

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MUSIC

Not a Megachurch? Creative Methods Toward Intergenerational Worship Within a Small
Evangelical Church: A Case Study

A Paper Submitted to Dr. Hanna Byrd
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Course
WRSP 889

By

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March 19, 2020

Abstract

Larger churches have historically had the advantage in the realm of creative worship ministry due to larger budgets, more volunteers and dedicated professional staff. While megachurches have dominated the creative worship model, smaller evangelical churches have struggled to capture the essence of creativity in their services. There is a need to explore the obstacles faced by the smaller church along with methods that can be applied to overcome the challenges to offer effective worship experiences that include creative worship elements in a multigenerational model. In this qualitative historical case study, insight into the processes and resources necessary to move the smaller church from traditional or age-segregated services into one intergenerational worship gathering will be identified. As part of the study, historical and biblical research will be completed and applied in a real-time setting in Fairview United Methodist Church. To gain proper perspective in the specific issues that have been addressed, a brief history of the church will be shared, noting that both large and small churches have struggled with the same type of “worship wars” within their own congregations. Recent statistics suggest that smaller churches across the country are struggling to survive in this time of megachurch domination. The results of the research and application discussed in this study will be of benefit to any smaller church that is attempting to offer a single, intergenerational worship gathering as they partner creativity with established historical traditions.

Keywords:

Megachurches, Smaller Evangelical Churches, Worship Wars, Creative Worship,
Intergenerational Worship

Acknowledgements

This study was inspired by my love for the Lord and the longing to serve His kingdom here on earth. The journey that I traveled to bring this study to fruition was filled with unexpected twists and turns, but the constant love of my heavenly Father always prevailed and carried me through the difficult times. I give Him the praise and glory for the work that He accomplished through me and in this project.

I also need to express my deep gratitude to my husband, children, family members and close friends, who sometimes had to sacrifice time with me as I researched and worked toward the completion of this study. Their love and support provided reassurance and gave me the courage to keep moving forward and achieve my goal. Finishing this race was truly a combined effort and I could not have been successful without their ongoing encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank the staff and faculty of Liberty University who provided guidance throughout the process. To Stephanie and David Pritchard, who welcomed me into their home on countless occasions when I traveled to Liberty, I greatly appreciate your hospitality and friendship. To Dr. Byrd, my adviser, who provided leadership during the writing of my thesis, and to Dr. Coates who also offered valuable feedback as my reader, I thank you for your understanding, patience, and your commitment to seeing me succeed. Finally, to each professor who guided my educational and spiritual growth during my time at Liberty, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for the profound impact that you have had on my life.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

For some time, megachurches have been a dominant force in creative worship ministry, due to larger budgets, more volunteers and a dedicated professional staff. With vast financial and human resources, their capacity to provide creative worship elements to the worship service is extensive, limited only by the skills, education and ability of the worship director.¹ A typical Sunday morning worship service includes video, lyrics projected on giant screens, extremely talented musicians, and professional-quality sound systems that can rival the experience encountered at live concerts of favorite pop and Christian artists. This style of worship draws thousands each week, with megachurches offering a number of services in stadium-size buildings, or live-stream broadcasting across multiple campuses that blanket entire states. Adding to the experience, one might observe drama, colorful artwork, and other visual elements that entice the senses and draw those gathered into powerful moments of worship. The growth of megachurches in the past several decades is undeniable, as explained by Ed Stetzer who offers the following statistics:

“The number of megachurches in America has nearly doubled during every decade over the last half century. In 1960, there was 1 megachurch for every 7.5 million Americans. In 2010, there was one for every 200,000 Americans. There are as many megachurches today in the greater Nashville area as there were in the entire country in 1960.”²

¹ Scott Thumma, Ph.D., “Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena: Their Characteristics and Cultural Context” *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*, 1996, accessed July 30, 2019, http://hrr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/thumma_article2.html.

² Ed Stetzer, “The Explosive Growth of U.S. Megachurches, Even While Many Say Their Day is Done,” *Christianity Today*, February 19, 2013, Accessed January 5, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2013/february/explosive-growth-of-us-megachurches-even-while-many-say.html>

While this substantial growth of the megachurch can be attributed to a number of factors, Wellman, Corcoran and Stockly-Meyerdirk assert that “Attendees come ‘hungry’ for an emotional experience and leave energized; in fact, many describe a physical need for the experience like a ‘high’ or a ‘drug,’ or an ‘energy’ that they don’t want to live without.”³ This current trend implies that the megachurch is offering something that people are not able to find in the average-sized church.

While some megachurches have been built from existing churches, the trend is to start clean, allowing church planters to paint a fresh canvas, unmarred by historical clutter and member discourse. In regard to the benefits of church planting, Aroney-Sine writes, “What would our lives look like if all the complaints, frustration, anxiety, distrust, confusion, criticizing, and grumbling were swallowed up in a life of thanksgiving?”⁴ The freedom to construct services with an ultimate focus on the creative worship of God enables ministry teams to reach worshipers that extend beyond the familial generations of established churches. Studies indicate that newly-established megachurches overcome the obstacles of church history by removing the need for adherence to ritual. Wellman, Corcoran and Stockly-Meyerdirk explain, “By eliminating formal liturgies and traditions and instead using familiar institutional forms, megachurches make participation in their services easy by removing most cultural membership capital barriers that prevent outsiders from participating.”⁵ With no ties to formal liturgy,

³ James K. Wellman Jr., Katie E. Corcoran and Kate Stockly-Meyerdirk, “God Is Like a Drug...”: Explaining Interaction Ritual Chains in American Megachurches,” *Sociological Forum* Vol. 29, No. 3 (SEPTEMBER 2014), 651, Accessed January 5, 2020, https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/stable/43653955?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁴ Christine Aroney-Sine, *The Gift of Wonder: Creative Practices for Delighting in God*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 140.

⁵ Wellman, Corcoran and Stockly-Meyerdirk, 654.

megachurches can utilize their resources for creative worship that reaches the current culture, while established churches are often tied to traditions. Checking the pulse of the local community is a key component for the church. Exploring the needs and practices of potential worshipers in the area surrounding the church provides an opportunity for the megachurch to craft worship that appeals to the greater community with extensive budgets and updated technology. Warf and Winsberg offer additional insight, providing the following description of worship in today's megachurch:

“Typically, they offer a welcoming environment that makes it easy for “seekers” to join. Many offer “toned down,” undemanding, multi-denominational approaches centered on positive spiritual, therapeutic messages rather than the guilt-laden doctrines characteristic of many traditional (especially Protestant) denominations.”⁶

Megachurches have discovered that attempts to meet the preferences and needs of people in surrounding communities enables them to make connections with worshipers that other churches are missing or ignoring. Blanchard, Stroope and Tolbert note, “Regardless of denominational affiliation, congregations are socially embedded in communities that shape congregational life.”⁷ Building new relationships and understanding current societal needs are a vital part of the creative worship experiences being offered in the megachurch. Regardless of origination, the megachurch has created an entirely new model of doing worship that seems to set the bar for smaller churches that is impossible to reach, leaving worship ministries feeling overwhelmed.

⁶ Barney Warf and Morton Winsberg, “Geographies of Megachurches in the United States,” *Journal of Cultural Geography*, Vol. 27, February 22, 2010, Issue 1, 36, Accessed January 5, 2020, <https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/doi/full/10.1080/08873631003593216>.

⁷ Troy Blanchard, Samuel Stroope and Charles Tolbert, “Bringing the Congregations Back in: Religious Markets, Congregational Density, and American Religious Participation.” *Open Access Religions Journal*, 5, (2014): 933, Accessed July 29, 2019, <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/5/3/929/htm>.

The small evangelical church has been a staple of community life. Throughout the history of the United States, the church has offered the opportunity for fellowship, spiritual growth and social support. Robert Ellwood, pastor of a small church in the nation's heartland in 1957 wrote, "I recall young families and innumerable children crowding Sunday School, vacation church school, picnics, and potluck suppers."⁸ Unlike today, while many are focused on their own families' activities, Ellwood noted that his church was able to build a new parish hall with mostly volunteer labor and that women had free time to serve in community and other church organizations.⁹ As the nation reached the middle of the 20th century, the church was experiencing a surge. Robb Redman reports:

"The 1950s and 1960s represented a high-water mark for North American Christianity, particularly for mainline churches. In the United States, attendance, membership, and church building reached an all-time high in the post-World War II era. Millions of GIs returned home and settled into a life of work, family and church."¹⁰

This sense of community exemplifies a substantial benefit of the smaller church. Leadbetter and Moore explained, "Some people get excited about numbers; others see them as irrelevant. Perhaps it's worth saying that small numbers mean there is a huge opportunity to build strong, intimate relationships relatively quickly, to visit effectively and to keep everyone informed."¹¹ Over time, the pendulum continued to swing between this desire for the close-knit community offered by the small church, and the yearning for something different.

⁸ Robert S. Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 1.

⁹ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁰ Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 115.

¹¹ Jane Leadbetter and Lucy Moore, *Messy Church: Fresh Ideas for Building a Christ-Centered Community*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 65.

As the 1960s drew to a close, a new wave described by Towns and Whaley as the “hippie culture” which was marked by a “commitment to nontraditional values,”¹² left its mark on church attendance. In fact, Redman stated that “More than one-third of all Boomers, some thirty-million, left the church they had been raised in,”¹³ some dropping out of church altogether. In later decades, as the boomers returned to worship in their traditional churches, the style of worship no longer held their attention. While some houses of worship were able to make changes necessary to adapt, others were left behind as the “Jesus Movement” swept the nation. Towns and Whaley explain, “The ‘Jesus People’ embraced Christ as Savior but did not abandon aspects of their subculture, including informal dress, rock music, casual speech and simple living.”¹⁴ As traditional churches clamored to find an effective reaction and adjust to the new movement, the megachurches slowly began to take hold, absorbing those looking for a different, more personal worship experience, enticing Boomers with modern music, updated buildings, new-age coffee spots, incredible children’s and youth ministries and the latest technology in weekly services. Thus, as the megachurch attendance multiplies, the traditional church in many areas is struggling to survive.

Due to the ongoing shifts in the church movement, today’s smaller evangelical church is faced with the problem of declining membership and weekly turnout in worship. Dwindling attendance is compounded by the reduction of financial donations and fewer volunteers to support the various ministries of the church. Given these limitations, the concept of crafting creative worship is a daunting task. Since many traditional churches encompass a population of

¹² Elmer L. Towns and Vernon M. Whaley, *Worship Through the Ages: How the Great Awakenings Shape Evangelical Worship*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 295.

¹³ Redman, 115.

¹⁴ Towns and Whaley, 299.

believers that span several generations, the movement toward intergenerational worship (IGW) provides an opportunity for multiple ages to be involved which expands the possible number of volunteers, but more importantly, is biblically mandated. Kirk addressed this important God-ordained directive to the church: “When God set His people Israel in order, he placed each individual within a family, each family within a tribe, and each tribe within the nation. No generation was excluded, no child left out, no older person put aside. Within each tribe were the components of family; they were community.”¹⁵ Scripture offers multiple references to this concept in various books of the Old and New Testaments.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses commanded obedience from the Israelites and instructed the people to “. . . take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. *Make them known to your children and your children's children*”¹⁶ (Deut. 4:9, emphasis added). It is obvious from this passage that multiple generations were to be instructed in God’s laws. They were also gathered together in the days of Jehoshaphat, when he called the people to worship, fast and pray in a time of deep concern for the nation: “Meanwhile all Judah stood before the LORD, *with their little ones*, their wives, *and their children*” (2 Chron. 20:13, emphasis added). A third example is seen in the Old Testament after the completed reconstruction of the wall in Jerusalem and the celebration of the people: “And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; *the women and children also rejoiced*” (Neh. 12:43, emphasis added).

¹⁵ Daphne Kirk, *Heirs Together: Establishing Intergenerational Church*, rev. ed. (Suffolk, UK: Kevin Mayhew, 2003), 17.

¹⁶ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

The New Testament also presented a number of references to children and the importance of intergenerational worship. In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ thanked the Father for “revealing things to the children” (Matt. 11:25), reminded the believer to be “humble like a child” (18:2-6) and not to “despise the little ones” (18:10) and most notably, Christ calls children unto Himself to lay His hands on them, reminding the disciples that “for to such belongs the kingdom of Heaven” (19:13-15). Scripture clearly indicates that Christ cared not only for adults but for all generations, including children and offers them as an example to imitate. The Apostle Paul’s letters to the church communities were to be read aloud to all and included words for the children. In his letter to the church in Colossae, Paul spoke directly to the children with a reminder “to obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord (Col. 3:20). However, Paul implored the faith communities to consider children as models for behavior in his letter to the Ephesians: “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children” (Eph. 5:1) and to “Walk as children of light for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true (Eph. 5:8-9). In Ephesians, Paul reminded children to “obey” but also exhorts fathers not to provoke their children, but to “bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephes. 6:1-4). Allen and Ross noted that Scripture “clarifies that religious community as described in the Bible assumed the idea that children, young people, adults, and the elders and leaders were actually present together often.”¹⁷ The establishment of the church as a multi-generational endeavor was created by God and provided a solid foundation for leadership today in developing services that allow generations to “commend His works to one another” as commanded in Psalm 145:4.

¹⁷ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 84.

The concept of sharing faith stories and the words of Scripture among generations is an important aspect of IGW. Ross Parsley wrote, “The responsibility of parents and grandparents is to make sure that their values, traditions, lessons, and stories are passed down to their kids and grandkids.”¹⁸ Age-segregation in the church, and more importantly in worship has fostered disarray in the family. Page and Gray offer the following synopsis of the current state of the church:

“Over the past 20 years, our churches have managed to raise a generation of young Christians with little connection to the body of Christ as a whole. Just as devastating, we patronized older generations with an environment of irrelevancy and self-centeredness by disconnecting them from modern movements of God. . . The situation is lose-lose: we are not reaching the world for Christ, and we are losing our own children.”¹⁹

Catering to generational preferences in worship is ultimately causing division in the church. Therefore, keeping families together to worship and learn about God is a strong advantage of IGW.

In addition to the biblical mandate for IGW, there is much to be said about other benefits of bringing multiple ages together. Allen and Ross explored numerous developmental theories and explained that “social interaction is crucial for cognitive, moral, psychosocial and faith development. When persons of any generation are perennially present only with those who inhabit their own developmental level, it is more difficult to progress to the next stage of development.”²⁰ Society depends on one generation learning from the next, avoiding mistakes of the past and exploring new paths to deeper connections with one another and with God. Ross and

¹⁸ Ross Parsley, *Messy Church: Multigenerational Mission for God's Family*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 79.

¹⁹ Frank S. Page and L. Lavon Gray, *Hungry for Hungry: Challenges and Solutions for Today's Church*, (Birmingham, AL: New Hope Publishers, 2014), 37-38.

²⁰ Allen and Ross, 96.

Allen concluded that “Intergenerational Christian settings are authentic, complex learning environments, made up of individuals at various stages in their faith journeys, teaching some and learning from others as they participate in their community of believers.”²¹ The smaller evangelical church will benefit from exploring the concept of intergenerational worship as they seek to not only survive the megachurch era, but flourish, emphasizing their strength as a tight-knit community of faith that supports and learns from one another as they deepen their relationships with God.

The purpose of IGW is to bring multiple generations together at one time to worship God in a corporate manner. For churches who are currently engaged in age-segregated services or attempting to appease generations with a specific style of worship, the movement to IGW will take time and careful consideration for effective change. This study will explore the pathway for the smaller evangelical church to examine the benefits and determine the best methods of transition. Insight will also be shared to assist churches who are currently moving through a worship war to establish common ground based on the biblical model of worship. IGW often includes a variety of musical styles, different forms of preaching and other relevant worship elements. Worship elements such as congregational or choral music, readings, visual arts and sanctuary enhancement are just a few of the many elements that can be fashioned in a creative way to provide uplifting and engaging worship for the smaller church seeking an IGW model.

Case Study Background: Fairview United Methodist Church

The Fairview United Methodist Church (FUMC) is a small evangelical church that averages 75-80 people per week at Sunday morning services. Historical documents indicated that

²¹ Allen and Ross, 118.

FUMC was organized by Reverend Alfred Brunson in 1822.²² The original buildings were located in a rural setting, but feeling the need to accommodate a growing population in the town center, ground was broken in 1960 to construct a new church and education building, and eventually a parsonage on the current property.²³ The church has been a part of various circuits within the local conference over the years and currently exists as a two-point charge within the Erie-Meadville District of the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

Historically, the Methodist Church generally rotates their pastors every 3-4 years, which was exemplified in the church history. One major exception was noted when Pastor Dennis Miller was assigned to the Fairview United Methodist Church in 1995 and remained until his retirement in 2013. Since his departure, the church has been led by Pastor John Gerber (2013-2017) and is currently under the leadership of Pastor Jack Tickle. As Pastor Miller was nearing the end of his tenure, the church began to suffer from decreases in attendance, especially by younger families. This was documented in the study as the church engaged in discussions and adjusted to new worship styles that enabled them to remain relevant in the Fairview community.

