see for themselves."⁴⁸

Question 6

Most churches are aging and attendance is declining. Is that true for your congregation? If so, is that a concern for your leadership?

The information extracted for this question helped to frame a contextual perspective of the growth and development in the RBC. There is much to be said about assessments of growth in the church, but in its simplest form, consistency should not be overlooked as a major contributing factor. Thirteen of the participating pastors (65%) reported that there was a decline in membership at their churches and that aging was the overwhelming common factor that led to that shift. Additionally, four pastors (20%) reported that there was an increase in membership at their churches because of frequent additions to the churches' membership each month. Three pastors (15%) reported that their memberships neither decreased nor increased at their churches, but rather remained stable. These results happened despite the aging factor because there was a balance regarding the loss of membership and the increase in membership. A few times, the word consistency was used by some of the pastors to describe their church memberships.

⁴⁸ Melissa Cooper, "The Challenges and Opportunities of Intergenerational Leadership," Lewis Center for Church Leadership, <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/challenges-opportunities-intergenerational-leadership/>.

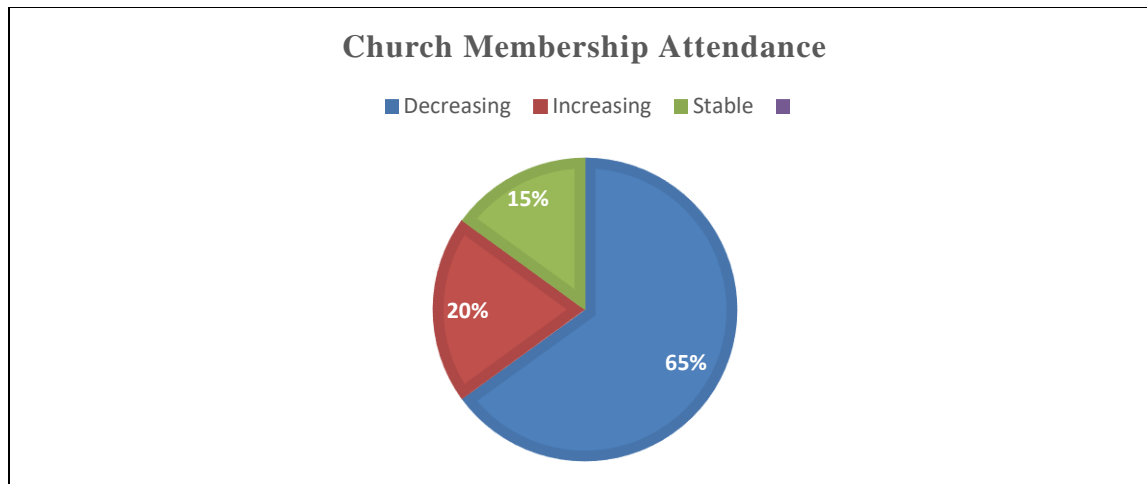


Figure 7. Church membership attendance.

As expected, the four pastors (20%) who reported seeing increases in their memberships said they had no concerns about membership productivity. Why would they, since they are experiencing increases. However, the thirteen pastors (65%) who reported that their churches' memberships were decreasing and the three pastors (15%) who reported that their memberships were stable indicated that they had significant concerns in this area. The three pastors (15%) experiencing stability expressed gratitude for the consistency, but were adamant about their desires to see progress. The thirteen pastors (65%) experiencing membership decline emphatically suggested that if the decreases continued, their churches would be forced to close. The participants did not appear to be reluctant to share their responses, but they were hopeful that the awareness will incite a regiment of change. There was a strong consensus that no church should be subjected to having their doors closed because of depleted membership.

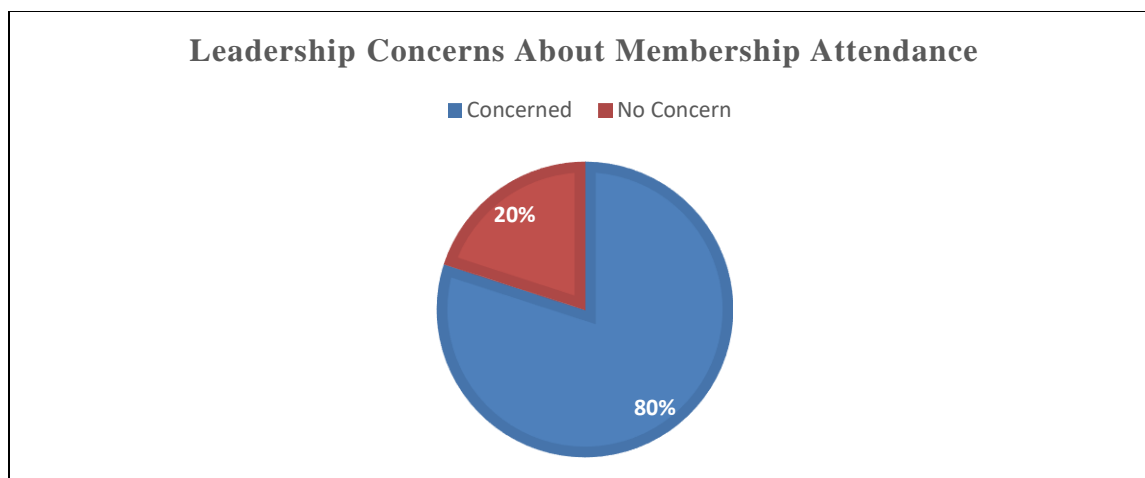


Figure 8. Leadership concerns about membership attendance.

It is important to pay attention to the fluctuation of growth among the membership and how that will ultimately contribute to the way that the generations are managed in the church. Bill Hybels argued that “every serious problem known to humankind is addressable and solvable when the right people are involved into the dialogue.”⁴⁹ The RBC must be aware that as the older generation is aging out of the church, that preparing the other generations to interact with each other appropriately is pertinent for the sake unity and growth.

Question 7

What would you do to increase intergenerational inclusion to avoid conflict and inspire church growth?

This question set the tone for the development of a strategic model that would help the RBC to better manage intergenerational conflict while experiencing real growth. According to Dave Browning, “you cannot do work that matters until you define what matters.”⁵⁰ Based on the repetitiveness and adamancy of the pastors’ responses to this question, four strategies were

⁴⁹ Bill Hybels, *Axiom: Powerful Leadership Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 92.

⁵⁰ David Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity: How the Church Does More by Doing Less* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 66.

developed as a tool to increase intergenerational inclusion to avoid conflict and inspire church growth. The strategies were:

1. Develop effective evangelism ministries that addresses the needs of every generation;
2. Develop mentoring partnerships among the various generations;
3. Develop intergenerational leadership teams; and
4. Evaluate the interactive management of the generations effectively.

Although this researcher made great effort to clear up any ambiguity, one pastor indicated that he felt the question was unfair because of the generational makeup of his church. Pastor L said, “the church is just trying to survive with those who show up.” However, regardless of the congregation size, if there are representatives from more than one generation, inclusion should be priority. James White stated his view of intergenerational ministry as being: “two or more different age groups ... together learning, growing, living in faith through in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive occasions, and interactive sharing”⁵¹. The RBC has a responsibility to seek progressive and solution-focused ideas to facilitate church growth. Five of the pastors who reported that their churches were increasing emphasized the importance of seeking methodologies to keep the ministry of the church progressive. Some participants discussed the inclusion of more advanced technology and social media, while others expressed the importance of learning to unify by engaging more in activities that include the various generations. An overwhelming majority of the pastors said they felt that evangelism and outreach were critical factors for increasing church growth and intergenerational inclusion. According to Dale Galloway, “the reality is that if your church does not connect and retain people, you lose

⁵¹James W. White, *Intergenerational Religious Education: Models, Theory, and Prescription for Interage Life and Learning in the Faith Community* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press., 1988).

them out the back door.”⁵² To avoid only catering to people who share common cultural preferences, the key is to train each generation to evangelize the lost no matter their ages.

“Churches that want to grow must be willing to take some risks,” Hilliard noted.⁵³

The pastors reported that developing intergenerational leadership teams and intergenerational mentoring partnerships will lead to increases because it is a strong statement of inclusion. Paul Newton shared that “the development of leaders for the early church took place organically rather than institutionally.”⁵⁴ Two of the pastors (10%) consistently used the word “conviction” pertaining to their own leadership throughout the tenure of their pastorate. This writer was inspired by this dialogue and connected with the responses from an intrapersonal perspective.

Question 8:

What are some ways you think your church could specifically appeal to younger members and develop younger leaders to help manage generational inclusion?

Evangelism, mentorship and leadership development were sentiments that were echoed in the responses to this question. The pastors reported a few ideas that could potentially appeal to the younger members. The pastors also shared some ideas of how to better develop younger leaders to help manage generational inclusion.

⁵² Dale E. Galloway, *Making Church Relevant* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1999), 75.

⁵³ Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 22.

⁵⁴ Phil A. Newton, *The Mentoring Church: How Pastors and Congregations Cultivate Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2017), 20.

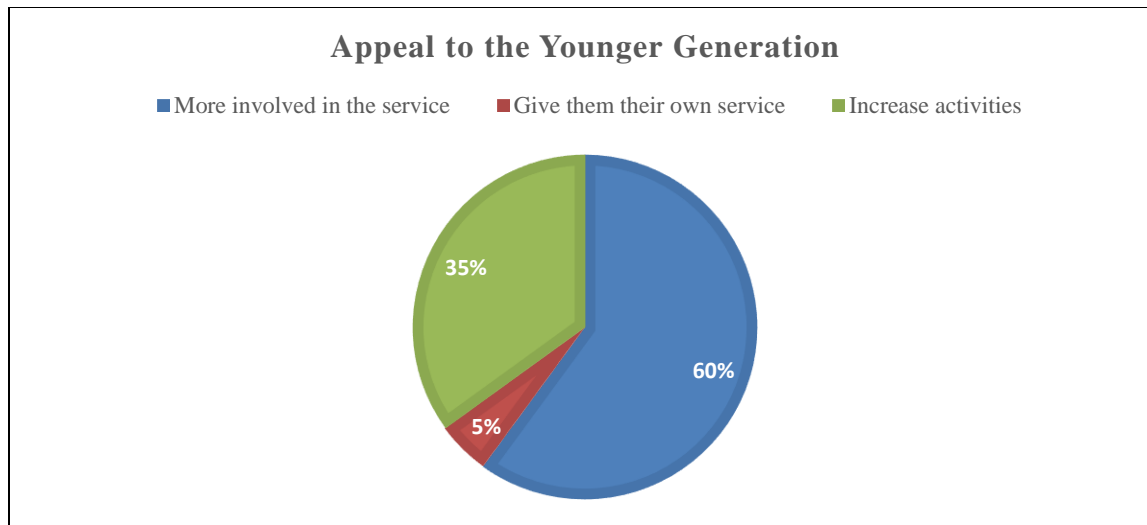


Figure 9. Appeal to the younger generation.

The responses from each pastor pertaining to this question were intriguing because of the constant reflections they offered about improving generational inclusion in their churches' ministries. It was interesting that one pastor reported that he thought it would be a "prodigious gesture" to the younger generation by allowing them to have their own service. This researcher asked whether that gesture would further disvalue the idea of unity in the church. The response was inspiring as the intention of the idea was to draw the youth into the church. It hit home here that many pastors as leaders expressed great intentions toward building the kingdom of God, but did not always have adequate resources. However, "the only way to figure out how something can get done is to refuse to take your eye off what needs to be done," Andy Stanley noted.⁵⁵ Twelve of the pastors (60%) reported that they would like to get the younger people more involved in the corporate worship service. They continued to appeal that there must be some modifications made to the practices and styles of worship so that it becomes more attractive for

⁵⁵ Andy Stanley, *The next Generation Leader: Five Essentials for Those Who Will Shape the Future* (Cape Town: Struik Christian Books, 2006), 68.

the younger generation. Eric Mathis shared relevant insight on the importance of involving young people in the corporate worship of the church:

Worship has the potential to be the most important training ground for young people to hear and tell the story of God working in the world. Worship has the potential to form their identities as God's image bearers who matter in God's kingdom and have a place in Christ's body just as they are. Yet churches too often limit the role of young people in worship and place them in separate buildings and spaces, away from adults and children. This robs the church of all ages the opportunity to worship with the complete body of Christ.⁵⁶

Lastly, seven of the pastors (35%) reported that increasing the activities in the church and for the church will appeal tremendously to the younger generation. The pastors each talked about creating more dialogue in their respective ministries pertaining to creating better opportunities for the younger generation in their churches. The road towards progress in the RBC is to understand that intergenerational inclusion expresses unity.

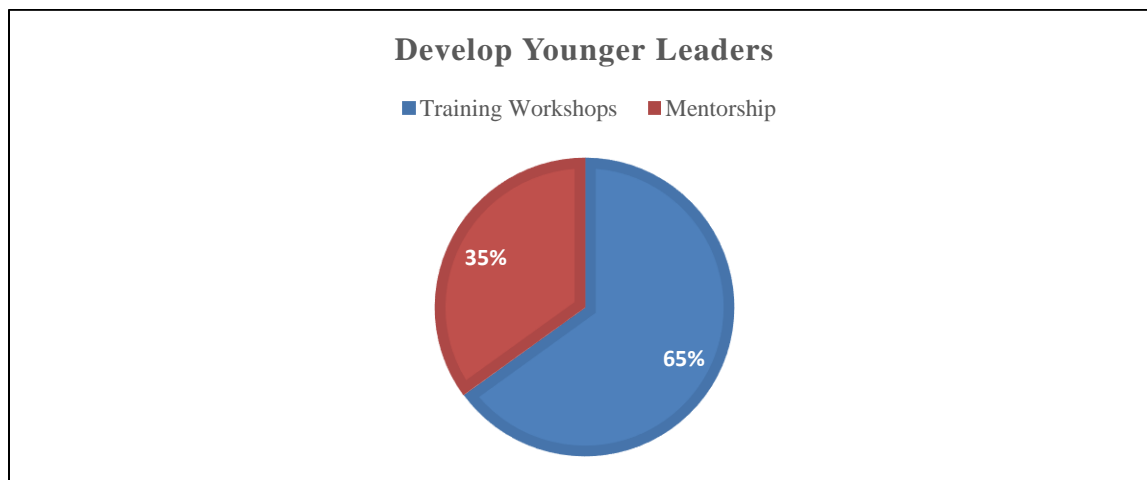


Figure 10. Develop younger leaders.