Problem Statement

While megachurches have dominated the creative worship model, smaller evangelical churches have struggled to capture the essence of creativity to provide effective IGW. The megachurch has several distinct advantages over their smaller counterparts which include: larger numbers of worshipers, more ministry volunteers, high quality, creative, and well-planned worship, and sermons that are often inspirational motivational and well-delivered.²⁴ These

²² Western Pennsylvania America United Methodist Church Organization Historical Database, p. 210, https://www.wpaumc.org/files/resource/historical_records/church+records/church+records.pdf, Accessed February 8, 2020.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Scott Thumma, PhD., "Exploring the Megachurch Phenomena."

elements are ultimately due to a higher revenue and appropriate disbursement of funds to the various ministries in the body of the church.

Smaller churches are currently facing declining numbers in worship due to aging population and the disinterest of the younger generation who feel disconnected from the traditional church environment. Chapman explained, “Although the churches have managed to gloss over the numbers, they are dramatic, especially as they relate to the younger generation where Christianity seems to have virtually collapsed...The decline of Christianity among the young has been confirmed in many polls.”²⁵ This trend is one that is not drawn along denominational lines, but is seen in churches of all types across the country. Dave Miller explained how the megachurch phenomenon has impacted smaller churches: “My church is squarely in the ranks of the average, struggling churches...We’ve gone up, we’ve gone down. We’ve added some, we’ve had some leave (many moved, more than a few funerals, and a few got upset); we’ve held our own...but we’ve just not seen the fruit we’d like to.”²⁶ The smaller church must find a way to encapsulate the positive facets of the megachurch while remaining true to their roots as a family church serving in the local community. Lack of response to this issue could threaten the existence of the small church, causing some to merge with larger churches and others to close their doors for good.²⁷ Reversing the trend of deterioration must be addressed if smaller evangelical churches are to survive.

²⁵ Mark Chapman, “The Common Good, Pluralism and the Small Church,” *Political Theology*, 16:1, (April 21, 2015): 61-77, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1462317X14Z.000000000130>.

²⁶ Dave Miller, “On Small, Struggling Churches: What Makes a Church Effective?” *SBC Voices*, December 30, 2014.

²⁷ Bob Smietana, “Flip this Church,” *Christianity Today*, Vol. 59, Issue 5, June 1, 2015, 46.

Understanding the relationship between the relevance of smaller church decline, resistance to change and the modern trend of consumerism would substantiate the need for the smaller church to return to IGW. While there is a body of research on the topic of IGW, there is gap in the literature in regard to smaller evangelical churches who face the unique challenges of achieving IGW with creative worship. Lori Danielson offered some insight in her dissertation, “An Assessment of the Influence of Church Growth Philosophy on Small Church Worship.” Danielson offered a comparative analysis of larger and smaller churches and how the various ministries within the church affect growth, concluding that “All churches have components that are determined by the specific needs of the church. These components are often interconnected and influence each other.”²⁸ However, she did not explore the unique challenges associated with the smaller church to establish a solid IGW model that emphasizes creative worship elements. In “The Family of God Together: Intergenerational Worship Gatherings” by Mark Erickson, the author examined the various generations of worshipers in detail, offering insight into the how each age group views worship. His focus of study explored the “tension and conflict we experience . . . due to miscommunication and misunderstanding,”²⁹ and highlighted the need for acceptance of styles within blended services. Erickson stated that his primary concern is the “intergenerationality [sic] in the worship gathering” and did not “directly relate to the structuring of the worship gathering itself.”³⁰ Mavryn Cooper also explored IGW in the local church, citing

²⁸ Lori J. Danielson, “An Assessment of the Influence of Church Growth Philosophy,” (PhD. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018), 210.

²⁹ Mark B. Erickson, “The Family of God Together: Intergenerational Worship Gatherings,” (DMin Western Seminary, 2014), 79.

³⁰ Ibid., 96.

Gil Rendle that “being intergenerational is clearly a leadership issue.”³¹ The author explored a pattern for IGW but does not provide details in the creative worship elements that are accessible and effective for the smaller evangelical church. This study offers insight into this specific application for churches who are considering the move to IGW.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative historical case study is to provide insight into the processes and resources necessary for the smaller church to move to one intergenerational worship service. Key to successful adaptation in this purpose is the general understanding that the size of the church body requires a spirit of cooperation and family. This is explained by Blanchard, Stroope and Tolbert, “In small organizations, strong shared consensus among members provides an accountability structure to regulate members. In addition, small size limits the organization’s capacity to accommodate differentiation among members.”³² While there may be obstacles, this study offers practical ways in which the smaller church can achieve IGW in their setting. This study includes literature relevant to IGW with specific focus on administrative and relationship concerns, as well as the incorporation of creative worship elements that will ease the movement into IGW.

³¹ Mavryn Lynn Cooper, “Intergenerational Worship in the Local Church,” (MDiv Emmanuel School of Religion, 2009), 37.

³² Blanchard, Stroope and Tolbert, “Bringing the Congregations Back. . .”

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because smaller evangelical churches across the country are experiencing fewer people in the pews each week.³³ As families move to new locations or the elderly population passes away, there are no new members taking their place. Danielson remarked, “The small church does not typically use the worship service as an evangelistic draw and entry point for unchurched people.”³⁴ As a result, the numbers of small churches are declining and not being repopulated. This study is critical for those churches with diminishing attendance, an older population that is resistant to change, and the desire to maintain their identity while moving toward more creative worship that will draw in more families to spur regrowth. If the small church is going to survive, they must give serious consideration to how they plan and present worship, providing an atmosphere in which the unchurched will feel welcomed and where people of all generations can find common ground in worshiping God.

For well-established churches, part of the problem is a “country-club mentality” where the long-time members are happy to gather and worship together and find great comfort in their predictable worship patterns, music and programs. The problem with this line of thinking is that without the pruning away of some outdated traditions and lack of fresh ideas (fertilizer), no new growth is being realized and eventually the church will cease to exist. This study will address the congregation that is resistant to change and explore paths for smoother transitions when making adaptations to current worship practices.

Smaller churches may become overwhelmed by the desire to remain true to their theological church doctrines and rituals while offering creative elements of worship. This study

³³ Dave Miller, “On Small, Struggling Churches.”

³⁴ Danielson, 226.

addresses those concerns and places an emphasis on the qualities and advantages that are available in the small church. The smaller church must focus on those qualities which make them unique and viable in the community. Wallace wrote, “The small-membership congregation worships relationally. One of the strengths of the small-membership congregation is the family atmosphere, where everyone is important, needed, and wanted.”³⁵ Just as in biological families, the strength of relationships are a key asset to the small church and must be a focus as the smaller church moves to an intergenerational worship model.

This study will have a profound impact on the smaller evangelical church who desires to remain independent, honor tradition, value creativity, experience growth and maintain the essence of family within their place of worship. As each of these factors are explored, the smaller church will find practical solutions to meet the needs of their specific churches as they seek a revitalized approach to intergenerational worship that brings the family of believers together to offer corporate praise.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study examine the current issues facing the smaller church who desire to move to one intergenerational gathering and draw attention to the need for more creative worship elements in IGW in the smaller church. The questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the worship ministry challenges facing smaller evangelical churches in the process of working toward one intergenerational service?

³⁵ Julia Wallace, “How to Worship in Small-Membership Congregations.” *Worship Matters*, Vol. 2, March 26, 2014.

Research Question 2: What are the creative worship elements that can be utilized in smaller evangelical churches as they work toward one intergenerational worship service?

The first research question addresses the overall obstacles that small churches will face as they move to IGW. It provides awareness to specific challenges that will help individual churches to make appropriate worship decisions for their body of believers, providing guidance as the work through the transition process.

The second research question will address the ways in which creative arts can impact the intergenerational model to help create unity in the church family as they worship God. Consideration will be given to traditional worship elements as well as more modern worship elements to create a balanced approach to worship.

This historical case study was used to provide insight and instruction to the smaller evangelical church to establish successful IGW worship that promotes health and growth over mere existence. Bill Henard wrote, “The church that wants to avoid the crises, problems, and difficulties of ministry and mission moves into a survival mode. Ministry becomes more about taking care of those in the status quo than meeting genuine needs.”³⁶ Bob Smietana explained that churches who refuse to adapt may face the necessity of a merger with a larger congregation (wedding) or face closing its doors (funeral).³⁷ This study is vital to the smaller church seeking to remain independent and even flourish in today’s society where the megachurch appears to dominate current church culture.

³⁶ Bill Henard, “A Surviving Church is a Dying Church” *Lifeway*, May 30, 2018.

³⁷ Smietana, 46.

Core Concepts

There is a huge variance in the size of churches today. Megachurches can see weekly attendance in the thousands, while smaller churches can worship with as few as twenty people per week.³⁸ For the purposes of this paper, the term *smaller church* will refer to those churches who experience an average weekly attendance of eighty people or less, including children.

As creative worship in smaller churches is explored, it will include a discussion of a variety of elements. In this paper, *worship elements* will refer to any activities that are included within the flow of worship (i.e., visual arts, music, prayer, etc.). These may include visual art, sanctuary enhancement, music, drama, dance, responsive readings, prayer and engaging teaching based on the Word of God (directed toward the entire worshipping body, but also during specified “child-friendly” messages that include object lessons). Worship elements will be interchanged in an established worship flow on a weekly basis so that services provide a fresh approach while maintaining a level of routine.

The goal is for the smaller church to work toward the biblical model of intergenerational worship which is evidenced in both the Old and New Testament mandates. Just as Scripture calls entire families together to learn and to worship, today’s church must do the same. This worship model is exemplified in the church through the return to intergenerational worship: a bringing together of all generations in one time and space to offer corporate praise to God. Ross Parsley compared this type of worship to the family table:

“If we’re going to gather everyone together for dinner, then we’ve got to allow our kids to join in with us in conversations and questions...It is the act of leaning toward them instead of away from them. That might mean more music that reflects their culture rather than yours. It might mean being willing to surrender to

³⁸ Thumma, “Exploring the Megachurch Phenomenon.”

new cultural norms in our church services. No doubt, we must pass our values on to them, but we also need to make sure that they love dinnertime instead of dread it.”³⁹

The movement of the smaller church to an intergenerational model will be beneficial to all members of the family.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in this study:

Creative Worship Elements: music, theology, performance, history, leadership, Scripture, technology, architecture, art and drama; quality content and structure⁴⁰

Intergenerational Worship: whole generations coming together regularly to worship, edifying one another, studying the Word, celebrating and remembering important feasts, engaging in times of fellowship⁴¹

Megachurch: churches who average approximately 1000 worshipers or more on a given Sunday, sometimes significantly more with multi-site campuses⁴²

Smaller Church: congregations that have approximately 15-75 worshipers⁴³

³⁹ Parsley, 76.

⁴⁰ Greg Scheer, *The Art of Worship: A Musician's Guide to Leading Modern Worship*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 87-88.

⁴¹ Allen and Ross, 82.

⁴² Smietana, “Flip This Church,” 47.

⁴³ Lisa Stracks, “Where Twenty or Thirty are Gathered: Creative Worship Ideas for Smaller Congregations,” *Reformed Worship*, 71 (2019).

Worship Wars: modern-day term for the historical conflict over proper worship, mainly emphasizing dissenting views on the proper style or presentation of music in the church⁴⁴

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: The worship ministry challenges facing smaller evangelical churches as they work toward one intergenerational service include resistance to change, consumerism and implementation of a balanced worship model with limited human and financial resources.

Hypothesis 2: The creative worship elements that can be used in smaller evangelical churches as they work toward intergenerational worship include: visual and performance arts, music (congregational singing, bell and choral music), and engaging teaching.

In response to the first hypothesis statement, the first obstacle facing the smaller church in moving to one intergenerational service is the resistance to change. The long-standing traditions of the matriarchs and patriarchs of the church will not easily be replaced. Concern over the loss of these traditions will weigh heavy on the hearts and minds of the older generations in the church. Smaller churches that have been in existence for an extended period of time can become set in their ways, making change difficult. It is not uncommon to hear the phrase “but we have always done it this way” as new ideas are discussed. Dougherty, Marti and Martinez offer words of insight to the stagnant church: “As a congregation’s history stretches, patterns get established that can make a congregation unwilling or unable to adapt to changing circumstances. It is widely recognized that new congregations are more prone to grow than are older congregations.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Michael J. Wood, “Ancient Worship Wars: An Investigation of Conflict in Church Music History,” *Musical Offerings*, Vol. 5 (2), 2014. Accessed 2/20/2020.
<https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/musicalofferings/vol5/iss2/3/>.

Coupled with the resistance to change is the current trend toward consumerism in the church. Chan warned, “It’s no secret that most people who attend church services come as consumers rather than servants. We see the foolishness in this, but it feels as if we have resigned ourselves to it.”⁴⁶ Secular culture in the 21st century focuses on self-fulfillment, personal aspirations and prosperity, so it is not unusual to find modern-worship goers moving from church to church trying to find a service that meets all of their needs and desires. However, this is not a God-honoring approach to worship. Sunday gatherings must not be about the efforts to please those in the congregation, but instead, must focus on the people’s surrendered worship of the Triune God. Page and Gray offer insight on this topic:

“Church leaders must develop a strategy for intentionally discipling congregations in their journey to understanding the value of a unified worship voice. . . It is when we are together, unified in the worship of our Lord, that we will find the body of Christ is stronger and most effective.”⁴⁷

The ultimate goal of flushing out consumerism is to worship as prescribed in Scripture, in Spirit and truth (John 4:24, paraphrase).

A final obstacle in the move to one intergenerational service is implementing a balanced approach in the family service. Page and Gray explained, “By planning services with (1) balance, (2), authenticity, and (3) excellence, churches can expand their worship repertoire to levels that age-segregated worship would never allow.”⁴⁸ Efforts to include a variety of worship elements will be at the forefront in the shift, but there is also a very real concern over the lack of human

⁴⁵ Kevin D. Dougherty, Gerardo Marti, and Brandon C. Martinez, “Congregational Diversity and Attendance in a Mainline Protestant Denomination,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 54, 4 (2015): 679, accessed July 29, 2019, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jssr.12229>.

⁴⁶ Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church*, (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2018), 86.

⁴⁷ Page and Gray, 53-54.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

and financial resources available. Smaller churches often have lower budgets for worship expenses but moving to IGW may discourage some people from wanting to participate as well. Brennan Fortier of Hillsong Worship wrote, “Looking to larger teams as an example is a great way to set goals and stretch, but there are times when smaller churches simply don’t have the same resources, so the final outcome will look a bit different. It’s in these times that you must consider what’s in your hand at *that* moment.”⁴⁹ The worship ministry of the smaller church must be pro-active in creative use of funds, as well as personal recruitment for choirs, praise band, drama teams and other important aspects of the new intergenerational service.

In consideration of hypothesis statement 2, incorporating creative worship elements into the new intergenerational church model will likely open the opportunity for new volunteers to participate and for fresh expressions of worship to be considered. The area of visual and performance arts creates new paths to worship that can include digital and printed artwork, drama, dance, sanctuary enhancement and banner displays. An important aspect of incorporating these elements will require exploring methods that can be accomplished on small budgets and with limited volunteers until the new ministry inspires passionate involvement by more people.

Another worship element that will likely play a significant role in the intergenerational worship model is congregational and choral singing. Detterman wrote, “Worship teams are fine. They have an important place in 21st-century worship leadership. Professional choral ensembles are OK for what they are – if you must. But there is nothing else like a volunteer choir.”⁵⁰ A combination of hymn tunes (including modern hymn arrangements) and contemporary music will provide the weekly offering of praise for the congregation. In addition, bell choir pieces,

⁴⁹ Brennan Fortier, “How to Do More with Less – 5 Big Ideas for Smaller Congregations,” *Hillsong Worship*, September 14, 2015.

⁵⁰ Paul E. Detterman, “A Case for the Church Choir,” *Reformed Worship*, January 17, 2019.

choral anthems and worship choir selections can be added at scheduled times to enhance the worship and the honor that is ascribed to God through the use of musical gifts bestowed by Him on the worshipping body. All music must be used, not as performance, but as a means of honoring God, whether it is corporate praise, meditative solo or choral anthem.

A final element of creative worship that may assist in facilitating a successful intergenerational model is engaging teaching. The use of the Revised Common Lectionary, Christian Calendar- based messages, topical themes and book studies will all be explored as important tools for the pastor and worship leader in an effort to make connections and draw people into the biblical teachings of the faith. In addition, a weekly moment for the children will provide object lessons that are geared toward assisting the children, and the adults, to comprehend the sermon theme for that week.

Research Methods

The research method utilized in this study is a qualitative historical case study. A case study is defined by Gilham as a study in which one investigates a “unit of human activity embedded in the real world which can only be studied or understood in context.”⁵¹ For the purpose of this study, the transition in worship at the Fairview United Methodist Church was explored both in real time observations, as well as through qualitative and historical methods. According to Creswell, a qualitative research design was recommended for this study because it reviews the needs of a potential audience, involves reflexivity and describes a holistic account of the problem being studied.⁵² Further, the approach to this study is historical as explained by Carr,

⁵¹ Bill Gilham, *Case Study Research Methods*, (London: Continuum, 200), 1.