The pastors' responses to the second part of this question pertaining to the development of younger leaders elicited similar views. Thirteen of the pastors (65%) reported that training the

⁵⁶ James DeBoer et al., "Why Youth Need to Be Leading Worship Regularly Now," February 2017, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship for the Study and Renewal of Worship, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/why-youth-need-to-be-leading-worship-regularly-now/>.

younger generation with workshops and conferences is the most effective way to develop younger leaders. Again, the resources are limited, but there is still enough in the rural community that will contribute greatly to developing the younger generation. Seven of the pastors (35%) reported that using the older leaders as mentors to help shape and develop the leadership in the younger generation is major factor in facilitating intergenerational inclusion in the church. Pastor I, mentioned that she has already commenced with delegating experienced leaders to mentor the youth of her church. “Every member has a part to contribute toward the growth (spiritually and numerically) and building up of the church body,” Phil Newton wrote.⁵⁷

Question 9:

Thinking broadly, what would be a major goal for your church in the next five years regarding intergenerational management?

The pastor’s responses revolved around the theme of entering a building process over the next five years, in terms of people (generations), ministries, or facilities. It is ultimately an assessment of how much the church would like to grow both spiritually and numerically. Hilliard provided perspective on this matter:

Spiritual growth in a church may or may not lead to numerical and financial growth, but numerical and financial growth by themselves will never lead to spiritual growth. Increases in numbers and wealth may make a church bigger, but apart from spiritual growth and relevant outreach, they do not necessarily make a church better. Healthy churches are growing churches, but the key factor is how this growth is measured.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Newton, *The Mentoring Church*, 121.

⁵⁸ Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 4.

Table 2.
Major Goal for Church in Five Years

Pastor	Building the congregation (generations)	Building the ministry	Building facilities
P-A	X		
P-B		X	X
P-C		X	
P-D	X		
P-E	X	X	
P-F		X	X
P-G	X	X	
P-H	X	X	
P-I	X		
P-J		X	
P-K	X		
P-L			X
P-M:		X	X
P-N	X		
P-O		X	
P-P	X		
P-Q		X	
P-R:	X	X	
P-S	X	X	
P-T	X		

Each participating pastor is designated by the letter “P” (for pastor), followed by a unique alphabetical designation.

The participants reflected immensely on this question before giving responses. It was interesting that eight of the pastors (40%) reported goals that were directly related to building the people exclusively. They adamantly suggested that in five years that they wanted the members of their churches to be stronger disciples for Christ and they talked about factors that would strengthen them in that way. Four of the pastors (20%) reported goals that were solely geared towards expanding a specific ministry effort in the next five years. One such goal was developing a relevant evangelism ministry. One pastor (5%) reported that his focus was to build and expand the facilities. Notably, the idea is that the building expansion will impact the people and the ministry, but the goal was articulated to be uniquely about the building expansion. Four

pastors (20%) reported that their five-year goals were to build both the people and the ministry. They were adamant that teaching and training the people to live together in unity would fulfill biblical principles. The writer of Hebrews encouraged believers to “consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”⁵⁹

These pastors also shared that developing effective ministries of evangelism and mentorship are also important factors in Kingdom building. It was clear from the beginning that the investment must be in the people and the instruments of ministry in which the people function. Three pastors (15%) reported that in five years they hope to have more effective ministries and facilities that embrace all generations and all cultures. Although, the primary goal is to build people as the people build the ministries, it is just as important to have the resources to assist the churches with reaching a multitude of people.

Question 10

Tell me what you think is the best thing about your church today that promotes healthy growth?

Each of the pastors disclosed responses filled with intimacy and authenticity as they assessed the best thing about their churches presently that promote healthy growth. Various emotions were on display while reflecting on that valued feature that make these pastors’ churches relevant. This researcher fully identified with the barrage of emotions as he shares their passion for leading God’s people.

⁵⁹ Heb. 10:24-25 NIV.

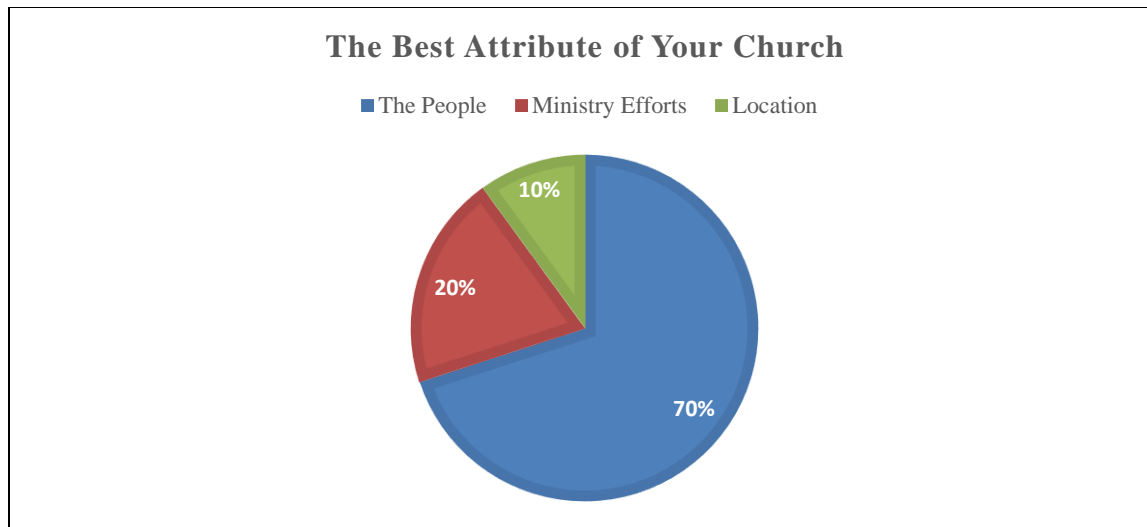


Figure 11. Pastors' designation of their churches' best attribute.

This project is designed to bring awareness to a conflict that has existed in the RBC for some time now and that is the struggle of the various generations in the church to get on one accord. These pastors share the sentiments of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2 when he wrote, “make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.”⁶⁰ Therefore, it was admirable to witness fourteen of the pastors (70%) reporting that in some unique way, the people were the best aspects of their churches. Many of them called the people loving, supportive and one even suggested that the members of his church taught him how to love. Another pastor adamantly expressed the trust that has been developed through relationship building. Again, this connected strongly with this researcher, who has invested ample time building rapport with the members. Four pastors (20%) reported that the effort that is given to implement ministry endeavors is the best attribute of their churches. Whether it be the teaching modality or the way in which some see to it that services are flowing smoothly, the efforts are noticed and appreciated. Lastly, two pastors (10%) reported that their churches’

⁶⁰ Phil. 2:2 NIV.

locations are the best thing about their churches. Their churches are located near major highways and are easily accessible. These pastors suggested that it is important in the rural context to have that type of access because of convenience. They expressed that it gives them better opportunities to evangelize and bring the unchurched to Christ.

Each of the pastors' perspectives were informative as well as enlightening and this researcher extracted much from this experience. The RBC must take inventory of every portal towards progress without compromising the biblical guidelines to do ministry. The data revealed here confirmed that there is much to be done. It also shed light on several modifications that need to be made and revealed that RBCs are still powerful forces in the kingdom of God because of their resilience and fortitude. It has always endured the challenges of the day, but each participant must be accountable for improving the functionality of this great storehouse.

Chapter 3

Impacting Factors

It has often been said that the Black church has been and some say still is, the pillar of the black community. However, there has been an incredible revolution of sorts that would suggest that the “black church” is losing its influence over the black community. It is no different in the “rural” black community and what seems to be driving this deflation of influence is the unwillingness of the generations to unify more completely in the church. Analyzing the perspectives of the entire Black church context is undoubtedly important and having a keen perspective from the pastoral leadership will create a foundation for the reconciliation of unity in the church. Brenda Snailum shared important insight when she wrote, “I think the main hindrance has been the lack of understanding that intergenerational relationships are crucial to spiritual growth and maturation. If leaders understood how important intergenerational experiences are for growth and development, they would pour enormous amounts of energy into creating these experiences.”⁶¹ Inevitably, it starts with the leadership identifying that intergenerational disharmony as well as disunity has been and still is a major problem in the Black church.

The role of leadership also helped to shape the Black church. In many ways, the leaders’ contributions created some positive reinforcements for the church down through the years, but has also caused damage to the church in other ways. Too often, pastors try to replicate what appears to be right to them individually. The danger in that is rationalizing whether the decision to do so is God-led. Henry and Richard Blackaby offered insight on this:

Christian organizations should note in the Scriptures and throughout history that God rarely worked the same way twice. God’s activity was always unique to the people with whom he was dealing and the time in which he was working. God’s activity cannot be

⁶¹ Snailum, “Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry,” 171.

reduced to a formula because God is more concerned about relating to his people than he is with a specific task or program. Churches erroneously assume that because God worked mightily in a particular way in the past, he will work in exactly the same way today. Many organizations are locked into routines not because they are effective today but because they were effective yesterday.⁶²

It is safe to say for the Black church, that although the world is evolving, the functionality of the church oftentimes appears stagnant. Much of this is a result of trying to rewind yesterday into today's ways of doing things. According to Hillard, "people are not attracted by the mundane and ordinary. They are looking for something that will bring meaning and life to what often seems to them as a dreary and pointless existence."⁶³ The inspiration is found in the hope of being able to recalculate the misdirection and forge ahead into a safe plane of trusting God through it all. There ultimately should be a conversation that is produced in the church to help facilitate healing and growth; particularly, regarding the mismanagement of generational inclusion.

One must consider the impact of decline in church growth for a myriad of reasons, but specifically in how the dysfunction among the generations have left a hole in progressive ministry efforts. No matter the complexity of theological variances, pastors of RBCs can attest to the constant challenge of trying to fill the gaps found among the generations. In addition to this, Matt Pearman suggested that most people "have too much to do and not enough time to do it. We feel overstressed, overworked, and overloaded. And thanks to new technology and media, we have more coming at us than we ever did before."⁶⁴ While this is true, it is the responsibility of leaders and pastoral leaders in particular, to invest in utilizing methodologies that will unite the congregants to glorify God. Intergenerational conflict has a deceptive appearance and can often

⁶² Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 89.

⁶³ Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 48.

⁶⁴ Matthew Aaron Pearman, *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 35.

camouflage itself to look less evasive than it actually looks. The pastor's plate is filled with other seemingly more important issues that have been documented as priority. Unfortunately, the moment has been missed to be proactive, but a strong intervention will steady the ship. Pastors of Black churches are at least willing now to listen to constructive feedback that will help to reshape and redevelop the church back to its biblical roots. Therefore, it is imperative to specifically identify intergenerational conflict as a problem in the Black church.

The Problem

Intergenerational conflict is the disparity that lodges among various generations and creates a cold atmosphere of division. Unfortunately, intergenerational conflict also exists in the church. As with any organization or institution, the church has experienced many problematic occurrences that have created division. These occurrences have often expanded because there was not a great deal of attention given to how these things manifested. Nevertheless, the conflict among the generations is divisive and incredibly unhealthy regarding growth in the RBC. According to Galloway, "A healthy church can be defined as one growing both in numbers and in quality, both in winning people to Christ and in growing disciples into strong Christians."⁶⁵

Until methodical attention is given to the internal division among the generations in the Black church, it will continue to be difficult to convince those on the outside of its validity. It is important to be inclusive and to make every effort to mend the blend. It is important to "express your hunger and hope to see a stream of freshly redeemed people entering and energizing your ministry. Rick Richardson suggested that when people see your heart is genuine, they will respond with enthusiasm."⁶⁶ Through this project, the researcher accomplished the objective of

⁶⁵ Galloway, *Making Church Relevant*, 25.

⁶⁶ Rick Richardson, *Evangelism outside the Box: New Ways to Help People Experience the Good News* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 157.

encouraging and challenging the Black church to grow both in quality and in quantity. Why?

Because there has been in decline in the growth of the Black church, some which is attributed to the intergenerational conflict that exists within it.

Decline in Church Membership

After factoring in the death of those who were once members, the migration of other members into industrial geographical locations for work purposes, and the departure of young people for college, rural Black pastors feel as though they are already facing a deficit. Some churches have closed their doors and some have reduced the number of services. Many will ultimately contend that the lack of sufficient finances is the primary reason that these things happen, but there are factors that lead to this sort of demise. It is a jubilant experience when men, women, boys and girls assemble peaceably together,⁶⁷ but if the assembly is not something that each generation can navigate through, it will inevitably cause a decline. Although there appears to be a decline in the membership of most American churches, it is also apparent that many are more interested in worshipping and fellowshiping in an intimate setting such as with smaller memberships in the churches. The Barna Research Group provided information that suggests attendance is greater in the more intimate settings:

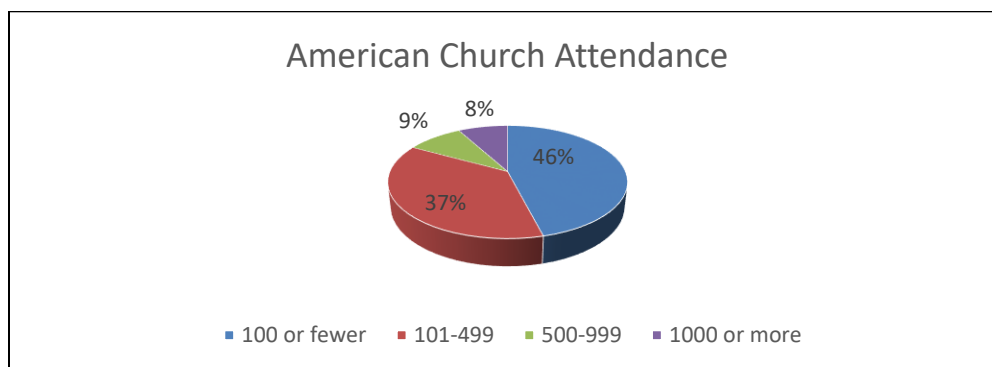


Figure 12. American church attendance.

⁶⁷ Psalm 133:1 NIV.

The RBCs usually represent the 46% group and the 37% group shown in Figure 12 above, with many members of those groups sharing families that are dispersed throughout the community. Historically, many of the rural churches interacted with one another because churches only had services on one or two Sundays during the month. After many churches transitioned into having services every Sunday during the month, families and generations began trying to coexist more consistently. However, there was still a strong sense of generational and cultural preference that continued to manifest in the churches. Carl Ellis shared some enlightening information about the younger generations' response to traditional church:

As younger African Americans became more cognitively oriented, the traditional church continued in the intuitive mode. Many in the younger generations however, were unable to connect with the message of the traditional church, and they began to search elsewhere for answers to questions involving African American core concerns. As a result, the theological influence of the church began a general decline – this, in spite of higher rates of church attendance when compared to other American people groups.⁶⁸

Many young people attended church out of obligation to their parents, guardians or caretakers. In many ways, the youth did not feel included and would often feel disconnected from the church experience. The older generation had their share of life's experiences and could identify more with the message of reconciliation. However, there was a struggle with implementing methodologies that were attractive and connective with the younger generations. Some intentional effort has been made to allow each generation to connect to the church experience, but it is packaged with a great deal of destructive criticism. This type of criticism causes a range of problems in the church that lead to decline or constant dysfunction among the membership.

⁶⁸ Carl Ellis, "The African-American Church: Past, Present, and Future," Christianity Today, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/july/african-american-church-in-america-past-present-and-future.html>.

Unifying the generations will help to reinvigorate energy in the church and to chart the course of the church's function back to worshipping God. After all, intergenerational conflict has impacted the disunity in the church greatly and it has even caused many to leave the church. One must avoid catering to one group more than the other because it will inevitably create more friction. "Discrimination causes withdrawal where people become walled cities within themselves. The loss starts with a lack of information, wisdom, and understanding, according to Beeson and Hayward."⁶⁹ Paul wrote to the church at Galatia, emphatically sharing with them that "there is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus."⁷⁰

Decline in Qualitative Growth

There has been a decline in the quantitative growth of the church, but it has weighed greatly on the qualitative growth of the church as well. Gen X, the millennials and the generations that follow struggle to embrace traditionalism because it does not speak to their cultural preferences, while the Baby Boomers and older generations feel as though the younger culture is laced with worldly shame and ignominy that does not interact well with their cultural preferences. To avoid being in conflict, the younger generations leave the church as soon as they are old enough to make the decision to do so. The result of this is a church with increased gaps between the various generations. At present, the number of youths attending church is gradually declining and the older generation is dying out. The generations in the middle are still experiencing life and exploring the boundaries of their faith. Pastors are trying to maintain the faithful members who show up, but often overlook those factors that caused the dysfunction. It is

⁶⁹ Ray Beeson and Chris Hayward, *Wounded in the Church* (New Kensington: Whitaker House, 2017), 210.

⁷⁰ Gal. 3:28 NIV.

written in Proverbs 27:23, “be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds (NIV).”

Consequently, there will be an introspective look at the Black church to frame the importance of unity in the church. To that end, this chapter presents the historical profile of the Black church to identify the root of the problems regarding intergenerational conflict and to illuminate the impact of culture, tradition, and leadership variances that have both promoted and hindered the unity in the church. As will be seen in this chapter, it is necessary for the Black church to engage in solution-oriented methodologies to grow strong unified Christians within the body of Christ.

Historical Impact

What is the Black church? The Black church is a euphemism to describe Black Christians.⁷¹ The RBC, then, denotes Black Christians who participate in church life in rural demographics. According to the authors of *Black Church Studies: An Introduction*, “the Black church tradition possesses distinctive characteristics and constitutive elements including key questions, symbols, rituals, ideas, and beliefs that are always subject to adaptation, improvisation, reinterpretation, and even abandonment.”⁷² The rationale behind affiliates of the Black church being marginalized and disenfranchised is well documented and the intent of this chapter is not seeking to inflate nor deflate an argument to prove nor disprove this rationale. However, the Black church, inclusive of the RBC, has championed movements that supported and support those who have internally or externally been disenfranchised and marginalized.

⁷¹ Juan Marcial Floyd-Thomas and Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), xxiv.

⁷² Ibid.

How did the Black church and the RBC come to be? They were developed through a partnership between heritage and learned behavior. In most arenas of life, one tends to extract a model of learning from someone else or something else. Although the ethnical culture was and is vastly different, the Black church shared a theological motif that was comparable to the ways of the oppressors of that time. In *Through the Storm, Through the Night*, Paul Harvey clarified that “black Christians developed a religious culture that brought together elements of their African past and their American evangelical training, resulting in the creation of a unique American religious culture.”⁷³ Although the slaves were able to experience moments of jubilation because of their faith in a liberating God, it was still insidiously toxic for them pertaining to their physical liberation. This often meant that the slaves would repress their own desires to portray a certain image in front of their white masters.⁷⁴ Much of the cruelty and oppression that Black Christians experienced did not stop after slavery, but lingered even after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863. Yet, the Black church formidably stood the test of times; even through the era of Jim Crow.

“If the church is the institutionalized expression of the religious life of a people, as many sociologists believe, then the Black church is a powerful institution,” Andrew Billingsley and Cleopatra Caldwell wrote.⁷⁵ The ability to learn from a dark past as well as the inspiration of new opportunities, as depicted in James Weldon Johnson’s poem “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” has assisted the Black church to march on until victory is won.⁷⁶ God used a resource such as the

⁷³ Paul Harvey, *Through the Storm, through the Night: A History of African American Christianity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2013), 49.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Andrew Billingsley and Cleopatra Howard Caldwell, “The Church, the Family, and the School in the African American Community,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 60, no. 3, (Summer 1991): 428.

⁷⁶ James Weldon Johnson, “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” Poets.org, <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/lift-every-voice-and-sing>.

Black church to inspire generations of individuals to keep pushing towards better. Because of this, it is well documented that the black church is a powerful institution.

As a remnant of the Black church, the RBC met numerous challenges because of the lack of resources that were available during its establishment. Many of the RBCs experience the harshness and cruelty of racism more intensely than Black churches that had formed in urban communities. However, it was these intense moments that drove the RBC into desperately seeking God to provide liberation and protection. Congregations of Black Christians would come together in safe, yet sacred spaces to hold “worship services characterized by a sense of engaged ecstasy with singing, dancing, praying, moaning, clapping, and shouting.”⁷⁷ Despite this, there are moments in which even the most powerful of institutions have small leaks that can ultimately sink the ship.

How then did intergenerational conflict become a leak in this powerful institution? It is understood that some of this struggle was unintentional. Nevertheless, it is a setback that needs to be addressed and not just merely covered with presupposed bandages. Ross and Allen shared an interesting historical view of the Christian church:

Throughout the ages Christians have tended to emulate (often intentionally or unthinking) the culture around them, and as American culture had become more and more gravitationally fragmented over the last hundred years, churches have followed that same trend. Beyond this general trend to reflect the surrounding culture, churches have embraced other pieces of the cultural outlook that have ultimately contributed to the pervasive age segregation that characterizes American Christianity.⁷⁸

As stated earlier, the RBC was, and in some regards, still is the pillar of the rural black community. It has through much turmoil, scandal and controversy, shown great resilience and perseverance. Perhaps, this unattended issue of resolving the conflict among the generations is

⁷⁷ Floyd-Thomas and Floyd-Thomas, *Black Church Studies*,” 13.

⁷⁸ Ross and Allen, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 38.

something that has been present in churches universally, but it definitely exists in the RBC. The age of an individual or the generation in which he or she belongs to, has become a radar to indicate likes and dislikes. Paul encouraged Timothy to ignore the incredulous opinions of others who counted him out because of his age.⁷⁹ Yet, since those moments in which the slaves were observing their masters, biasness crept in; maybe even sub-conscientiously and there the discontinuity among the generations heightened.

The context of the RBC appeared and still appears at times to be skeptical of the invitation into the advancements of whichever times were or are current. The oldest generation living currently, went through a period in which the generations before them had issues with their lifestyles. It says in the book of Ecclesiastes that “what has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”⁸⁰ This does not minimize the effort of the RBC to be conscientiously liberated from human oppression, but rather qualifies the church to pay attention to what it has become. As Raphael Warnock pointed out, “this ecclesiology of personhood expressed in its piety and its politics is, more than anything else, the single, unifying strand holistically setting the black church apart as the conscience of American churches.”⁸¹ The black church, inclusive of the RBC, has been a huge part of the success of America’s brand. However, it is important to expose the vulnerability of any institution to avoid engaging in any form of systemic and oppressive behavior. It is through this lens that the RBC must see a hope of moving consistently towards becoming more generationally inclusive.

⁷⁹ 1 Tim. 4:12 NIV.

⁸⁰ Eccles. 1:9 NIV.

⁸¹ Raphael G. Warnock, *Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 14.

According to Paul Harvey, “black church leaders also faced new challenges, such as the merging of the informal religious practices of the former slaves with the more formal worship style of black denominations.”⁸² For many, the issue of intergenerational conflict was overlooked through unfocused lens for years because of naivety. However, the pioneers of the RBC perhaps overlooked this issue because of the other issues that were seemingly more insistent during that time.

The argument here is not over the implicit need to have a form of hierarchy, but rather to evaluate how those in the position of hierarchy abused power. This idea of self-glorification, entitlement, and authoritarian dominance was conceived on the defiled bed of oppression and ignorance. Ultimately, this created a form of hierarchy that at times resembled the damaging and seductive ways of the oppressors. Some of the individuals who were a part of this displayed humility, while others were eager to climb the weary backs of the more vulnerable to seek promotion. Although unified against the obvious fierceness of racism, the RBC struggled to stand strong against the internally intense forces of racism, sexism and classism. Throughout the years, however, even those issues have been attended to with some degree of specificity. Yet, quietly the disconnect and the dissonance between the generations have continued to be a complex problem for the RBC and the result of this is stagnated growth. According to Mark Noll, “it is cruel that the exercise of rights won long after they should have been given has, to some extent, undermined the work that the churches labored to perform in days of more overt oppression.”⁸³

⁸² Harvey, *Through the Storm, Through the Night*, 69.

⁸³ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 498.

As seen in Chapter 2, the researcher interviewed twenty African-American preachers who pastor congregations in rural Black Baptist churches. Each of them had witnessed a disconnect among the various generations in their respective churches and all agreed that ego and pride must diminish for better results. In other words, those in positions of hierarchy should be cognizant of what each generation in the church needs. Therefore, this researcher explored the importance of understanding the role of culture in relation to intergenerational conflict.

Cultural Impact

According to Ann Swidler culture is the “symbolic vehicles of meaning, including beliefs, ritual practices, art forms and ceremonies, as well as informal cultural practices such as language, gossip, stories and rituals of daily life.”⁸⁴ This is not only true of individual lifestyles, but also the collective foundational reasoning of organizations and groups. In a world with diverse spectrums of culture, it is impossible to expect that everyone will be influenced by the same cultural persuasions. According to Jim Van Yperen, “theses cultural conditions impact our ability to address conflict redemptively. A church founded on principles of individualism will respond to conflict out of its cultural values.”⁸⁵

Considering the times now, every generation is more willing to utilize their voices to express their likes and dislikes. Yperen goes on to say that “since conflict threatens private faith, we respond with the democratic ideals that form our privacy. Issues of fairness and tolerance take precedence over obedience and mutual submission.”⁸⁶ In the various generations in the RBC, many have felt and/or are feeling disregarded and some even discarded because of the

⁸⁴ Ann Swidler, “Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies,” *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273-286.

⁸⁵ Jim Van Yperen, *Making Peace: A Guide to Overcoming Church Conflict* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2002), 29.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

differences. According to Shaw and Kolbaba, “we are shaped by our generation in ways we don’t realize. The historical events during a generation’s childhood years shape that generation’s values and definitions of success. The shared experiences among the members of the generation are what distinguish them as a generation in the first place.”⁸⁷ There are variations within the Black culture that have proliferated as the times have progressed. Accompanying these variations is a boldness that expresses the dynamic differences found within the various generations in the RBC. John Ortberg shared a poignant perspective on culture relationship with the church:

Multi-generational church ministry in our day is uncharted territory. In past centuries, because culture changed more slowly, when people entered the church, they entered church culture. They sang common music and spoke a common language. Today, church life has largely been contextualized to reach people in popular culture. But pop culture has fragmented into all kinds of micro-cultures. Generations are generally segregated by media, clothes, music, entertainment, and technology. Trying to reach different generations simultaneously has become like trying to design one church that will work in both Spain and France.⁸⁸

According to Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal, “organizations are cultures that are propelled more by rituals, ceremonies, stories, heroes and myths than by rules, policies and managerial authority.”⁸⁹ The RBC as an organization is not exempt from the various cultural developments. Therefore, the lack of proper resolution tactics regarding the various cultures expressed in each generation has lured in the presence of intergenerational conflict.

As referenced earlier, the RBC constructed a format of church worship that was greatly similar to those who once oppressed them; however, the uniqueness of the style of worship was dramatically different. The tune of jubilancy in moments that were seemingly free of cruelty and oppression was greatly liberating for the RBC. Throughout the years, though, the cultural impact in the church became a vice against intergenerational inclusion. Hence, the conflict. It is apparent

⁸⁷ Shaw and Kolbaba, *Generational IQ*, 14.

⁸⁸ John Ortberg, “Can Your Church Leadership Represent Every Generation?”

⁸⁹ Lee Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (Hoboken: Jossey-Bass, 2017), 244-45.

that traditionalism made its impact on the generations in the RBC, but the culture has now taken it to another level. There are a number of ways in which the culture has crept into the church, but one way in particular, is the role of music as a worship style in the RBC.