⁵² John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, (Singapore, Washington, D.C.: Sage Publications, 2014), 185-86.

“Historical research is a continuing dialogue, an endless exploration between generations of historians, between different interpretations of the significance of historical events, and between established opinions and challenges arising from new discoveries about the past.”⁵³ In this study, the two approaches will be combined, providing a balanced viewpoint of worship that has evolved over time with current resolutions to the difficulties that smaller churches face in modern times.

Smaller churches have a vital interest in the ongoing discussion regarding worship style and the need to be culturally relevant in order to survive, while at the same time, standing firm in the traditional values, historical connections to the early church and the specific demographics that define their individual harvest field. This study addressed each of these concerns, providing insight from current literature that describes alarming trends toward declining worship attendance in the smaller church. With the doors of smaller churches closing every day, there is a need to examine the obstacles that must be overcome so that the smaller church can continue to play an active role in outreach and kingdom growth in their communities.

Noted earlier, the resistance to change, coupled with the fear of losing or forgetting the past history of the church is an issue, especially in the smaller church. While this phenomenon affects smaller churches in the country, city and suburbs, McLellan and Barrett speak about how church tradition and the need to hold on to rituals and meaningful memorabilia have an impact on the rural church. They wrote,

“Church buildings, spaces, and the furnishings within provide specific material frameworks that rural people are often deeply attached to, but this attachment may not be shared by newcomers resettling in the area. Most newcomers do not have family-based historical linkages of one’s grandparents carving and installing pews, making cushions, or commissioning stained glass windows, nor do they

⁵³ Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York, NY: Random House Inc., 1961), 35.

have decades of participation in large Sunday school activities and other community events held through the church.”⁵⁴

If the smaller church is to remain viable, the current members must be flexible and willing to let some things go as they seek to draw in newcomers.

As the smaller church moves toward attracting new families, one of the other key issues encountered in creative worship will be consecutively addressed, the increase of donations to help in funding the necessary items for creative worship, as well as other significant programs of the church. Addressing the obstacles that stand in the way are the key to moving toward an acceptable solution for all and will result in establishing a more cohesive church family which is focused on IGW. Moving towards this model will mean finding low-cost ways to provide creative worship elements that will attract and involve new people.

With megachurches looming in most cities, the smaller church must draw on its positive attribute of intimacy. Megachurches seem to have the upper hand in formulating worship, but they have experienced issues in connectivity that are causing larger church leaders to reconsider how they do ministry. Smietana quoted Scott Chapman in addressing this concern:

“In most megachurches the average church member has no trained pastoral presence in his or her life...few members get hands-on spiritual care or direction from a pastor. Breaking a big church into smaller worship spaces makes it easier for people to personally connect with the pastor, in what he calls ‘mid-sized community’ – groups of 30 or 40 people, rather than just in a crowd.”⁵⁵

While the megachurch has several advantages over the smaller church, it is obvious that being “small” can also be a positive factor. If the smaller church wants to avoid closing or merging, and simply becoming part of a multi-site megachurch, they must capitalize on their intimacy. A

⁵⁴ Janet McLellan and Joel R. Barrett, “Tensions in Ontario Rural Churches Among Long-term Members, Newcomers and Local Residents,” *Journal of Rural Studies* 46 (2016), 123, accessed August 10, 2019, <https://www.infona.pl/resource/bwmeta1.element.elsevier-ca56f4f9-b1ac-38cd-9ace-6b6e673354e0>.

⁵⁵ Smietana, “Flip This Church,” 48.

longing for authentic worship in a place where “everybody knows my name” and where there are opportunities for more people to participate in the weekly offering of worship provide an opening for the smaller church to benefit from their smallness. Moving to IGW is likely the solution for smaller churches longing to grow, while retaining the positive characteristics that define them as a smaller church in the local community.

Research Plan

The research plan for this qualitative historical case study will begin with an exploration of the biblical model of worship. There are multiple references to IGW within the text of the Old Testament, each of which will be examined in this study. In addition, historical documents of the early church will be researched to establish precedence for IGW in today’s church. These two authoritative sources will provide the foundation for the research and offer substantive response to the research questions. Finally, source interviews of pastors and members will offer eye-witness accounts to the transitional process to IGW.

The historical and current literature on intergenerational and creative worship practices will also be reviewed. With significant research into the current trends toward IGW, the literature will also provide foundational development for the smaller church seeking to implement IGW. The study will explore the essence of purposeful IGW in practice and the necessity for interaction between generations, as well as ideas on elements of worship that can be adapted to meet the needs of the smaller church.

This historical case study will include an overview of vital church documents which explores the movement through multiple worship trends from 2008-present at the Fairview United Methodist Church. An evaluation of worship outlines and an examination of bulletins of traditional, contemporary and blended gatherings that were utilized will be shared as evidence.

These documents, along with other vital tools such as attendance records, meeting minutes and eye-witness accounts and observation will provide details into the transition that occurred during the stated timeframe. The data gathered in this case study can be utilized as a guide to formulate services for smaller evangelical churches that are considering or are in the process of transitioning to IGW. More details about the methods of this study can be found in Chapter 3 of this study.

Summary

The movement toward IGW offers a credible shift for family-based, smaller churches that can survive in the current culture. Chan reminded, “At the end of the day, it’s about what we produce. We can get so focused on getting people through our doors that we don’t think about what goes out. The church’s purpose is not just to exist. It’s to produce.”⁵⁶ This study offers effective resources that will help the smaller church engage in creative worship that will draw people in and prepare their hearts and minds for lifestyle worship as they leave, resulting in believers who serve God outside the walls of the church.

⁵⁶ Chan, 93.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter examines current literature that explores worship in the megachurch, as well as the smaller evangelical church in the United States today. Section one provides insight into the rise of the megachurch and the worship practices of this larger church model. In section two, the focus will be on the issues with age-segregated worship and the call to return to IGW. Section three reviews literature on the benefits and the concerns facing smaller evangelical churches as they move to IGW. The final section will introduce existing academic papers and other sources that discuss the use of worship elements for effective IGW in smaller and larger churches.

Rise of the Megachurch and Its Worship Practices

Much has been written about the explosion of the megachurch in the past several decades. Several studies have recently been published that focus on the ecological implications of megachurches in local communities. Wollschleger and Porter suggested that megachurches have a profound impact on smaller churches. They compared the effect to that of Walmart moving into a neighborhood and trying to entice customers away from local small businesses, although they admit there are opposing views on this topic that are still being debated.⁵⁷ According to the results of their study, megachurches “increase the level of competition . . . and force other churches to work harder by defining themselves against the local giant.”⁵⁸ Warf and Winsberg also provided a thorough examination of the megachurch and its growth patterns, with

⁵⁷ Jason Wollschleger and Jeremy R. Porter, "A 'WalMartization' of Religion? the Ecological Impact of Megachurches on the Local and Extra-Local Religious Economy," *Review of Religious Research* 53, no. 3 (12, 2011): 295, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/1962749898?accountid=12085>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

specific details regarding the geographical locations in which most megachurches are birthed. The authors cited that “An increasingly important part of contemporary American religions is the megachurch, stereotypically held to be a suburban Protestant church, ethologically evangelical in orientation, whose attendees may be 10, 20 or even 100 times more numerous than traditional churches.”⁵⁹ The authors further stated that most megachurches are built in high-volume suburban areas, noting that “suburban locations are often home to substantial numbers of middle class families with children.”⁶⁰ In addition, the study offered insight into four specific metropolitan regions of the United States that are home to large numbers of megachurches compared to rural areas and smaller cities. Their findings indicated that “these religious institutions have flourished in large part because they use secular tools . . . such institutions attract middle class members who value their church experiences as much for their social and recreational dimensions as the religious ones.”⁶¹ This study focused mainly on the reasons for growth, while only alluding to the use of non-traditional influences in worship experiences.

Von der Ruhr and Daniels concurred that megachurches attract large volumes of people “in part by employing secular-based group activities to subsidize religious participation that then translate into an increase in the attendees [sic] religious investment.”⁶² Their research suggested that megachurches place an emphasis on attracting those who are dissatisfied with the traditional church. They concluded that in order for larger churches to “successfully draw in religious

⁵⁹ Warf and Winsberg, 34.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 41.

⁶¹ Ibid., 47-48.

⁶² Marc Von der Ruhr and Joseph P. Daniels, “Subsidizing Religious Participation Through Groups: A Model of the ‘Megachurch’ Strategy for Growth,” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 53, No. 4, January 2012, 471, Accessed January 5, 2020.

refugees, megachurches deliberately present themselves as distinct from traditional churches, signaling their new approach to religious life.”⁶³ According to Von der Ruhr and Daniels, megachurches achieve this goal through secularization: a more contemporary look, a lack of crosses and symbols typically seen in traditional churches, no pressure to become members and by offering a variety of activities, “many of which are anchored in secular activities in an effort to help assimilate new members and deepen their affiliation with the church.”⁶⁴ The focus in this study offered insight into the reasons for growth and addresses philosophical ideals, but did not address the weekly worship practices within the megachurch.

Snow, Bany, Peria, and Stobaugh asserted that “while members’ networks provide a structural conduit for growth, it is not always clear what generates and maintains the enthusiasm that prompts members to reach out to others.”⁶⁵ According to the study, the authors concluded that “it is the work the church does once a person attends a service or meeting that explains their engagement.”⁶⁶ The authors studied five different megachurches within the southern California region to determine their ability to attract and retain high numbers of participants. The results indicated that “the work of conversion, regeneration, amplification, and maintenance is done primarily in two venues: large congregational gatherings such as church services, and small groups,”⁶⁷ and further noted that “sermons often center on the problems of everyday life and

⁶³ Von der Ruhr and Daniels, 477.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ David A. Snow, James A. Bany, Michelle Peria and James E. Stobaugh, “A Team Field Study of the Appeal of Megachurches: Identifying, Framing, and Solving Personal Issues.” *Ethnography 11*, no. 1 March 2010, 167, doi:10.1177/1466138109347006.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 174.

explain how biblical teachings offer solutions to them.”⁶⁸ Focusing on “lifestyle topics”⁶⁹ in their sermons such as healthy living, financial concerns, relationship issues, and others provides a biblical application to many secular problems being faced by individuals and communities that are then discussed in more detail in small groups. The authors explained that “The small groups were more focused and intense than the large gatherings, and the range of problems addressed by specific small groups was extensive.”⁷⁰ Overall, the writers concurred that whether it is through the large group worship gatherings, or small group offerings, “megachurches have become major players in the current culture of self-help by facilitating and recognition of problems, naming and amplifying them, and providing church-based solutions.”⁷¹

The rise of the megachurch is unmistakable and the draw reaches beyond the social and recreational constructs to the actual worship experience. Wellman, Corcoran and Stockly conducted extensive research on the appeal of the megachurch and offered a vast description of the aura that is experienced in times of worship in great detail. They addressed the vibrancy that is felt throughout the worship space, with people of all walks of life coming together to sing, dance and offer praise, using the term “collective effervescence” to illustrate the “drug-like” effect that megachurch worship has on those who attend services.⁷² According to the study, the concert-style environment prepares the hearts and minds of those in attendance to be open to hearing the message provided by the pastor, always on relevant topics that “just make sense.”⁷³

⁶⁸ Snow, Bany, Peria and Stobaugh, 175.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 184.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Wellman, Corcoran and Stockly- Meyerdirk, “God Is Like a Drug...,” 660.

⁷³ Ibid., 661.

In another text, the same authors provided the following general description of a typical gathering:

“Usually, in megachurches, there are three to five songs at the beginning of the service to get congregants in a worshipful mood and to initiate mutual entrainment. A band or choir leads these songs from the stage, which directs and focuses the attendees’ devotion. The stimulation of emotion comes by way of the lyrics of songs that are emotionally charged, often setting up a need (sinfulness) and presenting a solution (Jesus’s blood). The music is loud and emotive, and it is customary (and sometimes prompted by the worship leaders) for people to raise their hands, close their eyes, and even rock back and forth to the music, representing a bodily commitment to emotional participation and the kind of entrainment that we saw repeatedly.”⁷⁴

This description is echoed by author James Twitchell who is an English professor at the University of Florida. He has authored multiple books on literature, culture, marketing and advertising. Twitchell shared his description of the megachurch experience, highlighting the vast difference from traditional worship settings:

“Of all the senses, music plays to the emotions with the least interference. It is not tied to emotional life; it is emotional life. . . . The sound of the megachurch is, however, not the music of the pipe organ, the hymnal, and the robed choir. It is the sound of the FM radio, contemporary, changeable, tuneful, and, best of all, simple, sing-alongable. And there is a lot of it. Almost half of a typical service is music.”⁷⁵

This trend toward the emotional high of worship may enthrall those who assemble in the megachurch week to week, but it is also setting a dangerous precedent in creating an environment that speaks more about the needs and desires of the worshiper than it does in

⁷⁴ James K., Wellman, Katie E. Corcoran, and Kate J. Stockly, "Desire for Wow, or Hacking the Happy," In *High on God: How Megachurches Won the Heart of America*, by Wellman, James, Katie Corcoran, and Kate Stockly, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2019) 3, doi: 10.1093/oso/9780199827718.003.0009.

⁷⁵ James B. Twitchell, *Branded Nation: The Marketing of Megachurch, College Inc., and Museumworld* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 85.

praising God. Sanders raised concerns that the “corporate megachurch is a kind of religious non-place”⁷⁶ that is relatively devoid of any markers of traditional sacred spaces. He further stated that “Non-place churches tend to be accessible, consumer-centric, Christian churches that de-emphasize fire and brimstone theology in favor of a happy go lucky ‘prosperity gospel’ that addresses felt needs. In other words, they appeal to a desire for goods and services that are packaged to promote optimism and good fortune.”⁷⁷ According to his study, Sanders asserted that the corporate megachurch is focused on producing “consumables” that have “displaced the divine.”⁷⁸ The author emphasized that in essence, the “non-place” churches have turned religion into something that is “consumed” rather than something that is offered to God.⁷⁹ Sanders’ research concluded that the consumeristic approach to worship has changed the landscape and purpose of worship noting that “The corporate megachurch is responsible for the manufacture of accessible, uncomplicated religious experiences – particularly ones that correspond to the stimulation of consumer desires in open-ended and continuous flows.”⁸⁰

Age-segregation Issues and Call to Intergenerational Worship

While the megachurch draws thousands to worship on any given Sunday, there are definitive problems that have arisen from these consumer-driven model of worship. Allen and Ross warned that “excessive individualism of secular Western culture is fundamentally

⁷⁶ George Sanders, “Religious Non-Places: Corporate Megachurches and Their Contributions to Consumer Capitalism,” *Critical Sociology* 42, no. 1 (January 2016): 72, doi:10.1177/0896920514531605.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

incompatible with the life of community as depicted in Scripture.”⁸¹ The church has drifted away from the model of Psalm 145:4 which called each generation to “commend your works to another” and in Psalm 78 in which the children of Israel are called upon to pass down what they have learned from their fathers and “not hide them from their children” (Psalm 78:4). Allen and Ross provide a masterful statement in regard to this biblical call to IGW:

“Whole generations are to pass to the next generations the truths of Yahweh, so that they will not forget who he is and what he has done for those he loves. In order for this progression to be possible, the generations must *be together, not just occasionally or sporadically, but often*—for important events, for rejoicing, for critical moments, for prayer, for solemn occasions, for feasts and celebrations, and for reading the Word, as well as for ordinary happenings.”⁸²

Burns-Marko infused the writings of Paul into her study of intergenerational ministry, noting the churches current trends toward “siloining,” which she described as a metaphor for what happens when groups insulate themselves with others of similar makeup.⁸³ The author claimed that this process of siloining has contributed to the steady decline in church attendance and stated that “the answer lies in the building of true community through the tearing down of intergenerational siloining.”⁸⁴ Burns-Marko further suggested that “the first step in moving toward a more intergenerational method of ministry is mindset,”⁸⁵ that it must be based on building relationships and not programs, and that leadership has the ultimate responsibility for

⁸¹ Allen and Ross, 43.

⁸² Allen and Ross, 82.

⁸³ Burns-Marko, Robyn, "Intergenerational Ministry: Bringing the Generations Back Together." Order No. 10638263, Azusa Pacific University, 2017, 3, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/2008669933?accountid=12085>.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 18.

communicating the proper mindset.⁸⁶ The author offered a brief history of the changes in the Evangelical Friends Church and explained how a specific church within the community was able to revive the body of believers through intergenerational ministries, but did not focus on creative elements that are enacted in worship settings. In his book, *Messy Church*, Parsley echoed the concern over age-segregation, noting that the separation of children and young people during worship is causing a fracture in the church, resulting in a broken family of believers.

Highlighting the current trend toward consumeristic worship, Parsley warned:

“Instead of offering a family of diverse people and interests, we offer homogenous services produced to meet our individual demands. Instead of teaching self-sacrifice and love, we make church about our expediency, ease, and comfort. Suddenly, we’ll be surrounded by our own kind—old and grumpy—with no one to share our experience, wisdom, and resources with. We just spend it all on ourselves, not realizing that we’re starting to become obsolete.”⁸⁷

The current literature provides ample warning of where the church is headed should it remain in the pattern of age-segregation.

The age-segmented paradigm of youth ministry began post World War II with “focus on specialized discipleship and teaching for teenagers.”⁸⁸ Marshall Shelley and Brandon O’Brien interviewed Kara Powell, Executive Director of the Fuller Youth Institute at Fuller Theological Seminary, to gain insight into the original purposes for age-segregation and how it has affected young people today. Powell stated that there were three goals in adding age-segregated classes and youth groups: teens were seeking to discover their identities, they needed to learn to make

⁸⁶ Ibid., 19-20.

⁸⁷ Parsley, 130-31.

⁸⁸ Shelley Marshall, and Brandon O'Brien. "Is the Era of Age Segregation Over?" *Leadership Journal*, Summer 2009, p. 44. *Gale General OneFile*, https://link-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/apps/doc/A205506594/ITOF?u=vic_liberty&sid=ITOF&xid=4dec9679. Accessed 14 Jan. 2020.

decisions autonomously and they needed to understand their specific purpose in the world.⁸⁹ This attempt to engage young people in the church was meant to be a positive influence and create safe spaces for teens to talk about their issues. Powell noted that while the decision to move toward age-segregated opportunities came with good intentions, it ultimately caused a falling away of high school and college-aged youth from the church. Powell compared the segregation as the “adult table” and the “children’s table” that occurred at large family dinners.⁹⁰ She explained that many young people skipped worship and only attended youth group noting that “as a result, graduates are telling us that they don’t know how to find a church. After years at the kids’ table, they know what youth group is, but they don’t know what church is.”⁹¹ Lifeway research studied this phenomenon and concurred that “over two-thirds of 18-22-year-olds leave the church. In the short, four-year transitional window of teen to adult, the church loses the majority of its students.”⁹²

Age-segregation is a serious issue in the church, but according to Powell, IGW can provide the answers for today’s congregations. When Shelley and Obrien probed Powell for insight into maintaining youth involvement in the church after graduation, Powell shared the results of her research, noting the importance of “getting kids actively involved in the life of the church before they graduate.”⁹³ She further explained that “There is a strong link between kids

⁸⁹ Marshall and Obrien, 44.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁹¹ Ibid., 45.

⁹² Sam Rainer, “Four Keys to Keeping Young Adults in Church,” Lifeway.com January 1, 2014, Accessed January 14, 2020, <https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/four-keys-to-keeping-young-adults>.

⁹³ Marshall and Obrien, 45.

staying in church after they graduate and their involvement in intergenerational relationships and worship.”⁹⁴ David Kinneman of Barna research concurred:

“Cultivating intergenerational relationships is one of the most important ways in which effective faith communities are developing flourishing faith in both young and old. In many churches, this means changing the metaphor from simply passing the baton to the next generation to a more functional, biblical picture of a body – that is, the entire community of faith, across the entire lifespan, working together to fulfill God’s purposes.”⁹⁵

Other studies have indicated that youth are not the only ones leaving the church. Barna research reported that in the 10-year period from 1991 to 2011, “Attendance at a church service in any given week has declined among self-identified Christians by nine percentage points.”⁹⁶ The desire to maintain family unity and the call for a return to the biblical worship model are driving the movement toward IGW in today’s churches. In his text, *Letters to the Church*, pastor, theologian, and author Francis Chan visited Paul’s teaching on the importance of each part of the church using its gifts: “A church grows to maturity only when each part is ‘working.’ If we give up on the goal of having all members exercise their spiritual gifts, we are destined for perpetual immaturity.”⁹⁷ As the church worships and the Word of God is declared, one of the natural outcomes is the maturity of its people. Keeley explained four stages of faith development as the key role of the church and offered insight into inviting children of all ages into the sanctuary every Sunday, citing, “it is the role of the church to accept people at whichever stage they find

⁹⁴ Marshall and O'Brien, 45.

⁹⁵ Barna Group, “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church,” September 27, 2011, accessed January 14, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church/>.

⁹⁶ Barna Group, “Barna Study of Religious Change Since 1991 Shows Significant Changes by Faith Group,” Aug. 4, 2011, accessed January 14, 2020, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faithspirituality/514-barna-study-of-religious-change-since-1991-shows-significant-changes-by-faithgroup#.VOY-By6l1XM>.

⁹⁷ Chan, 92.

themselves and to minister to them. . . Living and serving together in an intergenerational setting make up an important component of the faith development of all.”⁹⁸ Cooper’s study on IGW in the local church also emphasized the need to involve multiple generations in various ministries of the church. Cooper contended that “when churches begin to value individual members, there will begin to be opportunities for intergenerational relationships. Rather than church attendance just seen as voluntary, it will begin to be seen as necessary.”⁹⁹

Parsley identified this concept of living and serving together as a part of the family table of worship: “God designed us to live in a community of selfless serving, sharing, and correction. The dinner table is one of the best analogies we can use to understand how the family of God might relate to one another.”¹⁰⁰ In his study on the family of God worshiping together, Erickson also addressed the concept of the family table and offered insights into the importance of formulating IGW that helps to increase spiritual formation and discipleship within the church community. His findings indicated specific benefits that result from IGW, however he also noted that “even in churches where there is only one service, there is often little mixing of generations and people tend to be grouped by age.”¹⁰¹ His study primarily looked at the importance of purposeful interaction between generations. While he offered some suggestions for worship gatherings, his ultimate focus was to create an overall culture in the church that will serve as a springboard for IGW at weekly gatherings.

⁹⁸ Howard Vanderwell, ed. *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 51.

⁹⁹ Cooper, 35-36.

¹⁰⁰ Parsley, 63.

¹⁰¹ Erickson, 57.

Just as families may experience difficulties at times, the church must be prepared for the trials that may come in the move to IGW. Rendle wrote that when multiple generations come together, there will undoubtedly be differences of opinion. He explained that “the lessons each generation has learned, the values it has adopted and its way of seeing serve as a lens or a filter through which the world is experienced and understood.”¹⁰² Rendle further cited that those who are older might believe that this is a result of maturity and that once people mature in their faith they will come to accept the traditional standards of worship and actions that long-time Christians believe to be correct. Rendle warned that in IGW, believers must be prepared to remove their “generational filters” and stop looking for the “compromises that will be the most palatable or least offensive to the participants.”¹⁰³ According to Rendle, the ultimate goal in IGW is to “look at worship and other congregational practices from the perspective of purpose rather than the preference. Rather than asking how most people like a particular practice, leaders must learn to explore how choosing a practice will most faithfully fulfill the purpose of the congregation.”¹⁰⁴ Davis offered a significant look at the move toward IGW, with a special focus on established churches and finding common ground on which to build. He noted that “a key in instituting age-inclusive worship is to find common denominators—things that connect and relate to people of different ages.”¹⁰⁵ Davis employed both a qualitative and quantitative survey with members in his church congregation as a response to recent changes in the worship structure within the church. While his data was limited to a larger church of 500, the method of

¹⁰² Vanderwell, 58.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 59.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹⁰⁵ William H. Davis, “Creating a Climate for Intergenerational Worship at Thomasville Road Baptist Church Tallahassee, Florida” Doctor of Worship Studies, The Robert E. Webber Institute for Worship Studies, April 2007, 73.

focus on shared goals and church vision offer keen insight into churches desiring to move into effective IGW.

Churches who respond to the call for IGW must be mindful of best practices to achieve that goal within their own faith communities. Change is often difficult and making sweeping adaptations in worship will undoubtedly cause anxiety and concern among the members of the church. The top priority before making any changes must always be prayer. Church leader and author, J. Oswald Sanders cited that “The spiritual leader should outpace the rest of the church, above all, in prayer.”¹⁰⁶ The shepherd assigned to each church must prayerfully consider where God is calling them and trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead.

Once the call to change has been identified, pastors must be careful to tread carefully so as not to leave the current body of worshipers in the dark about the vision of IGW. In the book *Intergenerate*, Cory Seibel offered a five-stage process and explained key steps necessary to successful transition to IGW: awareness, understanding, evaluation, experimentation, and commitment.¹⁰⁷ According to Seibel, a clear sense of reasoning must be explained to the congregation, citing, “the crucial first step in the change process is to foster awareness of the intergenerational issues that the church faces.”¹⁰⁸ Organizing representation from each of the age groups represented in the church would aid in phase of transition. In phase two, Seibel described the importance of allowing the new vision to resonate for a while before making changes, stating that “in this stage it is crucial for leaders to nurture a culture of intergenerational learning.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2007), 99.

¹⁰⁷ Holly Catherton Allen, ed., *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*, (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018), 91-95.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 91.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 92.

When given an opportunity to discuss the potential transition, Seibel noted that members will be more receptive to the transition. Moving into the third stage, Seibel explained that evaluation was a vital step in the process, giving people time to consider solutions and examine existing church programs and how they will be affected by the change to come.¹¹⁰ As the church moves into stage four, Seibel stated that participants would now “begin to put new insights into action by initiating new practices.”¹¹¹ Finally, in the fifth and final stage of commitment, Seibel noted that worshipers begin to accept change, as “habits become engrained in the life of the congregation.”¹¹² The information shared by Seibel in this five-stage process stressed the importance of taking time at each phase, allowing the body to come gain insight about the need and purpose of transition, rather than making authoritative decisions without proper communication. Stollings agreed with Seibel, explaining that churches must strive to honor each generation and what they bring to worship: “We need the stability and wisdom of those who have gone before us to teach us what they have learned and to affirm that a hope-filled future awaits.”¹¹³ Wallace also offered advice in this area, reminding the church to make “small but significant steps.”¹¹⁴ Wallace further added that “Worship that builds intentionally on the intimacy and involvement of people helps provide vital and living experiences, as well as shaping the faith community.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Allen, *InterGenerate*, 93.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 95.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹¹⁴ Wallace, “How to Worship in Small-Membership Congregations.”

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Concerns and Benefits of the Smaller Evangelical Church

Smaller churches face a number of unique challenges in regard to sustaining effective ministries. One of the most discussed topics of concern in smaller churches is the need for change in order to remain relevant. In a study on declining churches McMullin noted that pastors who had effective ministries identified three major concerns: “congregations fail to be attractional, congregations are not missional, and congregations have marginalized the arts.”¹¹⁶ McMullin’s research suggested that “the church must compete for people’s time and interest and they do that by being relevant and by communicating clearly to the surrounding society.”¹¹⁷ McMullin’s study indicated that many church members and their pastors blame the secularization of society and external conflicting events such as work and sporting events for declining attendance, however he remarked that this does not explain the success of other churches to maintain or grow their membership.¹¹⁸ One of the pastors interviewed by McMullin offered the following perspective:

“The congregations that compete successfully in the religious marketplace do not seek to make their services ‘exciting’ and ‘fun’ so much as they seek to be relevant and religiously meaningful for congregants and potential congregants by the appropriate and effective use of the arts in worship. That is quite different. It is not just that old hymns accompanied by a pipe organ are not exciting; it is that the church’s traditional use of the arts is often perceived to be boring and antiquated by people in contemporary society. For that matter, congregations who are thoughtlessly using contemporary songs accompanied by rock bands may be equally irrelevant and unattractive. It is more than a matter of musical style: it is about the meaningful use of the arts in worship.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Steve McMullin, "The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches." *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 1 (2013): 50, Accessed January 27, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/41940815.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 49.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 57.

Change is needed in the smaller church in order to survive, however, that is often the most difficult thing for established churches to do. Citing the concerns raised by the failing churches in McMullin's study, he noted that while churches blamed "external conflicts" for declining attendance, most of the churches he studied were unwilling to make any adaptations in their worship or service times:

"Most (churches) are unwilling to utilize new technologies, to support an alternative service time, and to change worship and music styles. In a world where so much has changed, a congregation's resistance to change can become an important source of comfort for its members while making it increasingly irrelevant to the surrounding social environment."¹²⁰

Henard warned that some churches are no longer concerned with what is happening beyond their own walls and choose to simply exist. He stated that "the church is not growing because it does not want to grow any larger and has moved into a survival mode. . . It either decides to develop ministry to meet needs and mission to reach the world, or it chooses to hunker down and take care of itself" and "they turn inward because they have lost the biblical purpose of the church."¹²¹

Dougherty, Marti and Martinez spoke to the need for congregational diversity, and while their focus is on opening doors to multi-racial worship, the same sentiment is carried into the need for change in other aspects of worship and sustaining the life of the church. The authors concluded that "Long-time members of a congregation can sustain an internal culture that caters to their preferences. As long as a location has others who share those same preferences, a congregation will have a stable future. But when an external environment changes, congregations

¹²⁰ McMullin, 58.

¹²¹ Henard, Lifeway, May 30, 2018.

that fail to change face an uncertain future in replenishing members.”¹²² This need for change and adaptability demonstrates that church revitalization is necessary for many established churches, not just for those that are ‘dying.’”¹²³ Resistance to change and continuing to do things strictly out of tradition or habit can be destructive. Smaller churches must learn to be flexible and open to the movement of the Spirit as they seek to remain relevant.

Strong concern has been raised over the need for change and effective use of the arts in ministry, however, churches who are already in the midst of decline face serious problems when attempting to address those concerns. Fewer people in the pews naturally means a smaller number of volunteers to participate, which can eventually lead to burnout or even apathy. Donihoo discussed the issue of volunteer burnout noting that “volunteers are the foundation and representatives of the church. Their role is essential to the church’s mission in the community and in the world.”¹²⁴ Donihoo noted that volunteers who feel underappreciated or lack the financial support needed to accomplish ministry goals often become burnt out and eventually leave the church.¹²⁵ The study further indicated that “most nonprofit organizations’ demand for volunteers outweigh their supply” and that the retention of those volunteers is critical.”¹²⁶ Donihoo’s research offered perspective in the importance of training and supporting volunteers, and concluded that “an effectively shared vision can motivate, inspire, simplify, and focus the

¹²² Dougherty, Marti and Martinez, 680.

¹²³ Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2015), 189.

¹²⁴ Katie Donihoo, "Best Practices and Strategies used by Church Leaders to Mitigate and Prevent Burnout among Church Volunteers," Dr. of Education in Org. Leadership, Pepperdine University, 2017, 1.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 3

¹²⁶ Ibid., 8.

work.”¹²⁷ The small-church pastor must lay the groundwork for recruiting, training and supporting this vital human resource of the church. According to Donihoo, the commitment of the pastor helps to create the passion for change that is needed in churches to be successful.¹²⁸ This study provided significant insight into strategies to avoid volunteer burnout. While this information is useful to gain understanding of volunteerism, it does not address the processes and purposes of creative elements in IGW and the specific skills and needs of those who serve in worship ministry.

The impact of fewer people in the pews on Sunday mornings usually coincides with smaller contributions in the offering plate. Completing routine church maintenance, let alone providing effective ministry can be difficult when financial support dwindles. In their book, *Funding Ministry with Five Loaves and Two Fishes*, Rosario Picardo and Mike Slaughter wrote that “traditional faith communities, as they struggle to stay alive, often attempt to balance their budgets by deferring maintenance—thereby piling up expenses for future generations of churchgoers.”¹²⁹ Long-established churches may therefore need to spend a significant portion of their income on church upkeep, with fewer dollars to extend in ministry and face difficult choices:

“Thousands of church buildings, once flagships of their denominations, have become very costly to maintain and heat. . . This vicious cycle has led congregations to close down ministries and sell their properties to whomever they can. Many congregations are left to choose between costly relocations or the complete dissolution of their churches.”¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Donihoo, 7.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹²⁹ Rosario Picardo and Slaughter, Mike, *Funding Ministry with Five Loaves and Two Fishes*, {Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2016), 31.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

Churches once again must rely on their leadership to provide guidance in staying on top of routine maintenance, while casting vision for the purpose of the church and for enacting effective ministry on smaller budgets. The text by Picardo and Slaughter outlined the pastor's role in leading their churches financially, provided a breadth of information on improving the overall financial health of the church, and explained specific strategies to achieve financial goals, however it did not explore inexpensive ways to offer creative IGW in the smaller church.

While declining donations and population can be detrimental, smaller numbers do not have to mean death to the smaller church. In a study about church density and religious participation, Blanchard, Stroope and Tolbert contended that the hierarchies and large staff population in larger churches can have a negative impact on involvement by lay people, while smaller churches generally have less structure and organization, which "enables members of smaller organizations to participate more directly than members of larger organizations."¹³¹ Danielson agreed that smaller numbers can create more opportunity for involvement noting that "with fewer people in the congregation, there is not the opportunity for a variety of programming divided by age or interest levels."¹³² For this reason, people of all ages are able to connect and become involved in multiple activities within the church.