According to an article in the Library of Congress, “African American Gospel music is a form of euphoric, rhythmic, spiritual music rooted in the solo and responsive church singing of the African American South. Its development coincided with—and is germane to—the development of rhythm and blues.”⁹⁰ The role of music has been a cultural complexity among the generations in the RBC because of the nature of its usage. Initially, each generation appeared to be on the same sheet of music. Perhaps, this had something to do with the atmosphere of oppression, injustice and inequality during that time that incited a necessary response to unite. With the passing of each decade, it became more noticeable that even the music in the RBC was evolving. Some of this had something to do with Black people becoming more lawfully literate or at least more aware of the various genres of music. As the development of Black life was evolving, music transformed along with it. “Songs written by African American composers in the decades following emancipation that focused on biblical themes and often drew from spirituals were the source for the development of Gospel,” the Library of Congress noted.⁹¹ The culture of Black gospel music for the Black church and the Black community have always been edifying. Many have been liberated by the authenticity found in the words of a song. It is similar to the psalmist’s expression in Psalm 98:

Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. He has remembered his love and his

⁹⁰ “The Library of Congress Celebrates the Songs of America: African American Gospel,” Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/songs-of-america/articles-and-essays/musical-styles/ritual-and-worship/african-american-gospel>.

⁹¹ Ibid.

faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn— shout for joy before the LORD, the King. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.⁹²

Deborah Smith Pollard shared a masterful timeline that conveys the evolution of gospel music in the Black church as noted in Table 3 below. Table 3 provides a vivid perspective of the evolution of music in the RBC. Throughout the timeline, what is not seen is the transition of generational disconnection because of the conflict that erupted among the various generations. As the music evolved, the generation that grew with the music of that time was often looked down upon because of their embrace to something that was not the norm. According to Alton Pollard and Carol Duncan, “music becomes at risk when we are more concerned about the style or genre being presented than we are about whether the Word of God is being reinforced as biblically based, theologically sound, culturally relevant, or ‘rightly divided.’”⁹³ Radio and television has now given Black gospel music a broader platform, but the type of music is still preferential in the RBC. One can hear an assortment of black gospel music being rendered in the RBC; however, the assortment of music is not readily received by individuals who may not be a member of a certain generation. The pastors and leaders of the RBC must be in communion with the righteous ways of God to avoid commercialism in the church and to better manage the unity of those who congregate as part of the fellowship.

⁹² Psalm 98:1-7 NIV.

⁹³ Alton B. Pollard and Carol B. Duncan, *The Black Church Studies Reader* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan U.S., 2016), 109.

Table 3.
Gospel History Timeline

Significant dates	Evolution of Black gospel music
1619	First Africans arrive in Virginia singing African music
1640-1680	Large scale slave labor introduced in the British Caribbean
Mid to late 1700's	The folk negro spiritual emerges
1787	The African Methodist Episcopal church is founded
1865	Slavery abolished by the 13th amendment
1871	The arranged negro spiritual created by the Fisk jubilee singers
1890-1920's	Transitional/early gospel music
1929-1940's	Traditional gospel music emerges
1945-1960's	The golden age of gospel music
Late 1960s through 1980	Contemporary gospel and the mass choir sound explode
1980 through the present	Urban contemporary gospel music
1985- present	Praise and worship music
1987-present	Christian rap/Holy hip hop ⁹⁴

Each of the twenty pastors who were interviewed for this research all agreed that the culture of music can be quite divisive without proper metrics of resolution. They each expressed the difficulty of pleasing each individual from the various generations, with conflict being the result of the differences. Members of the older generation feel as though the younger generation has invited too much of “the world” into the music that’s supposed to be for the church, while members of the younger generation appear to be bored by the redundancy of musical presentation as poignantly advertised by the older generation in the RBC. Although music can serve as a healing agent, it can also be seen as a vice that causes division. Pollard and Duncan pointed out that “the truth is that these practices, habits, customs, rituals, and liturgical actions can become rituals without reason, ceremonies without content, singing without substance,

⁹⁴ Deborah Smith Pollard, “In Celebration of Gospel Music Heritage Month: An Historical Timeline,” September 2010. The Gospel Gamut by Deborah Smith Pollard, <http://deborahsmithpollard.blogspot.com/2010/09/in-celebration-of-gospel-music-heritage.html>.

services without sincerity, and music without meaning, relevance, or understanding in the lives of the congregation.”⁹⁵

There are those who are experimenting with conducting separate worship services specifically geared towards the various generations’ desires. However, in a great number of RBCs, there is a scarcity of resources to implement such a radical plan. Moreover, having multiple services to cater to cultural preferences of the various generations in the church seems to support more of the idea of disunity. It is important to accelerate towards a solution to help mend the divide among congregants in the RBC.

Resolving any type of conflict can be difficult, but unless the difficulty is confronted, the conflict remains. The cultural impact of music in the RBC must be resolved properly to invite the spirit of unity. Therefore, music must transcend culture by becoming an authentic tool towards effective ministry. Everist wrote: “Ministry is not merely a means to a goal. Ministry is a gift of God, a way of living and serving in relation to the neighbor. The Body of Christ is made up of many differently able people. With differing gifts, we are called into a variety of ministries within the faith community and in our daily lives in the world.”⁹⁶ Music then should penetrate the walls of preferential satisfaction among the various generations in the church. After all, the Apostle Paul encouraged the believers in the church at Ephesus to interact with and edify one another by singing songs and hymns that were authentically derived from the spirit and from the core of one’s heart.⁹⁷

The cultural impact of music among the various generations in the RBC can be managed also with healthy conversation. These conversations ultimately should drive the congregations to

⁹⁵Ibid, 110.

⁹⁶ Norma Cook Everist, *Church Conflict from Contention to Collaboration* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 21.

⁹⁷ Eph. 5:19 NIV.

actively listen to one another and to ask relevant questions. It is also important for the congregants to understand that ministry must be relevant, but most importantly it must be relational. The conflict that has existed among the various generations in the RBC have intensely divided the unity of the church. Music as a ministry tool can unite the body if it is presented with clarity. Neuger and Poling shared a constructive view of uniting a group of individuals despite the distractions:

It is important to recognize that the distortions that have emerged from a patriarchal mind-set in terms of religious systems, theological interpretations, and the structuring of culture have harmed everyone. When a culture exists within a conceptual error like that of patriarchy and builds rules, roles, and rituals around that error, no one can truly flourish...collaboration, collegiality, and honest partnership is required across various patterns of difference and diversity if we are to dismantle the oppressive systems that seek to empower only the few and to silence the rest.⁹⁸

Traditional Impact

Tradition is the transposition of beliefs, behaviors and practices from one generation to another. The RBC is steeped in tradition and is often subjected to lack of growth because of the intense grip of traditionalism. However, there were and are some traditions that were and are greatly edifying to the body of Christ. The formality of religion was framed after what the early RBC saw in the those who once oppressed them. The result of this was the constant appearance of superiority versus inferiority. It became complex when the generation receiving the traditional torch, had no clue as to how the beliefs, behaviors and practices would work in their now. Hence, the beginning of conflict among the various generations in the RBC. According to Anita Cloete, “ministry that separates people according to age or social status prevents Christians from hearing

⁹⁸ Christie Cozad Neuger and James N. Poling, *The Care of Men* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 29.

the insights from the entire faith community. This division according to age in ministry is not found in Scripture.”⁹⁹

At the commencement of the RBC, many of the Black church leaders tried immensely to operate out of authenticity. However, it became protocol to sustain a certain way of doing things regarding the operation of the church. According to Thabiti Anyabwile, “the only force capable of reviving the black church in whatever area she needs is the Spirit of God animating the Word of God.”¹⁰⁰ The potential for growth has been an enduring conversation in the RBC for many years and paying attention to those traditions that have contaminated the church is pertinent. The gospel writer in Mark 7:3-9 shares insight regarding how the RBC and the church at large should manage traditions:

The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles. So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?” He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: “‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules.’ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.” And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions!”¹⁰¹

In the RBC, racism, sexism and classism have been challenged through conversations and constant mental modification. Tradition became the handcuffs that restricted the liberation of women and those with low socio-economic statuses in the RBC. However, with much travail, prayer, and conversation, both sexism and classism are now being viewed in a different light in the RBC. Upon researching information about tradition in the black church, it almost always

⁹⁹ Anita Cloete, “Creative Tensions in Youth Ministry in a Congregational Context,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 71, no. 2 (2015): 3.

¹⁰⁰ Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *Reviving the Black Church: A Call to Reclaim a Sacred Institution* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2015), 247.

¹⁰¹ Mark 7:3-9 NIV.

references sexism primarily and classism secondarily; very little to no information about intergenerational discontinuity and conflict. Nevertheless, there is a shrinking regarding church growth that has and is inevitably occurring in the RBC. This shrinkage is greatly in part to the dispersion of participants from each generation in the church. Many members left and/or are leaving because they now feel comfortable using their voices against toxic traditions and rather than becoming confrontational, they leave.

Oppression, coupled with fear, had been a dark cloud over the heads of the pioneers of the early RBC, but they continued to press through the hardships that they endured to experience some form of liberation. This kind of strong will that had been passed down through the generations has served the church well regarding tradition. As history denotes, when a great deal of attention is given to a particular topic, other topics are then quite often overlooked. Traditionalism in the church has cause the church to develop a blind eye and a mute voice to how important it is to have a working partnership among the generations in the church. However, hope instilled in the hearts of the true believers can bring about real change.

Discerning dysfunctional and functional traditions in the RBC are germane to the nature of the church's existence. This starts with dealing with the presence of conflict that has been eating away at the growth opportunities in the RBC. In a research given by the Barna Group, it was suggested that Millennials and young adults have varying reasons for not affiliating with the church:

Among those who say church is not important, most are split between two reasons: two in five say church is not important because they can find God elsewhere (39%), and one-third say it's because church is not personally relevant to them (35%). One in three simply find church boring (31%) and one in five say it feels like God is missing from church (20%). Only 8% say they don't attend because church is "out of date," undercutting the notion that all churches need to do for Millennials is to make worship "cooler." A significant number of young adults have deeper complaints about church. More than one-third say their negative perceptions are a result of moral failures in church

leadership (35%). And substantial majorities of Millennials who don't go to church say they see Christians as judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), anti-homosexual (91%) and insensitive to others (70%).¹⁰²

In the RBC, the time frame in which the younger generation tends to distance themselves from the church, is when they become old enough to make their own decisions. For this reason, conversations about the thoughts of each generation must take place to move beyond the grip of negative traditional activity. According to Everist, "in order to move from a contentious toward a collaborative way of dealing with conflict, we need to consider the relationship of collaboration to conflict."¹⁰³

It can be puzzling at times, because in other areas of a Christian's life, solution-driven methodologies are employed far more fluidly than in the church. For example, if ten people on the job are annoying an employee, that employee will endure the frustration because his or her focus is more on the pay day that is to come than on those who are engaging in conflict. If the church in general and the RBC in particular would focus more on Jesus Christ, then perhaps there would not be so much conflict of any type within the church. However, the continual annoyance eventually becomes intolerable and one either finds a way to deal with it or opts to leave. Everist shares that "dealing with conflict will never be easy, but continue to talk and share perspectives as you work this time, noting ways you can gain insight and skill for the conflicts that inevitably will come again."¹⁰⁴

The RBC can move beyond the intergenerational conflict in the church, but there must be an intentional refocus towards being like Jesus Christ. Also, the RBC must engage in frequent forums to allow various generations to share their perspectives to enhance the congregation

¹⁰² "What Millennials Want When They Visit Church."

¹⁰³ Everist, *Church Conflict*, 7.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 24-25.

rather than to hinder it. As noted in the next chapter, each of the twenty pastors consented that identifying the toxic traditions is imperative for each ministry and developing methodologies to build unification is even more important. Therefore, it is prudent for every leader in the RBC to be aware of his or her role pertaining to church growth.

Leadership Impact

There have been phenomenal leaders affiliated with the RBC who accomplished much to build the kingdom of God. Leaders, who have endured a great deal of obstinate and intractable interfaces, both internally and externally to lead effectively. However, at some point, the successful blending of the generations never appeared to become much of a priority for the RBC or its leadership and it is notably becoming more of a problem now. Through this project, the researcher aimed not to diminish the role of leaders within the RBC, but rather to enhance the leadership. Therefore, the researcher took an introspective look at the leadership of the church in order to assist the RBC leaders in making necessary changes. This works best when the leaders recede so that God's will can flourish.¹⁰⁵

The church is much like the family, with church leaders serving in parent-like roles. In the home, parents must examine the scope of their homes to make the proper assessment of how each family member functions. Likewise, church leaders must consider the whole unit in order to determine productivity in the kingdom of God. "Spiritual leaders who develop their own visions, no matter how extensive, rather than understanding God's will, are settling for their best thinking instead of God's plans. It's a sure way to shortchange their followers," Henry and Richard Blackaby wrote.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the issue of intergenerational conflict has appeared microscopic pertaining to God's plan, with leaders failing to engage the proper resources to see it. However,

¹⁰⁵ John 3:30 NIV.

¹⁰⁶ Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 100.

the neglect of resolving the conflict among the generations in the church will lead to an empty fellowship. It all points back to figuring out a way to invoke unity in the body of Christ.

Affirmation is a building tool that helps to encourage people. It can frequently inspire individuals to want to do better, to want to be better and to want to live better. Earley pointed out that “affirming others builds relationships and motivates better performance.”¹⁰⁷ A good leader in the church is not selective in the way that he or she cares about each generation in the church. It is the selectivity of respect shown for certain generations that causes the conflict and eventually, the severing of the body. Therefore, the best model of leadership is and has always been emulating Christ. Leaders who are connected to Christ are building character. Joseph Stowell pointed out that “character-driven leaders are committed to building their enterprise with the ways of Jesus as the guiding light of their leadership competency. But it’s not just how we lead that is important to Jesus. Into the tension of would-be leaders who were striving for position and power, Jesus raised the issue of the importance of who we are as we lead.”¹⁰⁸

A leader recognizes his or her deficiencies and administers the environment in such a way as to delegate such matters to those who appropriately connect with the assignment. This delegation involves choosing representatives from each generation to perform in the operation of the church to bridge the gap towards unity. Leaders will not only focus on the mission, but also focus on building the spirits of the people to perform the mission. As a Christian leader, the impact of the ministry should always lead others towards being better Christians. It is the responsibility of the leader to discern the space to strategically plan against divisive attacks against the members. Intervention is great, but a Christ-led leader should always invest in preventative methodologies to build the Kingdom of God through the unity of the Spirit.

¹⁰⁷ Earley, *Turning Members into Leaders*, 50.

¹⁰⁸ Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, 50.