Danielson went on to say that another benefit of the smaller church is accountability citing, "in contrast to the anonymity of the larger church, the small church is able to provide a natural accountability that notices when people are missing from the services."¹³³ Wallace concurred that intimacy is a benefit of the small-membership congregation, noting that people

¹³¹ Blanchard, Stroope and Tolbert, 933.

¹³² Danielson, 212-13.

¹³³ Ibid., 214.

know each other so well that the ushers know where each person sits and who may have left their car lights on in the parking lot.¹³⁴ She further noted that the intimacy of the church can be used as an advantage in the worship setting, citing “effective and faithful worship has nothing to do with the size of the congregation.”¹³⁵ Wallace detailed the benefit of this intimacy by comparing it to an extended family. She explained that “worship in the small-membership congregation is like a family reunion: news is exchanged, people are remembered, stories are told, new members are welcomed, departed people are mourned, and vital customs and rituals are observed.”¹³⁶ The family-based connectivity can also result in a sense of informality in some cases that provides a welcoming atmosphere for visitors.

While touting the benefits of small churches Wallace also warned they should not try to compete with what larger churches are doing and stated that the “small-membership congregation that tries to act like a big one will not only feel inferior but will also fail.”¹³⁷ Danielson concurred that small churches need to focus on their strengths and reminded that “authenticity is a quality that characterizes small churches when they do not pretend to be more like a large church.”¹³⁸ Danielson’s study indicated that the small church must develop its own philosophy and vision based on God’s leading and provision. She noted that “while church growth is important and desired . . . small church authors realize that God brings growth and it is not engineered by anything they do in programming. They believe that their focus should be on

¹³⁴ Wallace, “How to Worship in Small-Membership Congregations.”

¹³⁵ Wallace, “How to Worship in Small-Membership Congregations.”

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Danielson, 219.

the spiritual health of the church and caring for the people both within and without the church.”¹³⁹ For the small church with a population of multiple generations, this theory leans toward the importance of IGW. Danielson’s research covered vast topics regarding worship in the small church, and even the rudimentary elements that should be included based on biblical guidelines, however, her research does not incorporate the use of creative worship elements or sources that can assist those serving in the small church to find and develop those creative elements.

Creative Worship Elements for Effective IGW

This final section of the literature review will explore several texts which speak to the need for creativity in worship. McMullin completed a study of sixteen churches who are currently facing declining numbers, noting that “although most of these congregations each had hundreds of members as recently as 20 years ago, the congregations now range in size from about 30 people in the pews on Sunday morning to two congregations with about 175 people each.”¹⁴⁰ McMullin’s study spoke about the poor quality of arts in worship, often focused solely on music, noting that “there was no use of dance, drama or visual arts.”¹⁴¹ His study indicated that adapting more creative elements could provide a solution for churches struggling to keep their doors open and their pews filled.

God offers the first example of creativity and planning as laid out in the Book of Genesis and the creation of the universe. God’s desire for order and beauty is also evidenced in the

¹³⁹ Danielson, 86.

¹⁴⁰ McMullin, Steve. "The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches." *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 1 (2013): 43-59. Accessed January 27, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/41940815.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 57.

specific details He provided for the building of the temple (1 Kgs. 6, 1 Chron. 28). Worship planning and patterns vary by denomination and by the abilities and preferences of the leaders. Creative worship elements, however, can be adapted to suit any congregation and can help in the process of establishing effective IGW.

J. Scott McElroy put together an expansive book that speaks to the renewal of arts as a medium for creative worship. In his text, *Creative Church Handbook: Releasing the Power of the Arts in Your Congregation*, McElroy examined the call for creativity in the church as well as the process for starting or restoring arts ministry in church congregations. The author discussed the need to awaken the creative spirit that is in all individuals as a gift from God: “We are creative beings—artists and engineers and builders and dreamers—because we are made in the image of a creative God.”¹⁴² The text explored the use of creating live art during the course of a worship service, or working as a team to plan and create a work of art in the church or even offer an art display for a community event or outreach program. The text also spoke about the use of creative writing that can be offered as prayers, congregational readings or even drama. McElroy further discussed the role of dance in the worship service, noting that David danced before God when the ark was returned to Jerusalem, praising God in the process. However, the author was also quick to admit that “dance is the most difficult of the arts to integrate into the church.”¹⁴³ Many of the projects and ideas shared by McElroy were geared toward the larger church, but he opened the door and introduced the importance of the arts making his text a good reference tool for those who long to follow God’s creative call to utilizing the arts in worship.

¹⁴² J. Scott McElroy, *Creative Church Handbook: Releasing the Power of the Arts in Your Congregation*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2105), 44.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 176.

Music is one of the primary topics when discussing worship in today's church. Cooke's research indicated that music is one of the main factors of consideration for those choosing to attend a specific church.¹⁴⁴ Citing the drawbacks of smaller churches, such as "deficiencies in training, staffing, participants and available resources,"¹⁴⁵ Cooke asserted that small churches may struggle with achieving a quality music program, which ultimately has a negative impact on attendance. Her study was phenomenological in design, and results were achieved through direct observation of team practices and Sunday morning services and offered a summary based on thirteen specific themes which emerged from the study. While the study provided insight into establishing quality music programs, it did not provide ideas for creatively using music within weekly worship services.

The use of the church choir in weekly worship is another topic that is being debated in relationship to IGW. Many megachurches do not utilize a choir in their services, but according to Detterman, the choir is a vital part of church life and worship. In his article, "A Case for the Church Choir," Detterman identified four reasons for supporting and maintaining the church choir: 1) the choir provides a sense of motivation for members to attend weekly worship; 2) members of choir are inspired by the music that they sing and present as a gift for the congregation; 3) a volunteer choir creates a sense of community and fellowship; and 4) choir members develop a deep love for music, for each other and for God.¹⁴⁶ The relevancy of the church choir in modern worship was also explored by Leon Boss. In his study, Boss noted that

¹⁴⁴ Penni E. Cooke, "The Characteristics of Quality Worship Music and Church Size, A Qualitative Phenomenological Study," Doctor of Management in Organizational Leadership, University of Phoenix, March 2010, 6.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 8.

¹⁴⁶ Detterman, A Case for the Church Choir.

choirs have been in existence since biblical times. He offered support for the choir in the following argument:

“The fact that an emphasis was placed on the temple singing being directed and accompanied by trained and skilled musicians indicates that part of the reason for having a choir was to offer particularly beautiful singing to the Lord; singing that was beyond the capability of the congregation itself.”¹⁴⁷

Boss indicated in his study that individual churches need to consider the scriptural support for trained singers and determine how they can best utilize their own people resources to meet the needs for worship. He wrote, “If people work hard to understand the culture of their communities, and their country, then they would be able to better understand how the church choir can be used in worship, its function, and the type of repertoire needed that will glorify God and relate to the people.”¹⁴⁸ He further explained that “as the emerging churches come out of the older established churches, seeking to speak the language of their culture, the leadership needs to evaluate the style of music the choir sings, the resources that are available, and upkeep which includes cost.”¹⁴⁹ For smaller churches, the inclusion of a church choir, even on an occasional basis can provide an opportunity for more involvement in worship gatherings. Boss concluded that “it is within the goal of helping people to participate and shape their worship that one finds the relevancy of a church choir. . . the decline [of the choir] does not mean the choirs are no longer relevant.”¹⁵⁰ Both authors referenced established, solid purposes for the choir in the church but neither spoke to the impact that choral anthems can have in establishing creative

¹⁴⁷ Leon F. Boss, “Church Choirs: An Examination of Relevancy in 21st Century American Churches.” (DMin., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2011), 17.

¹⁴⁸ Boss, 30.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

worship opportunities. They also did not address other ways that the church can incorporate smaller vocal ensembles, or utilize other tools and strategies, especially in churches where the number of musicians and volunteers are few.

Another element of IGW is the power of engaging teaching. Arthur Foster completed a study of inner-city churches that were facing decline and concluded that true biblical teaching is a key to enlivening churches according to the model presented in the book of Acts. Foster designated five specific topics, based on the book of Acts to help pastors and their congregations uncover the practices of the early church and encourage spiritual growth through biblical teaching. In week one, he encouraged pastors to “commit to teaching the unadulterated Word of God even when facing resistance.”¹⁵¹ The second week of teaching emphasized the need for fellowship among believers: “Sharing must begin in the body of Christ and expand into the inner city neighborhood”¹⁵² The third focus area was to teach the body of the importance of celebrating the Lord’s Supper with other believers as a part of regular fellowship: “The early church devoted themselves to the breaking of bread to remind them of the One who sacrificed himself for their sins . . . those who want to experience spiritual health and numerical growth in their ministry must follow this early church mandate.”¹⁵³ The fourth teaching component instilled by Foster in his study was an emphasis on prayer, which he described as the “continual communication with God about multiple elements (petition, confession, adoration, thanksgiving, supplication, and intercession).”¹⁵⁴ Foster further indicated that pastors should make prayer an

¹⁵¹ Arthur L. Foster, “Declining Inner-City Church Membership: Creating Spiritually Healthy Inner-City Churches through Acts 2:42-47,” (DMin., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019), 82.

¹⁵² Ibid., 86.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 96.

“essential” part of worship and also take time to preach and teach about prayer on a regular basis.¹⁵⁵ While his study examined inner-city churches, the information gathered has direct application to smaller churches in other regions. Understanding the four tenants of the early church is necessary to adopt engaging teaching in the church today that will inspire and motivate attendees to make personal study and devotion a part of the daily lives. Foster offered some suggestions for application of these four tenants that were specific to inner city ministries, but his findings could be adapted for small churches in other areas.

Creative teaching in IGW can also assist in the presenting need for multisensory worship. Hodge completed a study which focused on the way people understand and interpret information. Hodge provided a thorough review of Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence Theory and noted that there are seven types of intelligence: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, body/kinesthetic, music/rhythmic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.¹⁵⁶ While the original focus of Gardner’s theory was education, Hodge cited specific elements of worship that engage each of these types of intelligence as a means for incorporating multisensory elements into worship on a regular basis. He concluded that multisensory worship “can help by connecting people’s hearts to God instead of connecting people’s heads to abstract ideas about God.”¹⁵⁷ Hodge explained how traditional churches can address the need for multisensory elements in their weekly services:

“In multisensory worship, the various elements of worship, such as the gathering, celebration, proclamation, communion and the sending forth are all embodied through various media; through drama, video, digital art, and décor. All of these elements are brought forward and intentionally pieced together to create the

¹⁵⁵ Foster, 99.

¹⁵⁶ James Nathan Hodge, “Multisensory Worship in Traditional Settings,” (DMin., Brite Divinity School, Fort6h Worth, TX, 2007), 7-10.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 14.

worship for the day, in much the same way as a stonemason takes various stones and builds a wall.”¹⁵⁸

While Hodge expressed the need for these elements and offered great insight into their place in worship, he emphasized their utilization in traditional settings of worship and did not explain how to produce creative worship elements for smaller churches who are transitioning to IGW.

Summary

The information presented in the literature showed that smaller churches are struggling to compete with the thriving megachurches. While megachurches may have an upper hand in offering a variety of programs, issues have also arisen out of this movement in churches where age-segregation has become common practice. Current trends are leaning toward a more balanced approach which has rejuvenated the concept of bringing all generations together for worship. Several texts have also cited methods and best practice for transitioning to IGW, regardless of church size. The breadth of literature on IGW is extensive, however, authors generally focus their attention on specific attributes of this recent trend in worship, and most often base their findings on larger churches. This study offers the opportunity to emphasize the ways in which creative worship practices can be achieved in smaller evangelical churches, filling a void in the existing literature.

¹⁵⁸ Hodge, 42-43.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Intergenerational worship takes on many shapes and formats across denominations and also varies due to leadership abilities, individual church preferences, church size and location. The focus of this study was to provide insight into the specific processes involved in implementing effective IGW in the smaller evangelical church through creative worship elements. As such, the focus of this study examined those elements as a means of assisting other smaller churches in the transition to IGW. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology used to achieve that goal in this study. The chapter will include information about the research design, data sources, data collection procedures, data analysis and report of findings.

Research Design

The guiding method utilized in this research is a historical case study. Hancock and Algozzine define case study as “intense analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by space and time.”¹⁵⁹ The authors further explained that the focus of case studies is to “gain in-depth understanding of situations and meaning for those involved.”¹⁶⁰ Gillham offered additional insight suggesting that the recent surge in ecological psychology, the study of humans in interaction with their environments, indicates a “growth which corresponds with the increased importance of non-experimental case study research.”¹⁶¹ Gilham further explained that this “naturalistic” approach produces a phenomenological meaning that can be examined as a

¹⁵⁹ Dawson R. Hancock and Bob Algozzine, *Doing Case Study Research: A Practical Guide for Beginning Researchers*, (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2016), 9.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹⁶¹ Gilham, 5.

qualitative element: “how people understand themselves or their setting” as you “seek to find the underlying reasons—in people’s feelings or perceptions, or their experiences of what is going on.”¹⁶² According to Gilham, this type of study enables the researcher to emphasize “the meaning of processes that lead to outcomes and the meaning of changes that have occurred.”¹⁶³ Gilham further explained that the research is able “to explore complexities that are beyond the scope of more ‘controlled’ approaches and “to view the case from the inside out: to see it from the perspective of those involved.”¹⁶⁴ While this research has direct impact on the congregation being studied, it also has implications for other small churches who seek to learn from the experience.

Research Questions

Research questions and hypotheses were drafted in order to identify the problem that smaller churches have in implementing creative IGW. A variety of sources were used to assemble data, and eyewitness accounts were also taken through the process of personal interviews. The questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: What are the worship ministry challenges facing smaller evangelical churches in the process of working toward one intergenerational service?

Research Question 2: What are the creative worship elements that can be utilized in smaller evangelical churches as they work toward one intergenerational worship service?

¹⁶² Gilham, 7.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 8.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses for this study are:

Hypothesis 1: The worship ministry challenges facing smaller evangelical churches in the process of working toward one intergenerational service include resistance to change, consumerism and implementation of a balanced worship model with limited human and financial resources.

Hypothesis 2: The creative worship elements that can be used in smaller evangelical churches as they work toward one intergenerational worship include: visual and performance arts, music (congregational singing, bell and choral music), and engaging teaching.

Data Sources

The sources for data in this historical case study were drawn from four main categories: printed matter and electronic documents, source interviews with pastors and church members who experienced the transition to IGW, observational notes that provide reactions throughout the process, and physical artifacts. Gilham explained that in this type of study, while theory is important, “evidence is primary” and the researcher “develops a grounded theory” based on the evidence that is found.¹⁶⁵ For this reason, multiple forms of data are used to provide a plethora of evidence that can then be examined to determine the findings. Gilham cited this as a central concern of the case study method, noting that the method requires “the collection and study of multiple forms of evidence, in sufficient detail to achieve understanding.”¹⁶⁶ Included in this

¹⁶⁵ Gilham, 12.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 19.

section of the chapter is a description of the data sources used in the study as well as procedures for gathering the evidence from those sources.

Documents

Printed matter and electronic documents such as articles, meeting minutes, worship plans, bulletins, attendance records and other data were extracted as valid evidence from the church computer and files. This information reflected on events as they occurred in the transitional process. Specific insight into creative worship elements used in worship services throughout the course of the study was gained by accessing this data.

Source Interviews

This case study involved the process of transition from one traditional service to two unique services (modern and traditional) and back to one intergenerational service. Since three different pastors presided over the church during this transition, all three were interviewed to provide insight. Additionally, members of the church had opportunity to provide eye-witness accounts as regular attendees at worship gatherings.

Observational Data

The most common type of observation is that of direct participation. Gilham explained the importance of participant observation in a case study as being “‘in’ the setting in some active sense—perhaps even working there but keeping your ears and eyes open, noticing things that you might normally overlook.”¹⁶⁷ Observational data was gathered by the researcher and provided meaningful insight into the transitional process.

¹⁶⁷ Gilham, 21.

Physical Artifacts

This type of evidence includes artwork, photographs, digital media and other elements that have been created in some way. Gilham reported that in certain circumstances, “this kind of evidence is the most important”¹⁶⁸ as it gives an exact representation of the evidence. Physical artifacts were gathered by the researcher and incorporated appropriately in the findings to assist in illustrating the process of transition that occurred in the case study.

Data Collection Procedures

The procedures for gathering data vary by type, but the overarching focus is to provide thorough and authentic information. The process of accessing church-related documents required a written request to Church Council. Once access was provided, printed matter was downloaded or copied as needed to provide answers to the questions of who, what, where, when and how specific systems were established in the transition that occurred to IGW.

Source interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. Whenever possible, the sessions were completed in-person, however phone interviews were also utilized for those who could provide an impact statement and no longer living in the local area. Interview questions were prepared for former pastors and long-time members, as well as those who had been attending FUMC only since the addition of the second worship experience. This offered insight from a variety of perspectives and helped to gather evidence for the effectiveness and vitality of creative elements in worship gatherings. Interview questions were reviewed by Liberty University’s IRB and were determined to not require IRB approval. Hancock and Algozzine noted the importance of seeking specific information, but also allowing flexibility for open-ended responses. The reasoning behind this process is to “increase the completeness of the data”

¹⁶⁸ Gilham, 21.

and to minimize the “effects of interview biases.”¹⁶⁹ With prior permission from those being interviewed, all sessions were recorded through audio or video, allowing the researcher the opportunity to revisit the information gained and analyze it objectively in the overall study.

Observational data is that information gained by the researcher through direct participation in and observation of weekly worship and special gatherings. Gilham explained that observation includes three main elements: “watching what people do; listening to what they say; and sometimes asking them clarifying questions.”¹⁷⁰ As researcher and active participant within this study, personal observation included all three of those elements to gauge congregational response creative elements as they are occurred in the context of worship as well as listening to feedback about what has already transpired. Gilham stated that the “overpowering validity of observation is that it is the most direct way of obtaining data.”¹⁷¹ Gilham further defined the process of the participant observer as providing “descriptive observation: the setting, the people, activities, events, apparent feelings; a general picture of what’s on the surface.”¹⁷² This process was key to providing a thorough overview of each stage of the process in transitioning to IGW.

Physical artifacts have been previously defined as anything that is created or produced. Gilham spoke to the importance of understanding the process of the path to creative development and the value it has to the researcher. Gilham explained that “an influential use of case study process analysis is when the researcher researches their own creative activity” and noted that the

¹⁶⁹ Hancock and Algozzine, 50.

¹⁷⁰ Gilham, 45.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 46.

¹⁷² Ibid., 53.

“researcher is in a privileged position” because he or she has “privileged access to thoughts, insights, mental ‘discoveries’ which an external researcher could only achieve with difficulty.”¹⁷³

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was key to structuring and presenting the findings in a cohesive manner. The first step of the process was to organize the various types of evidence discovered and reviewed for recurring themes, creating a “chain of evidence.”¹⁷⁴ Since this study was conducted in a naturalistic setting with the researcher as an active participant, Gilham explained that there are multiple steps to consider when assembling the findings. Gilham noted the following concepts for compiling the data: chronological order, logical coherence (aligning chronological data with common themes), aim of research, the application of evidence to the research questions, and finally the “emergent theory” to provide explanation or understanding.¹⁷⁵ As the findings are presented, Gilham stressed that while it is standard to include artifacts in an appendix, that in some cases, physical data is a vital part of the story and should be included in the text of the report. According to Gilham, “Illustrations and samples are as much part of the chain of evidence as material that can be formed in words. They need to occur at the relevant point in the sequence because the text that follows will be read differently because of the sight of them.”¹⁷⁶ The presentation of the information gathered was therefore assimilated in a cohesive manner. Hancock and Algozzine noted that the closing section will connect the “outcomes of the

¹⁷³ Gilham, 90.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 95.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 96.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 90-91.

research to the literature and takes readers beyond the facts to the meaning they reflect, the questions they raise, the ideas to which they point, and the practical uses and value they have for the extension of knowledge.”¹⁷⁷ A thorough review of the data in the report will allow others to make application to current trends, but will also offer suggestions of further topics to consider in the study of effective IGW in the smaller evangelical church.

Summary

This case study described the actual process that occurred in a smaller evangelical church when evolving to IGW. Historical documents were reviewed, and eye-witness accounts were obtained by those directly involved in the transition. In addition, the researcher offered first-hand observation and physical artifacts that demonstrate how IGW was achieved. Details of the findings are presented in Chapter 4.

¹⁷⁷ Hancock and Algozzine, 86.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to share the findings of this qualitative historical case study on the creative use of worship elements in effective IGW as experienced at the Fairview United Methodist Church. This chapter is divided into three distinct sections. In the first section, a general historical overview of changes that occurred at the church are presented. The evidence for this section is offered primarily through official church documents such as meeting minutes, bulletins and attendance records. In Section Two, information gathered in source interviews is offered, with pastors and worshipers providing eye-witness accounts to the transition to IGW. This section includes direct observation from the researcher that is supported through documents and physical artifacts. Section Three provides an overall interpretation of how the evidence gathered makes connection to the research and hypotheses for this study.

History of Worship Transition at Fairview United Methodist Church

In the United Methodist Church tradition, the pastor has ultimate authority over worship, but there is an administrative counsel, as well as other ministry teams that meet to guide the movement within the local church.¹⁷⁸ In this section, historical data is presented that defines how the pastors and the other ministry teams made adjustments to worship practices over a ten-year period. The evolution of worship styles began at the Fairview United Methodist Church (FUMC) in 2008. Until that time, copies of church bulletins provided evidence of a traditional service, including recited or sung psalms, congregational hymn-singing, Scripture readings, sermons, weekly choral anthems, and monthly offerings by the bell choir. Music was led by the pastor and

¹⁷⁸ L. Fitzgerald Reist, Brian K. Milford, Brian O. Sigmon and the Committee on Correction and Editorial Revision of the United Methodist Church, eds., *United Methodist Church Book of Discipline*, (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Church Publishing House, 2016), 340.

accompanied by the organ, and in some cases the piano. At the prompting of the pastor, a praise team was organized in 2008 that offered special music and folk or gospel tunes by a small group of choir members.¹⁷⁹ This trend continued until the late fall of 2012, when more modern music was infused into the services on a weekly basis during the season of Advent in an attempt to offer a more blended musical style. This change was met with immediate resistance, and ultimately ended up with the resignation of the organist.¹⁸⁰ Due to the disapproval of long-standing members, the pastor suspended the movement toward blended worship, and the organist withdrew her intentions to resign.¹⁸¹

With the hiring of a new pastor in 2013, discussions were reopened regarding the need to make stylistic and technological adjustments to worship. The new pastor distributed surveys, inviting the feedback of the body of believers. Responses indicated a need for change, however resistance to a blending of styles into one service was still strong. As opposed to blending the musical worship within the church service, the Church Council instead voted to begin a new modern worship gathering to take place in the church's social hall at 8:30am, with the service being named "Ignite."¹⁸² This worship gathering offered a more casual service and included a light breakfast, helping to create bonds of fellowship and intimacy among the worshipers. Fellowship Hall was already outfitted with a projector and screen, as it was used by the youth group for worship events. The instruments and sound equipment used were donated by those on the praise team. Everyone who served at this service with the exception of the pastor, volunteered their time; those who attended helped to set up for the service and then return the

¹⁷⁹ Fairview United Methodist Church Bulletin, March 30, 2008.

¹⁸⁰ Fairview United Methodist Church Council Meeting Minutes, February 11, 2013.

¹⁸¹ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, April 22, 2013.

¹⁸² Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, September 9, 2013.

space to its original condition following worship. The traditional worship experience remained without change and continued to take place in the main sanctuary each Sunday at 11:00am. Sunday School remained at 9:45am so that those attending either worship experience could take part in spiritual education classes.

By November of 2013, council meeting minutes indicated an average attendance at Ignite of 40 people and that several worshipers who had not attended FUMC before were visiting weekly.¹⁸³ Church members who attended the council meeting also initiated a discussion about moving the service into the main sanctuary, but no change was made at that time. Council meeting minutes from December cited that a long-time member offered to provide the financing to purchase two projectors for the main sanctuary.¹⁸⁴ Projectors were purchased and installed by the church trustees and Ignite moved into the main Sanctuary in February of 2014. While attendance at both services seemed to be steady, concern was raised that FUMC was becoming a church of two separate congregations.¹⁸⁵

Divisions in church unity began to surface in the summer months, with a variety of questions and comments noted at a mid-summer Church Council meeting. The Worship Team Chairperson suggested that decorations in the Sanctuary, such as artificial trees, were obstructing the projectors and needed to be moved, and looking forward, that the placement of the advent wreath and other Christmas decorations would also need to be adjusted due to the praise band instrumentation. This led the organist to inquire about the possibility of offering two separate

¹⁸³ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, November 18, 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, December 13, 2013

¹⁸⁵ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, March 17, 2014.

Christmas Eve services, a practice that had never been done before in this church. According to council minutes, this discussion was deferred until the next meeting.¹⁸⁶ In addition, the Staff-Pastor Parish Relations Committee had previously voted and decided the annual Pastor Appreciation luncheon should be moved to a brunch, during the Sunday School hour, so that attendees at both services could attend.¹⁸⁷ This change was discussed at the July 28, 2014 Church Council meeting, and several members were not happy with the change according to the council minutes.¹⁸⁸ The minutes of the July 28 meeting further indicated that attendance at the traditional service was declining and that weekly offerings were substantially lower.¹⁸⁹ Eventually the divisions that began in early summer gave way and resulted in many people from the traditional service making the decision to leave the church, including the organist and several choir members. What was meant to be an outreach into the local community had become an all-out worship war in which some long-time members continually voiced concerns over the addition of a service that employed modern music, drums and a casual atmosphere that did not coincide with their personal views on worship.

Both services continued to co-exist, however, attendance at both services declined slightly. The organist had a change of heart and requested to be reinstated in September of 2014. The vote by church council members in the reinstatement showed a definite split in support for the organist. It was decided that the organist would be offered her position again, however a new employment agreement would be required. Although the vote passed, the organist refused to sign

¹⁸⁶ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, July 28, 2014.

¹⁸⁷ Fairview United Methodist Church, Staff-Pastor Parish Relations Committee Meeting Minutes, June 12, 2014.

¹⁸⁸ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, July 28, 2014.

¹⁸⁹ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, July 28, 2014.

the agreement and never returned to the church. The pianist from the Ignite service, who did not play the organ, was hired as an interim musician for the traditional service. Even though the traditional service flow did not change, the hiring of the interim musician from Ignite and the lack of organ accompaniment in the service resulted in another exodus of members and a drastic reduction in choir participation. Although those who chose to leave were from the traditional service, it was recorded that the entire church suffered from the effects.¹⁹⁰

Noting the decline in attendance at both services and the general feelings of unrest, the Worship Team joined together with the Evangelism Team and decided to employ a concept of “Fifth Sunday Worship.” They decided that whenever there were five Sundays in a month, that the church would offer one combined service with a blend of worship elements and musical styles. The service was always followed by a fellowship gathering or luncheon.¹⁹¹ While the first offering was well attended, many complaints ensued, mainly in regard to the music. After three attempts, the new initiative was abandoned. Services remained separated with education hour between the two gatherings.

Another major wave of disappointed members occurred in April of 2015 when the church council voted on two major resolutions. One decision was to purchase a new digital piano instead of repairing the organ. It was noted in the meeting minutes that the organ needed repairs estimated to cost several thousand dollars, and since it was no longer being utilized, the money would be better spent on a digital piano that had the capability to render an organ sound, as well as several other instrumentation settings. Many traditional service members were upset about utilizing money from the organ fund to purchase the new instrument, but the motion to purchase

¹⁹⁰ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, September 22, 2014.

¹⁹¹ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, January 5, 2015.

the piano passed by majority vote.¹⁹² At the same meeting, the council also voted to install retractable screens to improve the quality of the projector images. The screens would be hung on either side of the cross at the front of the sanctuary and would be utilized for both services. Once again, the results were mixed, with several traditional service members raising concerns about the screens detracting from the beauty of the sanctuary. Meeting minutes indicated that this resolution also passed by a majority vote.¹⁹³

From 2015 to early in 2017, the traditional service suffered the loss of many long-time members and the attendance in that service continued to decline. With the arrival of another new pastor in July of 2017, the Ignite service showed signs of revitalization and the addition of many new families with young children. The Education Chair noted that additional nursery volunteers were needed to assist with the influx of toddlers during Ignite.¹⁹⁴ The new pastor suggested that the 8:30am start time for Ignite may be deterring some people from attending, so the service start time was moved to 9:00am and Sunday School was delayed by 15 minutes to accommodate this change which began in January of 2018.¹⁹⁵

According to church records, Ignite attendance continued to rise throughout the year and into 2019, while the traditional service fell to approximately 30 people per week. With the onset of summer, which historically showed lower overall attendance at FUMC worship, the Worship Team voted to join the two weekly gatherings into one service at 10:00am for the summer months in 2019. In hopes of restoring the family atmosphere that once flourished at FUMC, the Worship Team agreed that the service would combine elements of both services and focus on

¹⁹² Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, April 13, 2015.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, August 21, 2017.

¹⁹⁵ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, November 13, 2017.

engaging all ages in worship for a true intergenerational worship experience.¹⁹⁶ This recommendation was taken to church council, and after much discussion, the resolution to move to one combined service for the summer months passed by majority vote.¹⁹⁷ In mid-May of 2019, the church learned that FUMC would become part of a two-point charge effective July 1. This decision, made by the Western Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist church, meant that the pastor would divide his time between two congregations in a 75/25 split, with FUMC receiving 75% of the pastor's time and the other 25% being assigned to another church in a small community nearby.¹⁹⁸ This confirmed the decision to move to one service and the change became permanent.

Summary of Worship Transition

FUMC experienced a tumultuous worship war between 2013 and 2019. The battle resulted in the loss of many long-time members and the addition of new members who experienced the negativity from the sidelines. In the next section of the study, eyewitness accounts from pastors and church members are shared to provide more detail regarding the challenges faced and the results of moving to IGW.

Eyewitness Accounts and Direct Observations

The eye-witness accounts in this study offer direct knowledge of the worship encounters that occurred at FUMC during the transition. The interviews were held on the phone or in person, and the respondents were encouraged to share their first-hand experiences. The questions posed

¹⁹⁶ Fairview United Methodist Church, Worship Team Minutes, April 11, 2019.

¹⁹⁷ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, April 22, 2019.

¹⁹⁸ Fairview United Methodist Church, Church Council Minutes, May 20, 2019.

by the researcher were reviewed by a representative of IRB. It was determined by IRB that the approval process was not necessary in this case study, as the questions focused on eye-witness accounts of specific events that formed the history of worship experiences at FUMC. Information was gathered from each of the three pastors that served in the transition. In addition, members were asked to respond to key questions that provided insight into the changes that occurred in worship experiences and the effectiveness of creative worship expressions in IGW. Interviews of members were divided into two categories: 1) those who are long-time members of the church and attended before the addition of the Ignite worship service, and 2) those who chose to switch from the traditional worship service to the new modern worship service, and 3) those who have only attended FUMC since Ignite was added as a worship experience. The results of the interviews are presented with the pastoral accounts first, followed by the remaining three categories of individuals. Finally, the direct observations of the researcher are recorded in this section which are supported through official church documents and physical artifacts.

Pastoral Interviews

Interview with Pastor Dennis Miller

Pastor Dennis Miller was interviewed by the researcher on January 23, 2020. All statements attributed to Pastor Miller in this section were recorded in his eye-witness account.¹⁹⁹ Dennis Miller served as Pastor of FUMC from July 1, 1995 through June 30, 2013. Pastor Miller commented that he was blessed with a solid congregation that included multiple generations for most of his tenure at FUMC, however he noted that the younger generations began to leave the church around 2008. With an unusually-lengthy assignment of 18 years within the same congregation, Pastor Miller expressed concern over the slow decline and movement toward a

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Pastor Dennis Miller, Fairview, PA, January 23, 2020.

church population that was represented by only one generation of worshipers. He noted the need for change in order to attract young families again, stating that “as generations learn from one another that it broadens the view of God.” Pastor Miller commented that IGW is the desired outcome for all churches and that a willingness to adapt to the changing needs of the community is vital to the growth and sustainability of the church. Drawing on the historical past of Methodism, Miller recalled the story of the conversion of John Wesley and the music that he and his brother Charles wrote. At the time, their tunes were considered unacceptable because they were set to secular bar tunes of the day. Their hymns which are today’s standard in the Methodist hymnal were disregarded by the Anglican Church because they were not “sacred enough.” Miller pointed to the same issues happening in churches today. Long-time members of the church tend to be unwilling to accept the updated music and changing worship practices of the younger generations.

Pastor Miller shared his recollection of the transition of music at FUMC, noting that church members had mixed reactions to the changes he introduced. He successfully instituted a folk group in 2008 that consisted of three to four choir members to lead in singing more modern music one Sunday per month. These songs included gospel tunes such as “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” as well as praise songs from the 1990’s such as “Here I Am Lord” and “As the Deer.” Miller noted that the success of this group was probably due to the fact that the songs were all relatively slow and that those leading were long-time members of the church. As Miller was nearing retirement, he continued to pray about moving the church toward a more blended service and made the decision to add a new group of musicians from outside the church that presented more current music. The group was generally not accepted and Miller’s goal of transitioning to a more blended service before leaving the church in 2013 never materialized.

Pastor Miller admitted that mistakes were made in the transition process. He had hoped that his long tenure of 18-years as the pastor would make the movement more palatable but stated that he did not give the people enough of a voice in the changes that occurred. He cited that the biggest hurdle in instituting new ideas was getting people comfortable with the change. Miller commented that his attempts to update the music in 2008 with the praise group was not completely successful, admitting it was not enough to move members out of their “comfort zone” and become more accepting of more modern songs and instrumentation. He explained that more should have been done to circumvent the resistance to change by formulating a statement of need or providing the rationale behind the movement so that the people could recognize the need for the spiritual growth of body.