A great leader will influence people in a variety of ways. John Maxwell shared that one such way to influence people is to be adaptable or capable of change:

Once the leader has personally changed and discerned the difference between novel change and needed change, then that leader must become a change agent. In this world of rapid change and discontinuities, the leader must be out in front to encourage change and growth and to show the way to bring it about. He must first understand the two important requisites to bringing about change: knowing the technical requirements of the change, and understanding the attitude and motivational demands for bringing it about. Both requisites are critically necessary. More often than not, though, when failure to change results, it is because of inadequate or inappropriate motivation, not from lack of technical smarts.¹⁰⁹

As referenced earlier, the RBC leaders struggled with being the agents of change that coherently attended to the importance of intergenerational inclusion in the operation of the church. However, one of the most important ways to influence change is leading by example.

Leadership is the process by which a leader encourages and inspires others towards a specific goal. It is an interactive process that benefits both the individual and community beyond stagnation, complacency and mediocrity. Leadership shapes and develops others to grow productively and transforms the dynamics of personal and collective situations. Rod Dempsey encouraged Christian leaders to look forward with vision rather than to look back in regret:

First, true Christian leadership begins with vision. Proverbs 29 reminds us, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Habakkuk 2 instructs us to "write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he may run that reads it." The starting point for all leadership is vision. A leader should be able to look ahead and chart a course of action. Without vision you cannot lead a group toward a preferred future. Christian vision primarily comes from spending time with God in His Word and in prayer, contemplating, reflecting, and listening for His voice.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 52.

¹¹⁰ Rod Dempsey, "Leadership Issues in the Small Group: A Working Definition of Christian Leadership," September 2007, Christianity Today, <http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2007/leadership-issues-in-small-group.html>.

As they hear and discern God's leading, leaders are able to communicate God's will to God's followers. Again, God's will is derived from God's Word. God will never guide any leader to do anything contrary to the scriptures.

True leadership is about developing followers to the point where they can, in turn, develop the next group of followers. The Apostle Paul had this in mind when he said: "the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."¹¹¹ The world is growing rapidly, and church leaders must be involved in guiding others to stay focused regarding God's will. According to Dempsey, "we need to make sure that we are developing exponential strategies (leaders developing leaders) to reach the world with the good news of Jesus Christ."¹¹² Therefore, the RBC must consciously and intentionally empower the generations to blend together by truly becoming disciples of Christ.

Leading despite the deficit

Pastors are often ridiculed because of the attacks against the church. In many cases, the pastors are just trying to remain faithful amid their own personal circumstances. It is no secret that the pastor is a leader who seeks divine guidance to press through the strenuous fields of ministry. However, it is also the role of a pastor to be sensitive the needs of those whom he or she leads. Henri Nouwen offered a refreshing perspective on ministry and those who serve in ministry in his book *Wounded Healer*:

For the minister is called to recognize the sufferings of his time in his own heart and make that recognition the starting point of his service. Whether he tries to enter into a dislocated world, relate to a convulsive generation, or speak to a dying man, his service

¹¹¹ 2 Tim. 2:2 NIV.

¹¹² Dempsey, "Leadership Issues in the Small Group."

will not be perceived as authentic unless it comes from a heart wounded by the suffering about which he speaks.¹¹³

The most effective form of ministry is that which is carried out by individuals who are willing to give of themselves to others despite his or her own wounds, scars, trials, hurts, disgust and/or pain. The idea that being wounded is what connects and interconnects the minister to the individual being ministered to helps to shape the unity in the church. It also helps to maintain balance, while promoting humility in the body of Christ. According to Hilliard, “the pastor’s influence naturally filters through the rest of the congregation and influences attitudes and understanding of church purpose.”¹¹⁴ No one is above anyone else because all fall victim to the strains of humanity and the issues of this life. This is true of the various generations in the church. It is through strength from God that individuals are enabled to recognize and cope with their own weaknesses. While it may appear to be radical and condescending to those who are soaked in traditional ministry, leaders recognize the needs of each generation to help the church to move beyond the pulpits of complacency and the altars of routine by honoring the biblical guidelines that will create more opportunities for genuine intergenerational interactions.

Many will experience challenges that have bruised the activity of his or her faith. Life seems to be more difficult in these moments and God seems distant or least out of his or her direct reach. There is a dire need for pastors and leaders to infuse an optimistic perspective that permits them to see the light amid the momentary darkness. Matthew 5:45 challenges pastors or any Christian leader “that God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”¹¹⁵ The feeling of difficulty is only momentary and the challenge is to develop a fortitude amid the deficit.

¹¹³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2014), xvi.

¹¹⁴ Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 40.

¹¹⁵ Matt. 5:45 NIV.

Great spiritual leadership will lead to discipleship and discipleship will place more emphasis on Jesus and less on those things that have caused a disconnect among the various generations. There is great validity found in the words of Jesus in Matthew 28 as he challenges the audience to “make disciples.” This message has been reproduced many times since its origin and given as a statement of action rather than one of pretentious rhetoric. Upon that reflection, it can be processed, that to productively make anything, there must be some attention given to defining that which is being made. Therefore, it is important for leaders in the RBC to no longer settle for membership, but rather build the various generations to be authentic Christian disciples. A disciple is a person who prioritizes with great loyalty a demonstration of someone’s character, disposition and internal being. It is not just following the newest fad, but sternly with discipline, forging ahead to model after a formidable representative. Jesus Christ should always be that formidable representative in the RBC and any other church for that matter. According to Galloway, “most traditional churches today cannot retain even a bare majority of their own young people into adult discipleship. The secular society has much more influence on our young people than the church.”¹¹⁶ To truly begin to reconnect and blend the generations, the RBC will need to re-format the focus back to being more like Jesus Christ. Jonathan Parnell shared an enlightening and unifying thought on being Christian disciples:

To be a disciple of Jesus means to serve like him. It means to serve, primarily, by looking at your brothers and sisters and going low in acts of love, even when it’s an inconvenience to self, even when it challenges the world’s social order and expectations. Making disciples of Jesus means to make servants into individuals who love one another...Jesus was sent for a purpose — to reveal God and redeem sinners (John 1:14, 12) — and he set his face like flint to see it accomplished (Luke 9:51; Isaiah 50:7). We too, as his disciples, filled by his Spirit, are sent for a purpose — to tell his good news (Romans 10:14–17). To be a disciple of Jesus means to point people to him. It means to tell the truth of the story of Jesus and his love so that others would know him and worship

¹¹⁶ Galloway, *Making Church Relevant*, 146.

him. It means, in other words, that we gladly seek more worshipers; which is to say, a disciple of Jesus makes disciples of Jesus, as Jesus tells us to in (Matthew 28:18–20).¹¹⁷

A disciple must be committed to Christ by the way in which he or she sacrifices that God would be glorified through Jesus Christ. In the RBC, there needs to be an intentional reflection done on sacrificing generational perspectives to follow Jesus Christ. In addition to this reflection, there also needs to be some level of accountability for each generation; an assessment system that will help to shape the focus of becoming a better disciple.

After leaders spend time in devotion with God and continually seek God’s word as a guide on the journey of life, then they can sensibly challenge and shape others into this kind of lifestyle. Discipleship is then the responsive activity of those who are yet evolving as disciples who shape others to be committed followers of Christ. It is modeling behaviors that resemble those of Christ for others to emulate and to replicate on the journey of life. A disciple of Christ does not become enthralled with various generational perspectives, but rather unifies through the connection with Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”¹¹⁸ The leaders and members of RBCs have a responsibility to participate in discipleship to bring glory to God, but also that others will be edified. By focusing on discipleship, leaders can avoid engaging in hierarchy profile propaganda and can incite commitment on the part of the leaders and the body in the RBC.

The rewards are limitless as the people of God, the body of Christ are entrusted to a Savior who loves his creation more deeply and rewards them more completely than anyone could ever comprehend. God desires the best for his children, He has a plan and purpose for them in

¹¹⁷Jonathan Parnell, “What Is a Disciple?” July 2014, Desiring God, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-is-a-disciple>.

¹¹⁸ Gal.2:20 NIV.

the kingdom of God, and He wants his children to spend eternity with Him. His call, above all else for his children as Christians, of what God's will is all about, is to be and make disciples at all times.

Chapter 4

A Model to Avoid Intergenerational Conflict

In this chapter, the researcher develops a strategic model to assist pastors and the churches in which they lead to better resolve intergenerational conflict and experience real growth. As discussed in Chapter 3, tradition, leadership and culture have proportionately impacted the formation of intergenerational conflict in the RBC throughout its history. Therefore, the researcher uses this chapter to frame a practical diagram to invite more intentional interactions among the various generations in the RBC. Frank Viola shared an interesting perspective on the impact of tradition, leadership and culture in the church:

Some Christians have tried to justify a slew of unbiblical church practices by suggesting that the church is different in every culture, and it adapts to the world in which it lives. It is thought, therefore, that God now approves of the clergy system, hierarchical leadership, the performance–spectator order of worship, the single leader model, the concept of “going to church,” and a host of other practices that were created around the fourth century as a result of Christians borrowing from the Greco-Roman customs of their day.¹¹⁹

The opportunity is now to have appropriate and healthy conversations that will contribute to the restructuring of a powerful resource such as the RBC. Not to ever minimize the bigger picture of inclusion among all races and ethnicities, but rather empowering the RBC to remain unified as a strong component of the success of this nation. The idea is simply to be a brick to assist with building the Kingdom of God. Galloway suggests that “Kingdom consequences depend on us.”¹²⁰ Therefore, the RBC should make the best practice of emulating the ministry as well as the character of Jesus as will be conveyed in a biblical framework.

¹¹⁹ Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church: Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2008), 45.

¹²⁰ Galloway, *Making Church Relevant*, 77.

Biblical Framework

The theme of unity is a formidable component in the Bible that builds spiritual character. It is then impossible to effectively deal with intergenerational conflict or any other conflict of the church without first examining the scriptures. According to Barthel and Edling, “We are unaware of any church that has successfully resolved its churchwide conflicts without first going back to the basics of what the gospel message is, its implications for faith and life, and God’s statement of purpose and mission for his church.”¹²¹ One can glean much from the teaching of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, where he emphasizes the importance of believers embracing their roles in the Christ-led body:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.¹²²

Although this scripture is not specifically about a generational blend per se, it is a statement of inclusion and equality in the church. The generations need one another. Individuals

¹²¹ Barthel and Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts*, 79-80.

¹²² 1 Cor. 12:12-27 NIV.

from the various generations have a biblical responsibility to blend together in a spirit of unity.¹²³ It is difficult to accomplish anything when devices have been employed to bring about division. However, when proper focal adjustments are made, the members of the multi-generational church can live Christ-like lives in unity. “The indwelling life of Jesus Christ is the only requirement for the unity of the Spirit. And amazingly, we Christians can detect that shared Spirit whenever we meet one another. There’s an instant sense of kinship that testifies that we have the same Father,” Frank Viola wrote.¹²⁴

A multi-generational church is a healthy church from the perspective of preservation, but also in the way in which God uses whatever or whoever He chooses. The prophet Joel reveals that a time will come when God will share a piece of God’s self with all people. Men and women will be gifted to share divine wisdom with others and each generation will be tasked with a responsibility in God’s kingdom.¹²⁵ God’s ultimate desire for His church is expressed in unity and in the blending of the generations. The moment that the church stops being obedient to the will of God is the moment that division and chaos has been given a promotion.

The mending happens when forgiveness is invited into the space and each generation accepts accountability for what he or she has done. In Colossians 3:13-14, the Apostle Paul urges believers to “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”¹²⁶ There will inevitably always be differences in anything that is connected to our humanity, but it is the responsibility of the believers to strive more intensely

¹²³ Eph. 4:3 NIV.

¹²⁴ Viola, *Reimagining Church*, 128-129.

¹²⁵ Joel 2:28 NIV.

¹²⁶ Col. 3:13-14 NIV.

towards finding solutions. After all, it is pleasing to God when people can thrust aside propaganda and self-righteous behavior with the fundamental purpose of joining together in unity.¹²⁷

The interaction between Paul and Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12 teaches the importance of generational blending or connectivity in the body of Christ. Paul, being more seasoned in life, tells the younger Timothy to be confident in his God-giftedness no matter his age and to demonstrate Godly characteristics in his efforts to minister.¹²⁸ “Sometimes there is a disconnect between what we advertise and what we’re really all about,” Dave Browning observed.¹²⁹ Therefore, it is important to expose authentic love to one another to esteem that which is good.¹³⁰ There are great examples in the Bible that express the importance of generational inclusion. Although there are more, this researcher highlighted seven intergenerational partnerships found in the Bible (see Table 4 below).

Table 4.
Intergenerational Partnerships in the Bible

Intergenerational Partnerships	Scripture Mentions
Moses helped to develop Joshua into a leader. Joshua listened and followed Moses’ direction.	Exodus 17:8-16; Numbers 11:24-30; Numbers 27:12-23
Jethro helped to develop Moses with expanding his leadership skills. Moses received Jethro’s advice and implemented it into his leadership.	Exodus 18:1-12
Naomi helped to develop Ruth into a wife. Ruth encouraged Naomi, but was also still willing to receive Naomi’s wise counsel.	Ruth 1:1-22;
Samuel helped to develop David into a King. David was opened to Samuel’s mentorship and he listened to him.	1 Samuel 16:1-13

¹²⁷ Psalm 133:1 NIV.

¹²⁸ 1 Tim. 4:12 NIV.

¹²⁹ Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 90.

¹³⁰ Rom. 12:9 NIV.

Intergenerational Partnerships	Scripture Mentions
Elijah helped to develop Elisha into a greater prophet. Elisha took the mantle and he was fruitful in the prophetic capacity.	1 Kings 19:21
Priscilla and Aquila helped to develop Apollos to become a great evangelist. Apollos utilized his gift mightily because he was willing to listen.	Acts 18:18-28
Paul helped to develop Timothy into a minister. Timothy was open to Paul's counsel and continued to use his gift to minister others.	1 Timothy 4:12

A church that mistakenly ignores these partnerships will inevitably overlook the importance of intergenerational inclusion. As the church continues to mature, it must impart wisdom to each generation so that it will parallel the biblical script. Without divine guidelines, the church operates irrationally in not only the way it displays unity, but also in the way it resolves conflict. So, the church should strive immeasurably to blend intentionally with one another to build the unity of spirit.¹³¹ It is the responsibility of the church to model certain principles such as unity, but often it is the church that patterns its ways after the world. Paul adamantly admonishes the church to avoid imitating the world's patterns.¹³²

Despite the numerous scriptures highlighting the importance of unity in the church, there continues to be a covert disregard to the word of God. However, there is a hope that great attention will be given to the importance of generational inclusion not only from the biblical perspective, but also from a practical perspective. After all, doing nothing about what it is that one says that he or she believes is pointless.¹³³ There are multiple generations in the church and insurmountable tension exist among them, but something must give. An ethic of caring should be presented in the resolution of each generation and more conversations must be engaged to avoid

¹³¹ Eph. 4:3 NIV.