Pastor Miller concluded the interview by sharing an old story about a group of people who lived in a beautiful valley. As the younger generation grew up, they questioned their older population about venturing to the other side of the mountain. Their response was in the negative; there was no need as they were perfectly happy with the valley they were currently living. The young people chose to travel to the other side of the mountain and found their own valley and the cycle continued, with generations moving back and forth over the mountain. Pastor Miller shared that this legend is the perfect example of the rut that FUMC had landed in, with the older generations finding comfort where they were and unwilling to change. This mindset unfortunately meant that as Pastor Miller retired in June of 2013, the church had only a handful of worshipers that were under the age of 60 remaining in the congregation.

Interview with Pastor John Gerber

Pastor John Gerber was interviewed by the researcher on February 11, 2020. All statements attributed to Pastor Gerber in this section are recorded in his eye-witness account.²⁰⁰ Pastor Gerber began his tenure at FUMC on July 1, 2013 and served at the church through June 30, 2017. His research of the area uncovered that the because of the impressive school district in the Fairview community, the population was mainly young and filled with “white collar” workers, which meant young families with children. He was taken by surprise at his first worship service and noted the lack of young families and children in the church. He mentioned that it was a congregation “acting similarly to the way it did when it was first established” and referenced an attitude of an old country church rather than the current reality of a young and thriving community. As he led his first Church Council Meeting, he asked those in attendance to look around the room. He asked how many of those gathered were under the age of 60; only Gerber (who was 59 at the time) and three people raised their hands. Pastor Gerber mentioned that his goal was to try to get the people to look beyond their own needs and realize that many of their own children had left FUMC to find a more modern worship experience at a church where their families could thrive and grow spiritually.

Gerber stated that the attitudes of the members at FUMC were different than any he had encountered in the past. He commented that the congregation was wrought with quarreling and an unwillingness to support transitions or the ability to get past the traditions, ministries and systems established by past generations. He further indicated that the older generation was happy, as long as the younger people came alongside their established norms of worship and ministry. The older population offered no respect or interest in the views of the younger

²⁰⁰ Interview with Pastor John Gerber, Fairview, PA, February 11, 2020.

generation, or their desire to worship in a different way. As a result, the small number of young people that attended held little respect for the “elders” of the church. Given this insight, Pastor Gerber met the challenge of instituting change with a different approach. He communicated regularly with the church body through newsletters and council meetings. Gerber read excerpts from the Rainer text, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* and led a weekly study on another popular text, *Who Stole My Church?* by Gordon MacDonald. He also conducted a survey of the current worshipers in an attempt to give them “ownership” of how the changes to worship would be made. He hoped that better communication and information would lead to worship that involved participation by multiple generations. Unfortunately, the damage that had already occurred could not be overcome. Instead of making adaptations to the existing service, Pastor Gerber and the members of the Worship Team chartered a new worship gathering that would meet the changing worship needs of the younger demographic that were yearning for something new. In October 2017, Ignite Worship, a modern worship service with a band, was established at FUMC.

Pastor Gerber’s plans to incorporate IGW were not realized during his tenure at FUMC; however, he offered great insight into the need for Bible-based preaching, time for meditation and involving the entire body of worshipers regardless of age. He also noted that participation by all generations helped to create a family atmosphere that is vital for smaller churches. Gerber suggested that utilizing children as acolytes and greeters gave them a purpose and a sense of belonging, and that older youth could volunteer as ushers or read the morning Scripture. During his time at FUMC, Pastor Gerber did encourage participation by different age groups, but since they occurred at separate services it was much harder to foster the sense of family that was lacking.

Gerber concluded his interview by offering a comparison of the churchgoer's worship needs to that of having a favorite chair. He commented that homes are often filled with a variety of places to sit, but that most people have one specific place they always choose as a place to sit, relax and watch television or read a book. He applied this analogy to the church, explaining that people may not want to sit in someone else's favorite chair because it doesn't fit them quite right; however, they must understand the preferences of others and be willing to recognize that comfort [worship], is defined differently by people of all generations. He stated that the early church was built on "unreached" people of all ages and that today's church must do the same if it is to survive.

Interview with Pastor Jack Tickle

Pastor Jack Tickle was interviewed by the researcher on February 3, 2020. All statements attributed to Pastor Tickle in this section are recorded in his eye-witness account.²⁰¹ Pastor Tickle is the current pastor of FUMC and began his term in July of 2017. Pastor Tickle commented that when he arrived at FUMC, there was an "unintentional divide" due to the separate worship gatherings and that conversations often involved the terms "us" and "them." His goal was to construct a bridge between the two congregations and restore true IGW at FUMC. According to Tickle, the pathway to make this happen was to work, serve and worship together. Throughout his first two years, Pastor Tickle's main objective was to promote activities that allowed this to happen. He revived various ministries that had been dormant and encouraged the church to recognize and work toward common goals. This included renovation projects within the church, service projects in the community and a scattered offering of combined worship gatherings, especially during the holidays.

²⁰¹ Interview with Pastor Jack Tickle, Fairview, PA, February 3, 2020.

Pastor Tickle followed established guidelines for administering changes, especially in worship. He held several meetings with the existing teams, allowing all voices to be heard and recognizing the importance of the heritage of the church while also addressing the need for relevance in the community. Tickle also established a new team consisting of the chairpersons for Mission, Education, Outreach and Worship (MEOW). Regular meetings were held, and the team leaders discussed ideas and implemented new activities outside of worship in which members from each service could spend time in fellowship and service with one another. While there were still some that resisted any modifications to worship and other ministries, Pastor Tickle addressed those changes within the various committees and then took them to Church Council. The fact that everyone who attended council meetings had the opportunity to share their opinions seemed to have an impact on unity within the church. Tickle noted that some progress was being made in making peace between the members.

Tickle recognized that for some members, accepting that long-time friends and members had left the church was extremely difficult. Tickle stated that “saying goodbye to some, however, was necessary in order for the church to heal and move forward.” Pastor Tickle explained that flexibility was the key factor as new ways of presenting worship were introduced, especially at the traditional service. He commented that worship must be creative and spirit-driven to cultivate a congregation that is alive and active. When questioned about change, Tickle noted that “worship must be fluid; if it doesn’t evolve and change, it will fizzle and eventually die out.”

In the early months of 2019, weekly attendance records indicated that traditional worship service was continuing to diminish.²⁰² Some people had left the church prior to Tickle’s arrival, some made the decision to leave after he was assigned to FUMC, and others were simply passing

²⁰² Fairview United Methodist Church, Weekly Attendance Records, January-March 2019.

on to life eternal. It was at this point that Pastor Jack addressed the Worship Team about bringing the two services together on a temporary basis to determine if IGW was a possibility. He stated that by providing the congregation with proper education about worship and explaining the history of hymns and need for modern expressions of worship, that a movement toward IGW could be accomplished. Over the next few months, Pastor Jack worked with the Worship Team to offer a number of combined worship experiences, including special services for Ash Wednesday, Holy Week and a celebration of the resurrection on Easter Sunday. These services included the formation of a multigenerational “Celebration Choir” and special music offerings by the church bell choir, which also had members from three generations. Dramas and dramatic readings were also added that involved children and adults. Noting the mostly positive reception of these experiences, Pastor Tickle and the Worship Team suggested that the church move to a single service in June of 2019. With only two dissensions, members of council approved this motion. Throughout the summer of 2019, Tickle listened to the feedback of the church family, with most agreeing that IGW was the best path forward for FUMC. Tickle admitted that making this change permanent meant the loss of a few more people from the church pews on Sunday mornings, “but Scripture reminds that sometimes the branches need to be pruned in order to bear more fruit (John 15:2, paraphrase).”

Interviews with Worshipers

In this section, information is shared that was provided during interviews with members and others who regularly attend worship at FUMC. For ease of process, all those addressed in this section were referred to as members. Since FUMC originally had only one service, added a second service and then returned to a single intergenerational worship experience, the interviews were separated into those who have been at FUMC prior to the transition, and those who either

switched to Ignite when the service began in 2013 or started attending FUMC when the Ignite service was birthed. The eyewitness accounts of people in both groups is essential to understand the divide that occurred and the process of transitioning back to IGW, including the use of creative worship elements which fostered unity. Following the member interviews, additional perspective is provided from the direct observation of the researcher.

Long Time Members

Most long-time members have attended FUMC for at least 20 years, with many of them, now in their seventies and eighties, who have been coming to the church since they were born. The first question posed to members focused on the worship elements that had been a part of the traditional service, with most respondents focusing on the message and the singing of hymns. Dianne Sartin commented that “hearing an uplifting message that teaches and can be applied to everyday life”²⁰³ was the most important part of worship. Becky Morrison concurred and added that the sharing of prayer concerns was also essential.²⁰⁴ A common thread among all those interviewed was the need to sing the hymns of the church that taught about the history and heritage of the Methodist faith. Dianne Sartin noted that the singing of hymns offered the opportunity to praise God during worship, but the familiarity of the words and tunes was something that could you could “take with you when you left” and continue to sing throughout the week.²⁰⁵ A final respondent noted that a key element of traditional worship was the connection with friends. Daisy Wilkins commented that she looked forward to the time of greeting at the beginning of each service, where friends could “share a hug and catch up on

²⁰³ Dianne Sartin, interview by author, Fairview, PA, February 5, 2020.

²⁰⁴ Becky Morrison, interview by author, Fairview, PA February 3, 2020.

²⁰⁵ Sartin Interview.

everything that transpired through the week.”²⁰⁶ The sense of family that existed among long-time members was also a consistent theme of value across all eye-witness accounts.

Although traditional worshipers enjoyed the comfort and security of their established practices, those interviewed all mentioned concern over the decreasing number of people in the pews on Sunday mornings. Attendance records concurred, with a notable drop in overall attendance and the lack of children at weekly services.²⁰⁷ Becky Morrison commented that as the numbers at the traditional service were dwindling that it was also becoming harder to find volunteers for worship duties and other ministries.²⁰⁸ Wilkins noted a deep sorrow for those who had made the decision to leave during the transition.²⁰⁹ Recognizing that while change was hard, all long-time members that were interviewed were in agreement that change was necessary in order to increase attendance and grow the church.

When questioned about the current IGW worship experience, most of the responses from traditional members were positive. Morrison stated that the changes did not affect her ability to worship, as she believed “worshiping together as a family is the most important thing we can do as people of God.”²¹⁰ Sartin added that the adaptations to worship flow have not affected her ability to worship, stating that “you get out what you put in” even though some things are unfamiliar.²¹¹ One long-time member, known as the “Grandma to the Youth Group,” noted that

²⁰⁶ Daisy Wilkins, interview with author, February 9, 2020.

²⁰⁷ Fairview United Methodist Church Attendance Records, 2010-2013.

²⁰⁸ Morrison Interview.

²⁰⁹ Wilkins Interview.

²¹⁰ Morrison Interview.

²¹¹ Sartin Interview.

she appreciated the influx of newer music because it helped her to relate better to the teens.²¹² A common thread among all of the long-time members was seeing the pews full again.

Several of those interviewed commented on the creative worship elements they experienced in combined worship services. Carr cited that when the children led the congregation in singing or when the youth presented a stick-ministry pantomime that she was encouraged by their participation in worship.²¹³ Sartin noted that the return of the children's message by a variety of volunteers made a strong impression on the congregation. She stated that often the messages presented to the children also impacted the lives of the adults. Recalling the words of Scripture, she explained that seeing so many children down front for this special time is a reminder that Jesus called us all to be children.²¹⁴ Morrison added that the use of banners and other visual elements that adorned the altar and sanctuary provided a new aspect that helped her to worship in new ways.²¹⁵ While the responses to creative worship elements were positive, one main concern raised by the long-time members was the shift in music. Morrison and Wilkins both stated that they missed the organ, as the more traditional sound is one that they have always connected to worship.²¹⁶ Sartin explained that the new music is too unfamiliar and was not sure that the modern music provided the rich lyrics and scriptural content found in the traditional hymns.²¹⁷ All respondents concurred that moving to IGW was worth the sacrifice of personal preference to worshipping with the fully body of believers at FUMC.

²¹² Cindy Carr, interview by author, Fairview, PA February 5, 2020.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Sartin Interview.

²¹⁵ Morrison Interview.

²¹⁶ Morrison and Wilkins interviews.

Members who Attended Ignite Worship

Those who attended Ignite represent two distinct categories of worshipers at FUMC: those who had been members of the church and preferred the new style of worship, and those who began attending after the new service began in late 2013. Of the five people interviewed in this section, three had been long-time members and chose to switch to the Ignite service, stating the music as the most powerful reason for the change. Kris Sundin, a middle-aged member, suggested that the “old-English” language in hymns restricted her ability to worship and speak to God.²¹⁸ Reba Robie added that the new service was uplifting and that she “felt good about inviting unchurched friends and family to attend.”²¹⁹ Abbey Robson concurred about the modern worship music, but also noted the casualness of the service and extended quiet time of prayer in Ignite as factors that enabled a more effective worship experience.²²⁰ New members at FUMC also commented on the casual environment and music style as vital to their decision to attend Ignite. Greg Gebhardt was invited to Ignite by her daughter who was an active member of the youth group at FUMC. He stated that he immediately connected with the modern music, identifying it as uplifting and inspirational.²²¹ Troy Bauder stated that while modern music is a preference, the strong Bible teaching and reading of Scripture in worship are key elements for all styles of worship, as well as the need to gather for fellowship and meals as referenced in the

²¹⁷ Sartin interview.

²¹⁸ Kris Sundin, interview by author, Fairview, PA, February 3, 2020.

²¹⁹ Reba Robie, interview by author, Fairview, PA, February 3, 2020.

²²⁰ Abbey Robson, interview by author, Fairview, PA, February 3, 2020.

²²¹ Greg Gebhardt, interview by author, Fairview, PA, February 5, 2020.

book of Acts. For Bauder, the key to worship is following the biblical model and praising God, regardless of musical style.²²²

When asked to provide comment on the impact that returning to IGW has had on the church, the responses of Ignite worshipers was varied. Two of the respondents indicated that they were struggling to worship with the change in music. Robson observed that with the change in music at the service, that there are fewer youth in attendance.²²³ Sundin commented that “with the exception of 2-3 praise band songs at the beginning of the service, it seems to be slowly morphing back to a traditional service.”²²⁴ Bauder disagreed, stating that “making a joyful noise and praising is not exclusive of contemporary Christian music or traditional music” and expressed that the way in which the hymns are presented at the new IGW service allows for a good flow between worship elements.²²⁵ Bauder expressed greater concern over the way in which the transition occurred, noting that along the way, as Ignite started and the congregation separated, several long-time members made the decision to leave the church.²²⁶ Reba Robie, a long-time member that switched to Ignite because she preferred that worship style, was disappointed in the move to IGW. She and her family decided to leave FUMC, citing that “it seemed that every person had to ‘give in’ for half of the service, and since we didn’t care for the traditional style, we were uncomfortable for that portion . . . nobody was completely happy like

²²² Troy Bauder, interview by author, Fairview, PA February 5, 2020.

²²³ Robson interview.

²²⁴ Sundin interview.

²²⁵ Bauder interview.

²²⁶ Ibid.

they were before.”²²⁷ Just as the long-time members who were unhappy with the move to IGW, the majority of those who attended Ignite also expressed discomfort with the switch to blended worship.

While the observations about changes in music were mostly negative by those who attended Ignite, those interviewed also offered many positive comments regarding specific creative elements that had been a part of the modern worship movement that were still maintained in IGW. Gebhardt noted his participation in the skits and dramas that began in Ignite and continued into special holiday services, programs and IGW provided an opportunity for multiple ages to come together in worship.²²⁸ Bauder explained that the inclusion of the bell choir, normally a “traditional” element, at IGW offered a different dynamic to worship and also commented that the inclusion of media arts and dramas were impactful as they appealed to all ages.²²⁹ Robson, who has a child in Kindergarten, stated that having her daughter sing in worship with so many other children was definitely a positive outcome of IGW. Robson noted that her parents, who formerly attended the traditional worship service, expressed gratitude that they could see their granddaughter worship in church and stand and sing next to her as she danced and sang with the praise band.²³⁰ Ultimately those from Ignite who have continued with the combined service concurred that while the move to IGW may not have been their first choice, the result has been a positive one overall for the unity of the church.

²²⁷ Robie interview.

²²⁸ Gebhardt interview.

²²⁹ Bauder interview.

²³⁰ Robson interview.

Direct Observations of the Researcher

In this section the researcher offers direct observations of events that unfolded during the transition to IGW, supported by church documents and physical artifacts. The researcher presents findings that build on the eye-witness accounts of the three pastors and the members who were interviewed for this study. Finally, the researcher provides an overall interpretation of how the findings are connected to the research questions and hypotheses for the case study.