¹³² Rom. 12:2 NIV.

¹³³ James 2:20 NIV.

the conflict that this type of division creates. Paul advised the church to mirror the humility of Christ:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!¹³⁴

It is the will of God the Creator, that those who claim to live a life patterned after Jesus Christ, should intentionally make the effort to live in unity.¹³⁵ Frequently referencing the biblical text will assist in the endeavor to not only inspire intergenerational inclusion, but also to avoid intergenerational conflict in the church. As the biblical text gives a sound foundation of the importance of unity in the body of Christ, it is also important to explore what may have triggered intergenerational conflict in the church; particularly, the RBC.

Resolving the Conflict

The common goal and objective of the church is not to become so engulfed in culture that the church resist to maintain a righteous relationship with God through Jesus Christ. In John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”¹³⁶ It is also greatly important to be intentionally appropriate regarding the relationships that the believers have one with another. In Mark 12:31, Jesus directs His followers to love others with the same regard they have for themselves.¹³⁷ Therefore, when the church

¹³⁴ Phil. 2:1-8 NIV.

¹³⁵ Eph. 4:3.

¹³⁶ John 14:6 NIV.

¹³⁷ Mark 12:31 NIV.

prioritizes culture over authentic relationship with God and others, conflict is inevitable. Conflict is any struggle that exists between or among two or more entities with differing views. And according Yperen, “church conflict is always theological and never interpersonal.”¹³⁸ It is urgent to find constructive ways to better resolve that conflict. Resolving conflict among the various generations is a universal church perplexity. For the purposes of this project, the researcher viewed conflict resolution through the lens of the RBC experience.

Mark chapter 3 states that “if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.”¹³⁹ Therefore, it behooves the participants of the RBC to be builders of unity while reaching intentionally towards an internal and intrinsic healing. “Spiritual health is the key factor for any church that desires to experience positive and lasting growth,” Hilliard contended.¹⁴⁰

The RBC has seen different types and levels of conflict, but the issue of intergenerational conflict has quietly been discounted. This can be seen more vastly in the cultural differences that have erupted among the generations in the RBC, as well as in the rural black communities. However, it is recognized that conflict is naturally present in everything and it comes as no surprise when it shows up. According to Newbold, “conflict is not immoral; it is amoral. It can come out of a sin; but it need not be sinful. Unfortunately, we attach negative results to conflict without realizing that it can lead to positive results.”¹⁴¹ In Ecclesiastes chapter 7, the writer of that book suggested that “indeed, there is no one on earth who is righteous, no one who does what is right and never sins.”¹⁴² This invites an understanding that conflict will manifest, but it

¹³⁸ Van Yperen, *Making Peace*, 24.

¹³⁹ Mark 3:24-25 NIV.

¹⁴⁰ Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 5.

¹⁴¹ Newbold, “Conflict in the Black Church.”

¹⁴² Eccles. 7:20 NIV.

is up to the Christ-connected, to work even harder to dissolve the conflict or rather to use the conflict to begin a conversation. Hugh Halverstadt shared great insight on conflict:

Christian understandings of God's love mean much more than interpersonal respectfulness, but parties' respectful behavior in a conflict is a necessary way of approximating God's love. Christian understandings of God's justice are much greater than the meanings of human fairness, but parties' assertiveness in a conflict begins to reflect God's unconditional love for all parties. Christian understandings of God's truth recognize that Ultimate Truth far exceeds human comprehension, but precisely for that reason, human accountability that checks for parties' distortions and self-deceptions in conflicts is required in approximating God's truthfulness... No conflicts are purely or perfectly Christian. But a conflict can be judged to be more or less Christian by how parties exercise power in dealing with differences. Behaviors of respectfulness, assertiveness, and accountability and the inclusion of a larger common good serve as standards of behavior in a Christian's calling in conflictive situations.¹⁴³

It is always acceptable for any organize group to have differences, but there are some standards that should regulate how the various groups interact with one another. Halverstadt suggested that the measurement of those standards can be realized through the components of respect, assertiveness and accountability.¹⁴⁴ Without the insertion of these three components, the conflict continues to be processed in a vicious and unhealthy cycle. Halverstadt referenced this as the “malevolent cycle.”¹⁴⁵ He further suggested that the church’s goal should be to foster more intentionally the “benevolent cycle,” as it is an expression of peace.¹⁴⁶ The idea is that no one in the church (be it church leaders or lay persons) should embrace an attitude of defeat, but rather embrace an expectation as well as a motivation to lead everyone to a win. According to Charles Trumbull, “there is no victory without surrender, but there may surrender without victory.”¹⁴⁷ After all, one of the tenants of the Christian faith is that being in Christ brings the believer into victory. It does not mean that tribulation and persecution will not manifest, it simply means that a

¹⁴³ Hugh F. Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, *Victory in Christ* (Fort Washington: CLC Publications, 2015), 19.

Christian has the wherewithal to win because of the divine connection. It is perceived that the RBC has developed a dangerous comfort in sustaining a win/lose attitude, but the greater news is that there is still time to readjust. “The character of any church will be only as strong as the character of the individual believers who make up its membership,” according to Hilliard.¹⁴⁸

The dirty fighting, as Halverstadt acknowledged it,¹⁴⁹ is not only a poor representation of positive interaction, but it also increases a disconnect from the guidelines of the biblical script. Individuals from various generations in the RBC should work diligently to engage together in unity as it is the will of God. The “we have always done it this way” and the “we are tired of doing it that way” attitude must be readjusted to experience a cycle that is more benevolent. This attitude adjustment is not only good for the edification of God’s people, but also pertinent for the glorification of God. Ultimately, the implementation of this good work will take an ardent installation of compromise. After all, it is Matthew’s gospel that encourages the believers to act like children of God by being intentional peacemakers.¹⁵⁰ Paul admonished the believers in Philippi to be more concerned with the interest of others than their own interests.¹⁵¹ It is the wise words found in Proverbs that shifts the believer to really engage in the movement of compromise when it says to “trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.”¹⁵² The RBC must be accountable to the written word of God as it is the believer’s lifeline. Therefore, compromise must not be viewed as a weapon of weakness, but rather as a tool of strength.

¹⁴⁸ Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 105.

¹⁴⁹ Halverstadt, *Managing Church Conflict*, 8.

¹⁵⁰ Matt. 5:9 NIV.

¹⁵¹ Phil. 2:4 NIV.

¹⁵² Prov. 3:5-6 NIV.

Depending upon the perspective, compromise can be viewed as either passive or assertive.¹⁵³ The moment that one can relinquish traditions, styles and ways that are not necessarily biblical to genuinely hear someone else's concerns, will be the moment that growth will occur. "Since change is a given of life, all the time periods exist in the midst of transition. Yet, many would say that the cultural transitions of which we are a part are unique in that they signify a kind of radical discontinuity with foundational assumptions that have formed both our epistemological and our anthropological starting places," according to Neuger and Poling.¹⁵⁴ Everist shared that there are both negative and positive signs of compromise.

Negative signs of compromise include:

- an individual feeling trapped by having to go along with a decision;
- individuals being forced to give up something;
- individuals feeling belittled or humiliated or having little control in the process;
- parties coming to the table with a long list of non-negotiables;
- individuals painting themselves into a corner with ultimatums or limited choices; and
- the presence of deeper issues that need to be addressed before a true compromise can be reached

Positive signs of compromise include:

- the free engagement of all parties in the compromise process;
- the presence of compromises that have the potential for bringing people together on neutral ground;

¹⁵³ Everist, *Church Conflict*, 138.

¹⁵⁴ Neuger and Poling, *The Care of Men*, 23.

- establishment of relationships to levels that cause individuals to believe they can approach compromise with zeal;
- all parties feeling that their ideas, desires, and gifts are being shared;
- individuals being creative about proposing possible new options; and
- individuals beginning to understand one another's needs and points of view through the very process of compromise¹⁵⁵

There should be constant and evolutionary dialogue about identifying the signs of compromise. This is something that should be consistently re-evaluated as an assessment tool towards growth. A healthy church is ultimately a church that can sustain through the toughest of times and still press forward with vigor towards building the Kingdom of God on the earth. According to Hilliard, "church growth does not just happen; a church must prepare itself to grow."¹⁵⁶ This researcher concurred with Halverstadt's concept of respect, assertiveness, and accountability as key factors for resolving the conflict in the church. It applies significantly among the various generations in the RBC who need to experience real growth.

Respect will sustain healthy and appropriate relational interaction between or among any group of people. It takes a strong reflection of one's self to employ goodness to others because the desire is to have that behavior reciprocated.¹⁵⁷ After all, the scriptures encourage believers to express God's love towards others, even at the expense of sacrificing the desire to promote self.¹⁵⁸ In the RBC, individuals may not always agree or share commonalities regarding culture, worship styles, concepts or theologies, but it is the will of God that all make the effort to co-exist in unity. Peter shared some words in the Bible that continue to confirm value today, urging

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 138-139.

¹⁵⁶ Hilliard, Church Growth from an African American Perspective, 23.

¹⁵⁷ Matt. 7:12 NIV.

¹⁵⁸ Rom. 12:10 NIV.

believers to “show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.”¹⁵⁹ One could argue that respect without assertiveness is like a car without gas. The intention to be good and to do good requires tenacity.

The passivity that has been found in the RBC regarding intergenerational conflict is unhealthy. Assertiveness can be used as a weapon, but if it is managed well, it can be a tool. According to Randolph Sanders, “assertiveness fosters greater intimacy between people. When people feel that they understand clearly and directly what others are saying to them and can speak freely with others, they naturally tend to grow closer.”¹⁶⁰ Assertiveness must be employed in the RBC to witness reconciliation among the various generations. The biblical writer wrote it best as he encouraged the believers to “be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”¹⁶¹ Rather than overstating expressions to promote that which is familiar, it should be the role of the believer to assertively trust God through the process. It takes a willingness to be accountable for any action as it will ultimately cause growth.

According to Jacob Abshire, “there is a sense of responsibility that comes when we know that we are accountable to someone else ... How we think and act must come to light through confession. Such a reality will cause us to better steward our time, talent, and treasure in order to be free from embarrassment.”¹⁶² Accountability helps to promote self-awareness and it induces proactive perspective regarding conflict. The Apostle Paul challenged the believers to first give

¹⁵⁹ 1 Peter 2:17 NIV.

¹⁶⁰ Randolph K. Sanders and H. Newton Malony, *Speak Up!: Christian Assertiveness* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1986), 16.

¹⁶¹ James 1:19-20 NIV.

¹⁶² Jacob Abshire, *My Brother's Keeper: An Essential Guide to Christian Accountability* (Magnolia: Lucid Books, 2014), 16.

an account to God.¹⁶³ He challenged the church at Ephesus with these words: “Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”¹⁶⁴ That Pauline scripture is relevant to each believer today. The time is now for each generation in the RBC to be accountable for the good and the not-so-good behavior that has been presented. It is important that every member of the RBC take inventory of their own lives to assess what needs to be sustained or improved. Paul encouraged the believers to edify one another and to seek ways to build someone else.¹⁶⁵ Each generation in the church has the responsibility of building other generations and actively listening to the concerns of others. According to Earley, “affirming others builds relationships and maintains better performance.”¹⁶⁶ The moment that one understands the importance of implementing respect, assertiveness and accountability as building blocks in the ministry of the RBC, conflict will be better managed and growth will occur.

The RBC can work through the cultural strongholds, the traditional misnomers and the mismanagement of leadership that has caused division by striving forcefully towards unity. It takes every person on the team to engage in covenant fellowship with another. John Maxwell points out that “the ability to connect with others begins with understanding the value of people.”¹⁶⁷ If the RBC is ever to confront the conflict and reconcile the generations, then there must be an intentional redirecting away from the same old patterns of doing dysfunctional service.

¹⁶³ Rom.14:12 NIV.

¹⁶⁴ Eph. 4:25 NIV.

¹⁶⁵ 1 Thess. 5:11 NIV.

¹⁶⁶ Earley, *Turning Members into Leaders*, 50.

¹⁶⁷ John C. Maxwell, *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect: What the Most Effective People Do Differently* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 15.

There will be a more intense look at the potential of the RBC to dismiss intergenerational conflict and to witness a stream of growth and development in the Church. Not simply growth regarding quantity, but rather growth being internalized in those who are already a part of the fellowship. “Until we stop measuring our success in terms of numerical size and growth, we may be unable to accurately analyze the faithfulness of our ministry,” according to Brandon O’Brien.¹⁶⁸ Qualitative growth in this context, is a result of a church in conflict becoming liberated to do God’s Will in the spirit of Unity.

A Practical Perspective

It was therapeutic to hear from other pastors in the RBC context about the need to resuscitate the energy and the wherewithal of the RBC. Participants revealed an overwhelming consensus that it will take time, effort, and training to see a shift in the interactions among the generations in the RBC. The twenty participating pastors reflected on the role of a pastor and the importance of balancing appropriate fellowship and constructive intergenerational interactions. The perspectives shared were of male and female pastors who have served at least five years in pastoral ministry. Undoubtedly, each pastor has recognized that there is an imbalance in the way the generations interact with each other and most assuredly welcome the opportunity to embrace methodologies that would help to develop intergenerational unity. This perspective emphasizes potential and a need to drive beyond mediocrity and complacency. Myles Munroe shares a thought of clarity about potential in his book *Understanding Your Potential*:

It is said that unless you do something beyond what you have done, you will never grow or experience your full potential. Potential demands that you never settle for what you have accomplished. One of the great enemies of your potential is success. In order to realize your full potential, you must never be satisfied with your last accomplishment. It is also important that you never let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do. The greatest tragedy in life is not death, but a life that never realized its full potential.

¹⁶⁸ O’Brien, *The Strategically Small Church*, 31-32.

You must decide today not to rob the world of the rich, valuable, potent, untapped resources locked away within you. Potential never has a retirement plan.¹⁶⁹

Four Strategies for Resolving Intergenerational Conflict

The problem has been identified and communicated in a manner that demands the employment of a solution. The pastors all suggested that reevaluation is necessary in gauging the progression of their respective ministries in which they lead. In other words, these leaders are not settling for what has already transpired but looking diligently towards what can be. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will share an in depth look at four strategies that will help the RBCs grow and develop as they move beyond the tyranny of intergenerational conflict. These strategies are developed from the partnership between the scholarship on the topic of intergenerational conflict and the perspectives of the pastors who were interviewed. Figure 13 below illustrates the top four strategies suggested by the pastors who were interviewed for this study.



Figure 13. Strategies for overcoming intergenerational conflict.

Each strategy has been mentioned sporadically in various forms of scholarly literature and pieced together to act as solutions for other challenges in the church and elsewhere.

¹⁶⁹ Myles Munroe, *Understanding Your Potential: Discovering the Hidden You* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2011), 24.

However, it is with the greatest intent to drive through the deep-rooted barriers that have existed in the RBCs that have stagnated consistent growth and development. With an open mind and a willingness to further the kingdom of God rather than ego and reputation, these strategies can act as tools of liberation. First among the recommended strategies was intergenerational mentoring, followed by intergenerational evangelism. Behind those strategies came intergenerational leadership teams, quarterly evaluations and forums. Reinforced with great commitment and consistency, the RBC can be just as powerful a brick in the building of God's Kingdom here on the earth than it ever has been.

Strategy 1: Intergenerational Mentorship Implementation

Mentoring is the most notable resource towards resolving intergenerational conflict in the church, but with relevant modification. Traditionally, those who were older or those who had the most experience in a specific area, met the criterion of mentorship. The challenge with this framework is that amid the process, qualified individuals were overlooked because he or she didn't measure up to the standards that it took to be a mentor. In the RBC, it appeared that the younger generation could only be the mentees in the process of mentorship. A big part of the conflict among the various generations is that the youth have oftentimes not only felt voiceless, but also useless and inadequate.

The relationship between Naomi and Ruth in the scriptures displays mentorship at its best. It was not only the older Naomi depositing into the younger Ruth, but also the younger Ruth depositing into the older Naomi. Because of this shared mentoring responsibility, both of them were blessed by the other's strength. Some of the pastors interviewed who were younger entering into the service of pastor, suggested that there were challenges with the older membership regarding receiving their leadership. In addition to that, it has been observed that the

younger generation is greatly rebellious to their older counterparts because of what is or is not culturally relevant in that moment. The accountability weighs on those in the various generations who only seek to exploit the negative images of other generations.

Therefore, having knowledge or awareness about other generations gives an edge to engaging in effective mentoring. Shaw and Kolbaba interestingly identified this as generational intelligence, going on say that “if we don’t have generational intelligence, we overreact to the small things, ignore the big things, and do the wrong things, making our relationships worse.”¹⁷⁰ The RBC has the opportunity to explore interactive and intergenerational commonality among the various generations in the church, but it requires each generation getting to know the others.

Being intentional about identifying and appointing qualified mentors from each generation is significant to the development of intergenerational unity in the church. Without Jethro's mentorship, Moses would have exhausted his resources and would have failed the assignment that he was given.¹⁷¹ Without Paul's encouragement to Timothy as his mentor, Timothy would have struggled with identifying his purpose.¹⁷² As stated before, Naomi may have been left to reside in the guilt and shame of her own sorrow, if not for the young Ruth being mature enough to mentor Naomi through her depression.¹⁷³ It did not matter who was the oldest or the youngest in those biblical occurrences, but what mattered was, the mentor’s attitude to affect change and to do something good. Pearman offered an astonishing view on doing good:

Note that God’s goal for us is not simply that we do good works but that we be fruitful in good works. The notion of being fruitful in good works, rather than simply doing a few good works, is central to the biblical ethic. God’s will is not simply that we do good but also that we be productive in doing good. In fact, the biblical ethic is that we do all the good we can...we are not to be scant and scarce in our good works, or even nominal and

¹⁷⁰ Shaw and Kolbaba, *Generational IQ*, 6.

¹⁷¹ Exodus 18:14-24 NIV.

¹⁷² 1 Tim. 4:12 NIV.

¹⁷³ Ruth 1:16-28 NIV.

mediocre, but abundant and liberal in doing good. We are not simply to do good for some people here and there; we are to do good for all people as often as we can and as much as we can.¹⁷⁴

Many of the pastors interviewed agreed that developing a strong mentorship ministry is a form of doing good, not only for the church, but also the community. The pastors who thought it was important to develop an effective mentoring ministry shared four strong components in building a relevant intergenerational mentorship as illustrated in Table 5 below:

Table 5.
Mentorship Development Process

Training:	Scripture:	Evaluation:
Connecting discipleship as the premiere form of mentorship.	Matthew 4:19-20, Matthew 28:19,	Certificate of completion
Identifying personality traits in self and others.	Matthew 7:12, 1 Corinthians 2:10	Certificate of completion
Constantly engaging in the arena of social interaction.	Matthew 25:40, Galatians 6:9-10	Certificate of completion
Assessing the knowledge about effective mentoring	Proverbs 4:7, 2 Timothy 2:15	Certificate of completion

Empowering the youth, the young adults and the older adults to become mentors will provide a sense of belonging as well as a sense of self-worth. These characteristics are bricks that help to build the Kingdom of God while on the earth.

Discipleship will drive an effective mentoring ministry in the church. A man possessed with demons was filled with trouble and after his interaction with Jesus, he wanted to follow Jesus.¹⁷⁵ Not only was the man's life changed through discipleship, but he learned something from Jesus because of mentorship. If those who assemble are authentic about their faith, then

¹⁷⁴ Perman, *What's Best Next*, 74-75.

¹⁷⁵ Mark 5:1-20 NIV.

they will not only be members, but most importantly, disciples. It often takes an intense discernment to filter through the crowd to determine who are just members versus who are disciples. However, pastors and leaders should be careful not to embrace the division any further by aligning with his or her carnality rather than his or her spirituality. It was Jesus who said that a house in turmoil will never endure.¹⁷⁶

It is difficult to interact with others with disabled social skills. It stifles conversation and the opportunity to impact a situation with true regard. Therefore, it is important to have some awareness about the various types of personality traits to be an effective agent of change. The church is called to heal, not to damage or bring harm. The RBC specifically can benefit from partnering individuals and generations compatibly together for mentorship. The determination of success will rely heavily on the consistency of the individual to constantly craft his or her skill by studying and meditating on the next steps. Phil Newton wrote: “As the mentoring takes place within community, it deepens the lessons practiced and observed in real-life settings – so there’s no mentoring in theory but in tangible reality.”¹⁷⁷ The scriptures challenge the believers universally to not get stuck in what they hear, but rather to be transcendent in what they do.¹⁷⁸

Strategy 2: Effective Implementation of Evangelism

According to Roberto, “Most churches are intergenerational or multi-generational by membership.”¹⁷⁹ Roberto suggested that churches should be “intentionally intergenerational,” rather than coincidentally intergenerational.¹⁸⁰ How do the churches become intentionally intergenerational? Churches become intentionally intergenerational through the vehicle of

¹⁷⁶ Matt. 12:25 NIV.

¹⁷⁷ Newton, *The Mentoring Church*, 135.

¹⁷⁸ James 1:22 NIV.

¹⁷⁹ Jon Roberto, “Becoming Intentionally Intergenerational: Models and Strategies,” *Lifelong Faith* (2009): 33-44.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

evangelism. Why evangelism? Implementing appropriate intergenerational mentoring methodologies opens a more panoramic view in reaching out for individuals from each generation. In other words, mentoring builds relationships among those in the church to inspire those outside of the church to understand the importance of unity in Jesus Christ. Figure 14 below illustrates the inclusion of each of the various generations working together in unity to reach the lost. First, the evangelism team should be constructed of members from each generation. Secondly, the evangelism team should consist of individuals that represent a variety of personality styles. Lastly and most importantly, the evangelism team should include those who are authentically engaged in a relationship with God through Jesus Christ and desire to connect others to him.

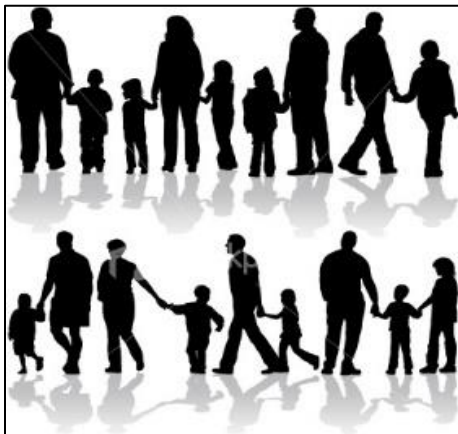


Figure 14. Intergenerational evangelism. (Shutterstock.com.)

The consensus from participating pastors was that authentic evangelistic efforts will draw various generations into or back into the church. According to Snailum, “the main hindrance has been the lack of understanding that intergenerational relationships are crucial to spiritual growth and maturation. If leaders understood how important intergenerational experiences are for

growth and development, they would pour enormous amounts of energy into creating these experiences.”¹⁸¹

As many participants of the RBC inquire about the decline in membership, it appears to be a paradox of sorts when there is a stagnation regarding reaching out for the lost and unchurched from each generation. How does one authentically represent the Christ without displaying his characteristics? A question to ponder, but more importantly, something that requires the immediate attention of the RBC. In Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus encouraged his followers not to settle for mediocrity, complacency, or lackadaisicalness, but rather to reap the harvest sown:

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”¹⁸²

Jesus also urged his disciples to mobilize and find those who are not aware of God’s mercy and God’s willingness, with the goal of penetrating their hearts with His love. Jesus emphasized that His disciples should not discriminate, but should shower the love of God on all who will receive it.¹⁸³ This includes being cognizant of evangelism efforts that meet the needs of every generation. According to Ed Stetzer, “as cultures and generations change, it’s vital to adjust our approaches and methodologies for whatever group we are engaging.”¹⁸⁴

Evangelism, is then an intense concern for those who are outside of the will of God and a willingness to reach those individuals at all cost. So rather than crying about the deficit and the

¹⁸¹ Snailum, “Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry within Existing Evangelical Church Congregations.”

¹⁸² Matt. 9:35-38 NIV.

¹⁸³ Matt. 28:19-20 NIV.

¹⁸⁴ Ed Stetzer, “Three Keys to Evangelizing Across Generational Lines,” January 2017, <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/20980-generational-evangelism.html>.

decline in quantitative growth, the RBC must display God's love by first sharing the salvific message of Jesus Christ to those who may not share much in common with the church. Earley and Dempsey shared an interesting perspective on evangelism:

Although most of us are not farmers, we do understand that there is a process involved in harvesting a crop. For example, if a farmer wants to harvest a crop of corn, he does not merely hop on his tractor, ride out into the fields, and start collecting corn. A lengthy process must be followed. First he has to plow the ground. Then he must plant the seed. The young plant must be fertilized, watered, and weeded. It also must be given time to grow. This entire process must be followed before the harvest can occur...in one sense, everyone we meet is a spiritual field. Our responsibility is to cooperate with God and others to plow the soil of their heart, plant the seed of the Gospel, water the seed, and wait for God to bring the harvest. Salvation is a process leading to an event.¹⁸⁵

It is the responsibility of the church to stop making excuses for past as well as present negative behavior and forge into the future with purpose, passion and power. Now is the time to re-evaluate the frustration and make every effort to connect in the spirit of unity. Paul wrote to the Church at Galatia and challenged them to "do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation."¹⁸⁶ According to Browning, "we need to balance what works for us with what works for others. We have churches full of people who love Jesus. But that's not enough. We need to love what Jesus loves: the world. If we don't reach out, in effect we are saying to the rest of the world (pardon the frankness), 'you can go to hell'."¹⁸⁷

There needs to be a development of intergenerational evangelism teams that will be contingent upon personality types. In an attempt to emulate certain evangelistic systems, many have become lost in the translation because it does not match who they are authentically and

¹⁸⁵ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is--: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2013), 130-131.

¹⁸⁶ Phil. 2:14-15 NIV.

¹⁸⁷ Browning, *Deliberate Simplicity*, 78.

eventually, they become overwhelmed with no further output. Earley and Wheeler share an incredible perspective on this:

Christians most effective in evangelism learn to evangelize according to their personality and the personality of their listener. One thing that gives evangelism a bad name is the notion that there is only one right way to do it. That is not true. The right way is to share the gospel in a manner that fits your personality and that of the person you are trying to reach.¹⁸⁸

Traditionally, the RBC has done well with operating inside the four walls; better than most. Families, customs and traditions allowed a free-flowing transport of members in and out the church for years. This is undoubtedly part of the reason that conflict (such as that which exists among the generations) has been inflamed for so long. However, evangelism opens a fresh opportunity for people who need divine redemption. Evangelism then invites people to come to God through the salvific door of Jesus Christ and then into the training center of the church. Christ wants the sin-natured human being to know that He can handle any burden, but there must be a willingness to hand it over to Him.¹⁸⁹

The RBC must choose to frame the portrait of every evangelistic opportunity by utilizing faith in God and determination to not settle for mediocrity. The mistakes, flaws and hiccups of the past should not keep God's people from fulfilling his or her purpose in him. This is the measure by which one should choose to believe now. The time is now for true worshipers to bow before God with great humility and not just by church demonstration, but also by the presentation of godly living. It is time for the church and especially, the RBC, to focus and refocus on God and His kingdom. The harvest is ready, but there must be some intentional

¹⁸⁸ Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 173.

¹⁸⁹ Matt. 11:28 NIV.

follow through. Effective evangelism will allow the RBC to experience growth to the like in which it has never seen. Rick Richardson shared an interesting perspective on evangelism:

Most churches think they already have good fellowship for pre-Christians, if they could only get them there. Few of us are aware of how our group feels to pre-Christian people. But often language, our acronyms, our announcements, our music, our messages, the way we pray, and our tendency to greet only those we know when we are together put up very noticeable barriers to those who are not yet Christian. To combat this tendency, one church has a three-minute rule. In the first three minutes after the service is done, members cannot talk to people we already know.¹⁹⁰

The RBC can experience positive change by developing an evangelism strategy that is generationally inclusive and allows the opportunity for consistent growth. Also, understanding the right placement for an evangelistic assignment is greatly significant because without the right connection, much damage could be done. Finally, implementing with follow through will determine the effectiveness of one's effort to advance the Kingdom of God. Evangelism partnered with good mentoring strategies will further crystalize the body of Christ together.

Strategy 3: Intergenerational Leadership Teams

The participating pastors were asked to describe the dynamics of the leadership of their respective churches and while the answers varied, they each connected when sharing about their young people and their lack of participation. First, many of these churches do not have leadership teams, but rather certain individuals in leadership over specific ministries. Secondly, the youth usually only have a vote regarding the youth ministry, with little to say regarding the overall church life. Intergenerational conflict exists in the RBC because every generation does not have a voice in the conversation pertaining to the well-being of the whole church. While the pastors reluctantly admitted that each generation is not vocal in the overall dynamics of the

¹⁹⁰ Richardson, *Evangelism outside the Box*, 101.

church, they all offered positive feedback regarding generational inclusion in the church's leadership.

The RBC must transition from identifying the church by guidelines that no longer parallel with the present and future context. It is the role of the leadership team to rupture the traditions that are not biblical and appear to be hindering progress regarding church growth. The time is now for the body of Christ to act constructively as the church. Leadership teams should not abuse authority and lose the trust of the people in whom are being led. There should always be an intentional representation of Christ and his righteous way of living. Each move and decision that a leadership team makes is a pivotal moment because others are watching to see if the leaders are modeling Christ-like behavior.

The idea of implementing an intergenerational leadership team will help to change the negative perspective of what others think of the church. It is about helping others to soar above preconceived notions of the church and the traditional construct. This is never to minimize the history and legacy of the RBC, but rather to enhance and progress it further. Intergenerational leaders should want to be visible and emulate the characteristics of Christ. Leaders should serve the people through love, correction and accountability. Leaders must connect with others where they are and allow that Christ-like influence to fill them. Dave Earley shared an interesting perspective on affirming others:

Affirming others builds relationships and motivates better performance. A principal called some of his teachers aside and told them they'd been selected for a special assignment. He said they were exceptional teachers and would be given an exceptional group of students to teach that school year. The teachers rose to the challenge and taught at a higher level. They positively pushed their students to outstanding performance. At the end of the year the results were obvious, in that their students had excelled, finishing above average.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Earley, *Turning Members into Leaders*, 50.

There are those in the RBC who have been beaten with verbal intimidations and therefore struggle to perceive themselves as anything other than failures. However, recognizing that affirmation is an effective tool to help increase one's confidence and self-worth. A leader who can embrace transformational experiences understands that there are stagnate moments, but pushes intensely to a better way of doing things. A leader does not feel celebrated by wearing a crown of hierarchy, but rather honored by wearing the hat of servitude. Stowell shares an enlightening thought on leaders as servants:

Servants focus on the needs of others. They train themselves to anticipate and see needs and then give their time and talents to meet those needs. Their lives are outwardly focused. They find fulfillment in blessing others. They encourage their followers, send notes of congratulations and affirmation, spread the glory around, and publicly affirm seemingly inconsequential efforts. Servants find their greatest joy in seeing others succeed. Servants also serve those in authority, willingly and eagerly. They carry out with energy and enthusiasm, the wishes to those to whom they are accountable.¹⁹²

Integrating the generations to be a part of the leadership team helps to give balance to the ministry of the church. Imagine that there is a church with five men and a hundred women, but the leadership team is made up of five men. Although the greater percentage of the population consists of women, the leadership team will be guided by male egoism and male philosophy. It is not that these men are not saved, but they have this perspective. Therefore, it would behoove a church with a large youth population to invite capable youth onto the leadership team in order to avoid one-sidedness. The moment that type of leadership is partnered with a healthy evangelism transport, lives will be changed permanently.

Strategy 4: Implement Quarterly Evaluations and Forums

Any successful establishment has a great assessment process that provides efficient maintenance in its development. It is important to have an authentic assessment plan in place to

¹⁹² Stowell, *Redefining Leadership*, 122-123.

reinforce the implementation of the other strategies. This plan is also known as an evaluation. Much like in the employment world, the evaluation system assesses workability, thoroughness and durability. After giving great attention to the proceeding strategies, there is a strong possibility that it will not sustain without a constant evaluation system. Many of the pastors interviewed suggested that they have evaluation systems in place, but those systems are not extensive. Some have the evaluations in place for the purposes of the various ministries and some only have evaluations for staff personnel. However, to eradicate the vindictiveness of conflict among the various generations in the RBC, an intense and consistent evaluation system needs to be in place.

This system of evaluation is induced by a personal encounter with the eternal that has partnered with one's past, pain and purpose. The spiritual indicator for a digressing and declining church is checking for a pulse of progress and proper rhythmic patterns of improvement. The creator understands the deficit and employs the Holy Spirit to guide the church in the direction of truth.¹⁹³ "Let go of your expectations and let God exercise his dominion and desires for your life," Bob Miller wrote.¹⁹⁴ Accepting that every human being is without perfection, is the most humbled response in the evaluation process. At some point, one understands that evaluation begins with self before it can be effective for the whole. These pastors and this researcher exuded great excitement when talking about this strategy. It provides the opportunity for sharing affirmations with individuals and then seeing them become even more fruitful citizens in the kingdom of God. Not only fruitful in his or her personal growth, but also fruitful in how one pushes others into better. According to Galloway, one should "think about the next levels of

¹⁹³ John 16:13 NIV.

¹⁹⁴ Bob Miller, *Defining Moments: 100 Kingdom Thoughts for Life-Changing Living* (Nashville: CrossBooks, 2015), 49.

commitment and how you help people move there ... It is an exciting challenge that will develop a balanced, healthy church – a church that grows.”¹⁹⁵

The process of evaluation can be devastating if not met with realistic expectations that lead to transformational experiences. As it pertains to the RBC, it is a detriment to turn a blind eye to deep-rooted errors of traditionalism that appear to have been buried under the rubble of pride and self-promoting propaganda. The conflict among the generations has been one of those missed errors in the church, but with a proper evaluation system in place, change is inevitable. The individuals that make up the church as well as the collective body, can inquire with confidence of God and others to “examine me” and “prove me.”¹⁹⁶ The examiner’s table can sometimes appear to be intimidating, invasive and disheartening, but with expectation, true transformation will occur. The reality of exposing deficits, spots, blemishes, wounds and scars in the church can feel alarming, but when with a personalized relationship with God and a strong work ethic, it will work best for the good of the whole body.

For this work, it is the RBC that will be evaluated to assess how well the generations are blending and communing together. There is nothing new about the evaluation process per se, but rather a more direct and consistent intention to monitor the effects of the interactions among the various generations in the RBC. The consensus among the pastors interviewed is that a steady progression of evaluations early will allow the opportunity to make appropriate modifications over time. It is believed that a strong evaluation system will use involve four qualities – it will:

- inquire (ask questions that are relevant and relatable to the experience);
- identify (reveal the strengths and weaknesses as a building tool towards progress);
- inform (share the relevance of the process and the results of the evaluation); and

¹⁹⁵ Galloway, *Making Church Relevant*, 34.

¹⁹⁶ Psalm 26:2 NIV.

- inspire (always present healthy challenges and consistent encouragement to build self-worth and team worth).

The four components of evaluation will allow a reasonable and practical guideline for growth and development. It is illuminating to discover that the vulnerability, embarrassment and exposure during the evaluation of past efforts are simply a catalyst to propel ministry to another level. Going through that process supports the church as a unit with discovering or rediscovering God's purpose for the ministry. It creates a new perspective regarding opportunities for growth and development.

Evaluations will also reinforce a healthy and interactive energy among the various generations in the church. While mentorship and evangelism represent the church's face in the community, it is the ability to internalize authentic and healthy conversation that keep the church progressing. No matter the complexity of a problem, being able to articulate a thought can generate hope for a solution. The hope is to reduce the multiplicity of conversations being had in small pockets and create a collective gathering of voices in an arena that are quite often called forums. Forums will give a neutral voice to each person of every generation and assist with making appropriate evaluations towards progress. It will also allow a safe space for the truth to be a transformative agent of healing. Therefore, as evaluations are being facilitated, forums will keep the conversation open and rather than speculating, conversation helps to keep the trust employed amid the fellowship.

The essence of the forums is to find balance or at least compromise in those situations in which conflict appears. Everist argued that compromise is most effective under the following conditions:

- when all parties engage in the compromise process freely;

- when compromise has the potential of bringing people together on neutral ground
- when the relationship has been established to the point that people know they can approach compromise with zeal;
- when all parties are feeling that their ideas, desires, and gifts are being shared;
- when people are being creative in possible new options; and
- when people begin to understand one another's needs and points of view through the very process of compromise.¹⁹⁷

It can truly be a struggle for some who frequently worship together and yet do not know one another. Even in the rural, smaller churches, people do not really know individuals outside of that moment of fellowship, unless there is a friend or family affiliation. The forums not only allow a balance or compromise, but it also allows the opportunity for individuals to not have to speculate about the other person's character.

Imagine participants of every generation in the RBC, being able to express their truth. Not only from the aspect of talking, but also by being active listeners. It may seem unnecessary to some, but as a participant and leader in the RBC, it is immensely relevant. Reconciliation, liberation, and healing can occur when the opportunity to converse is on the table. Many of the pastors interviewed for this study were excited about structuring a plan to enforce regular forums as a part of their pastoral assignment.

It is not the time to become exhausted with technicalities, because there will be a valid withdrawal based on a well-intended deposit.¹⁹⁸ The rural churches still rely heavily on the face-to-face forum style, as it is more intimate and safer. The larger rural churches still embrace the

¹⁹⁷ Everist, *Church Conflict*, 139.

¹⁹⁸ Gal. 6:9 NIV.

intimate face-to-face style, but they also embrace the phone conference as a transitional resource tool to develop the forum. The point here is to converse among the fellowship about what is the best fit for that specific church. No matter the preference, the RBC must be consistent in the way that it approaches implementation of forums.

Conclusion

One of this nation's strengths is the opportunity it affords individuals and groups to be different. The RBC is a productive remnant of what it means to motivate hope for a community of those who otherwise have no hope. Therefore, it is pertinent to confront the complacent and mediocre attitudes that ultimately have resulted in conflictive behavior. Prayerfully, this project will do more than just repair the oversight, but rather authentically engage a people to be more responsive to the biblical guidelines of unification. Those factors that vastly impact the RBC as referenced in Chapter 3, can very well be building blocks towards the edification of progression. However, there must be open dialogue among the generations to resist being stuck in the mud of silly biases in an earthly portrayal of God's kingdom. Hilliard shared a shrewd perspective on how the church should maneuver in its general interactions:

The church must be explicit in upholding the moral standards and behavior that the Bible teaches us. Compassion does not mean that we approve of or ignore people's behavior. But even admonishing can be done with a spirit of compassion, rooted in our striving to love our neighbors as ourselves. There are hurting people among us, and they need the comfort of a compassionate Savior. We can help them find him because we are his hands and feet and eyes and arms on the earth. When we share the compassion of Jesus with others, they come into contact with him through us, and he can change their lives.¹⁹⁹

No matter the historical and cultural significance, the RBC must not veer from the responsibility it has been given to share the message of Jesus Christ. It is not the intent of this project to misconstrue any logic pertaining to the RBC's role in the Christian ministry, but rather

¹⁹⁹ Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective*, 104.

to enlighten and/or remind others that the RBC is just one of many bricks that add to the building of God's Kingdom. What would happen in the rural territories, if every community took an introspective look at themselves? This question is difficult to fathom because it really would place the rural communities in a difficult and complex situation. The goal is to empower the formidable and productive building blocks in those rural communities so that effective ministry can go forth.

Therefore, the strength of this project is in the development of an effective intergenerational mentoring ministry as well as effective intergenerational evangelism partnerships that will ultimately generate unity in the RBC. Empowering members of every generation to become leaders and more importantly disciples of Jesus Christ, will cause intergenerational conflict to dissipate. Frequently sitting at the table of love, compassion and understanding while engaging in healthy dialogue will also inspire growth in the RBC. Earley suggested that "affirming others build relationships and motivates better performance."²⁰⁰ Positive affirmation drives many to excel beyond even their own expectations. It is a vital feature in the functionality of the RBC that must be subjected to constant reevaluation to experience growth.

The weakness of this project is that the practical input should have consisted of more than pastors. Ministry leaders, lay leaders and members of various churches could have contributed much to this project. Moreover, it would have allotted the opportunity for the entire RBC to have a voice in this project rather than just the voices of the pastoral leaders. Nevertheless, it is a start to better managing the conflict in the church and the model proposed should be utilized to bring about growth and development to and for the members. There is hope that this project will help

²⁰⁰ Earley, Turning Members into Leaders, 50.

to increase the qualitative and quantitative growth associated with any church, but particularly, the RBCs.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Tell me whether your church is small or large; whether it is made up primarily of younger, middle aged, or older people or a blend?
2. Which groups (if any) have the most difficulty relating to one another? What do you think could be done to improve church unity?
3. Considering age differences, which age group – young adults (ages 18-34), middle aged adults (ages 35-55), or seniors (aged 56 and above) do you think your church primarily appeals to or has its best ministry with?
4. Which of those age groups might feel as though the church is not meeting their needs or they are underserved?
5. Describe the characteristics of the “leaders” in your church (either the ones who have the official titles or the ones that the congregation looks to for direction)? Are they older or younger?
6. Most churches are aging and attendance is declining. Is that true for your congregation? If so, is that a concern for your leadership?
7. What would you do to increase church growth and attendance?
8. What are some ways you think your church could specifically appeal to younger members and develop younger leaders?
9. Thinking broadly, what would be a major goal for your church in the next five years?
10. Finally, tell me what you think is the best thing about your church today?

IRB Approval

July 7, 2017

Patrick Bland

IRB Exemption 2924.070717: An Evaluation of Intergenerational Conflict That Has Stagnated Growth in Some Rural Black Churches

Dear Patrick Bland,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School



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