The researcher became an active participant and leader in the worship at FUMC in November of 2012. While unable to provide first-hand account of events that unfolded in the years prior, church documents offered the necessary evidence to fill the gaps of the observations regarding attendance. Eye-witness accounts and member feedback provided the data necessary to interpret the success or failure of specific creative worship elements utilized in worship from 2013 to present day.

In addition to the outreach events, the researcher offered evidence of a variety of worship elements that foster unity in IGW. Since the church is small and budgets for various ministries are extremely tight, creative elements in worship are utilized for seasonal services and scattered at various times throughout the year. In most cases, the materials needed to implement innovations in worship are donated by members and many artistic additions highlighted in this study utilize few monetary resources. Weekly IGW at FUMC has a general pattern of order but also allows for flexibility and adaptation to include occasional creative elements.

FUMC follows the standard lectionary and church calendar, although occasionally has engaged in thematic series. Holidays and special seasonal services often provide unique opportunities to include creativity that involves people of all ages. On Pentecost, as the birthday of the church is celebrated, the congregation is often encouraged to wear red and the church has

hung streamers of red, orange and yellow to represent the flames of the Holy Spirit falling on the early Christians. On All Saints Sunday, celebrated on the first Sunday in November, FUMC has offered a variety of ways for members to honor the departed saints of the previous year that have greatly impacted their lives. In 2017, clouds were cut out of white paper and secured to a bulletin board. As the names of those who passed away were read by the pastor, family or friends walked forward and wrote the names of their loved ones, adding them to the great cloud of witnesses who guide those still on earth today. Most recently, in 2019, the bell choir offered a special anthem before the reading of the names, and then a single bell was rung as a candle was lit to represent the lives of those who had gone to their eternal home. These creative elements incorporated the tradition of historical celebrations at FUMC but were intertwined with modern adaptations, allowing people of all ages to participate and create a sense of unity.

Thanksgiving also offers a unique opportunity to bring the body of believers at FUMC together to engage in IGW. Several years ago, a cornucopia was printed and displayed on a large board at the front of the sanctuary, along with cutouts of various fruits and vegetables. During the service, individuals, couples, and families of multiple generations came forward, wrote down something they were thankful for on the printouts and then placed them on the cornucopia. Joy overflowed in the room as the church expressed gratitude for the many blessings of His providence. Last year this action was simplified, with each person attending the service receiving a smooth glass stone. As the praise band led in the singing of *10,000 Reasons* by Matt Redman, those in attendance brought forward their stones, filling a glass bowl to overflowing. These simple activities brought together generations of worshipers at FUMC as they offered praise to God.

During the Christmas season in 2016, both services made prayer chains during the service that were put together each week and then hung on the Christmas tree in the sanctuary on Christmas Eve. Utilizing construction paper and cutting it into strips, the cost for this project was minimal, but the results brought the entire congregation to gather around a tree, lifting the combined prayers of the people in a powerful moment of worship on Christmas Eve. During the Christmas season in 2017, inexpensive gold balls were purchased by the church and placed in a basket at the foot of a large Christmas Tree. Each Sunday of Advent, families in the church came forward to the tree during prayer time and hung ornaments representing people that they were praying for who had not yet accepted the gift of God's love. In 2018 at another combined service on Christmas Eve, members of the church family were asked for donations of candlesticks to utilize during the service. Brass, crystal and wooden candleholders were gathered and on Christmas Eve, the story of the first Christmas was shared through the use of candlelight. The church made a small investment in the various colored candles, but as each candle was lit representing the various characters in the story, the people in the congregation made a deeper connection as their candlestick was used to tell the story of the birth of Christ.



The Easter season offered additional opportunities to include unique worship elements. FUMC celebrates the season of Lent, which begins with Ash Wednesday and then moves through six Sundays until the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ. In 2018, one of the teens of the church presented a beautiful interpretive dance to an updated hymn tune. This deepened the connections of this teen to the church, as well as to older members of the congregation who were moved by her gift of beauty and grace. The teen has remained an active member of the church and assists in many of the church's ministries.



Another meaningful service of unity occurred on Good Friday in 2018. After a reading of the passion, prayers and quiet meditation, the entire congregation moved outdoors and lit individual luminaries that were placed outside the doors of the church in the shape of a cross. Once again, the cost was minimal, but worshipers of all ages were able to light a candle to recall the sacrifice of Christ. Once all of the candles were lit, the church members stood together, hand in hand around the cross in quiet prayer.



While creative elements of worship have produced meaningful moments at special times of the year, they have also been implemented in weekly services through dramatic readings, skits, visual art and music. At the first IGW service held in June of 2019, the praise band led the Twila Paris tune, *Make Us One*.²³¹ As the band led, members of the congregation were encouraged to come forward to the altar rail and join hands as they lifted a prayer to God to unify the church. This one moment displayed an important testament of the road that lay ahead for FUMC as they continue in IGW and reach out to the surrounding community to grow the Kingdom of God.

As stated throughout the source interviews earlier in this chapter, music has been the source of both controversy and unification in the church. While achieving a balance of congregational music has been an ongoing process, the participation of multiple generations in the church's worship ministry has helped to build unity. Effective recruiting in the various ensembles at the church has played a huge part in the successful implementation of music in the praise band, bell choir and multi-generational choir. Each has added creative elements of music to the worship ministry goals of IGW.

The church's praise band regularly features various youth of the church who have experience playing instruments or enjoy singing. One adolescent girl, age 10, sings with the band every couple of months and a former choir member, age 79, adds his voice once a month. While the band instrumentation normally consists of keyboard, guitar, bass and drums, additional members of the congregation have been invited to play on occasion, offering their gift of music on the banjo, accordion, brass and stringed instruments. Recruiting volunteers of multiple ages

²³¹ Fairview United Methodist Church, Worship Outline, June 2, 2019.

and those who play non-traditional instruments has helped to foster connection for those on the team and has provided a balance of participation across generational lines.

Another aspect of worship ministry that has shown positive attributes of IGW is the bell choir. Before the transition to IGW, the church's bell choir formerly consisted of members of the senior population of the church. Over the past few years, as long-time members left the church, the bell choir ceased to exist for a short time. To encourage greater participation among all generations, parents were invited to play with their child, and several husband and wife teams were also added to the roster. With all generations represented, the bell choir has offered music that is reflective of a modern style as well as renditions of favorite hymns. The utilization of multiple ages of ringers and the variety of musical styles has enabled the bell choir to grow and remain viable in the IGW model.

Participation in the traditional choir at FUMC dwindled throughout the transition process. When the choir director, age 87, decided to retire in May of 2019, the choir completely disbanded. While there was not enough interest to maintain a choir that sang on a weekly or even a monthly basis, a multigenerational choir, the "Celebration Choir," had been established to present anthems periodically throughout the transition during combined worship offerings and seasonal services such as Christmas and Easter. The Celebration Choir was designed to include members of all generations and, like the bell choir, featured parents and their children, individuals, married couples and some of the former members of the traditional service choir. Since FUMC did not have a pianist for the choir, an online music service was purchased at a reasonable rate that allowed for the downloading of unlimited choral anthems and worship choir songs, as well as accompaniment tracks. Freed from the financial burden of buying individual pieces of music and tracks, Celebration Choir was able to offer a variety of musical styles that

were engaging for the singers and congregation, while providing a meaningful presentation of the gospel in song at various services.

Interpretation of Findings

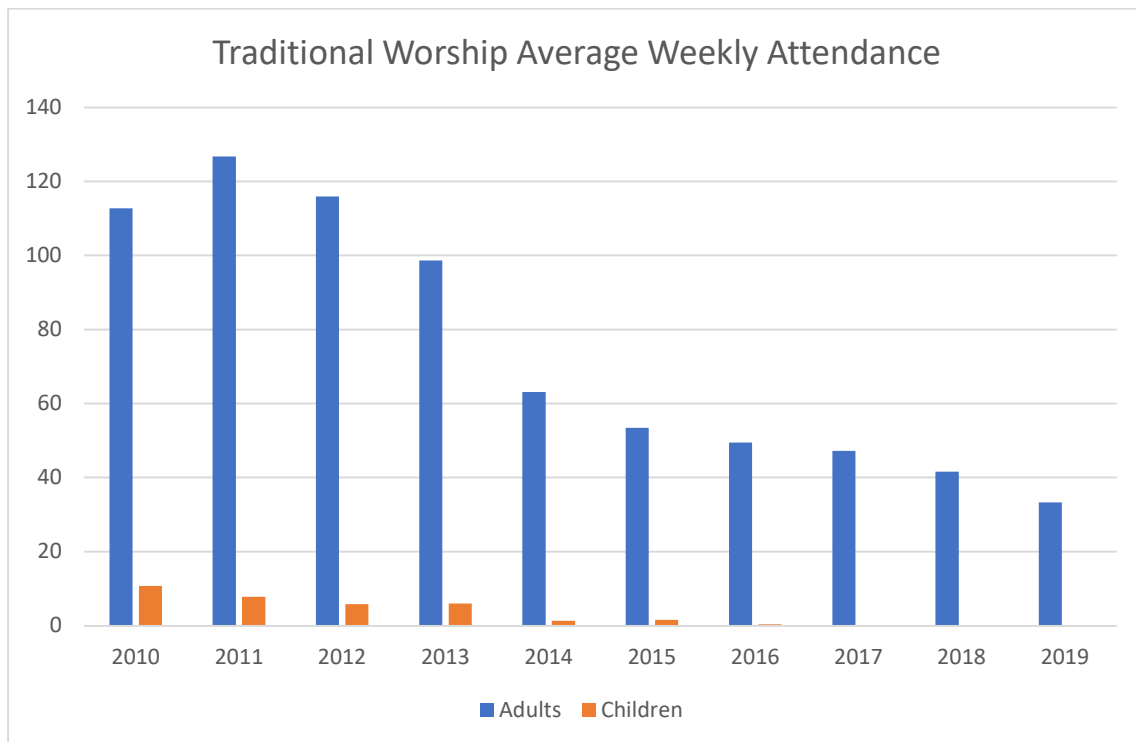
The evidence presented in this research gives credence to the importance of the two research questions presented at the onset of the study. The first research question addressed in this work sought to identify the worship ministry challenges facing smaller evangelical churches in the process of returning to one intergenerational service. The researcher hypothesized that the challenges included a resistance to change, consumerism and the implementation of a balanced worship model with limited human and financial resources. The evidence presented in this study bears out the first two stated challenges completely. Eyewitness accounts from pastors and members confirmed that a resistance to change and consumerism were both major factors that hindered the transition to IGW. Many people left the church due to changes in the structure of the service, the décor of the sanctuary, and the type of music being offered at worship. In addition, members shared the concern over a lack of volunteers to serve in ministry due to a declining population, as well as fewer financial resources to offer extended ministries beyond weekly worship gatherings.

The second research question raised in this study sought to identify the creative worship elements that could be utilized by the smaller evangelical church to facilitate effective IGW. The author hypothesized that visual and performance arts, music, including congregational singing, bell and choral music, and engaging teaching were vital to an effective presentation of IGW. The eyewitness accounts and physical artifacts provide substantial evidence that the smaller church can utilize each of these elements in ways that promote the participation of multiple generations in worship. It was noted that while each of these creative elements were commented on

positively overall, there were some opposing responses about the style of music being sung and the effect it had on the ability for some people to worship and experience IGW completely.

The attendance records offered specific evidence to the need for IGW. The highest average of weekly attendance at the traditional service took place in 2011, followed by a steady decline thereafter (See Chart 1). This chart highlights the average attendance at the traditional worship service from 2010 to end of May 2019, prior to the start of IGW:²³²

Chart 1: Traditional Worship Attendance Averages 2010-2019

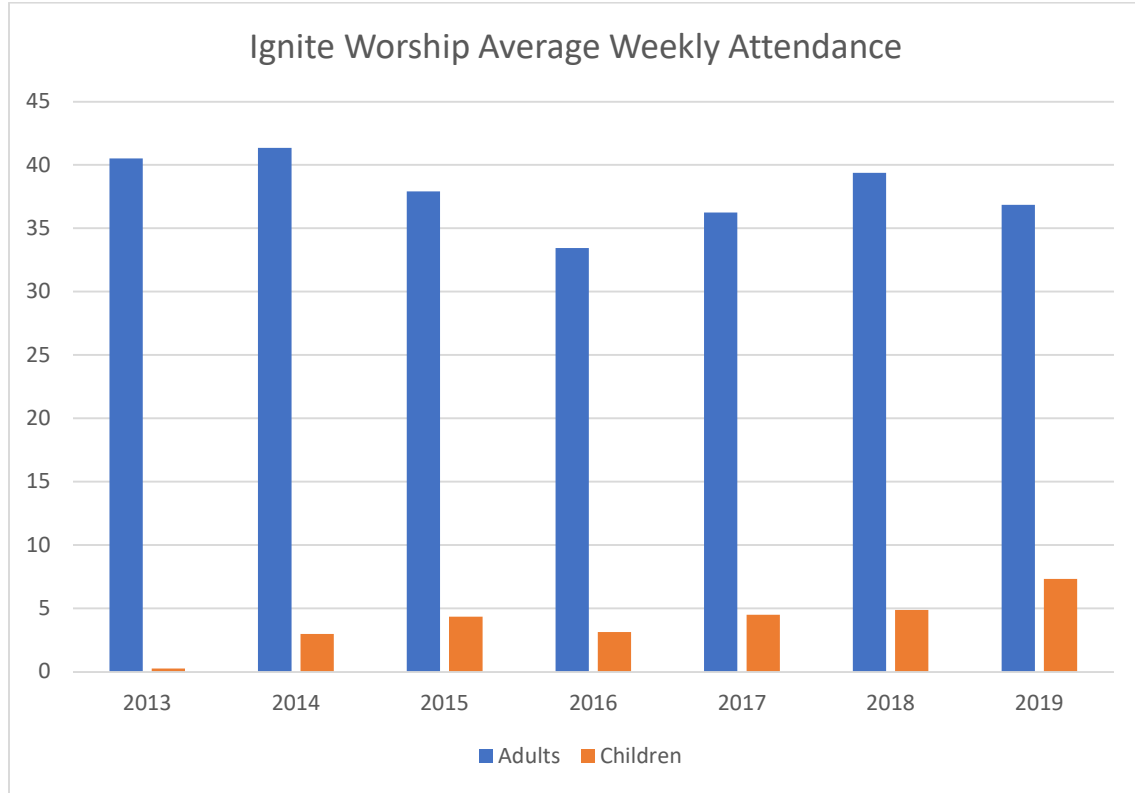


This is contrasted by the following chart which represents the attendance data from the Ignite service which began in 2013:²³³

²³² Attendance Chart numbers are recorded from Traditional weekly attendance records 2010-2019.

²³³ Attendance Chart numbers are recorded from Ignite weekly attendance records 2013-2019.

Chart 2: Ignite Worship Attendance Averages 2010-2019



Although the overall attendance at Ignite began at a much lower number, with the exception of a slight decline in attendance in 2016, the weekly attendance numbers for adults remained fairly steady. In addition, there was a steady increase in the attendance of children from zero in 2013 to a weekly average of 7 in 2019. Through an extreme worship war that occurred over the past 6 years, the church appears to have survived and is maintaining solid weekly averages in attendance. The combined attendance in 2019 through the present shows a steady average of 70 adults and 9 children in weekly worship. Those who are currently attending FUMC have expressed a firm resolve to achieve successful IGW and continue to grow the church through community outreach and local evangelism projects such as an annual Easter egg hunt and worship gathering, back-to-school party featuring contemporary Christian music, face-painting, food and bounce-houses, and a live nativity, all of which are free and open to the public. The

church has begun to look beyond its own walls and the needs of its own people to make connections with new families and the number of visitors and returning friends are beginning to show in the attendance records for 2020.

Summary

Smaller congregations face unique challenges as they struggle to remain relevant in today's culture. The evidence provided in this study suggests that although the pathway may be difficult, it can be accomplished. Through thoughtful communication, establishing an environment where members can see not just where the church has been, but where it is going, and assisting members to take ownership of the changes being made, the smaller evangelical church can carve a path to meet the needs of the local community.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a summary of the findings of the case study which was conducted at the Fairview United Methodist Church. It will include an overview of the significance of the study as well as the relationship of the findings to the research questions. Furthermore, it will explore the correlation of the findings to the existing literature on the topic of effective IGW in the smaller evangelical church. Finally, information will be shared as to the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for further research.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges of presenting effective IGW in the smaller evangelical church. In a culture where megachurches have dominated the worship landscape, many smaller churches have faced a steady decline in attendance at weekly worship. According to Lifeway Research, “Three in 5 (61 percent) pastors say their churches faced a decline in worship attendance or growth of 5 percent or less in the last three years. Almost half (46 percent) say their giving decreased or stayed the same from 2017 to 2018.”²³⁴ For the church, any reduction in attendance can cause problems, but for churches that see an average of 100 or fewer people in the pews on Sundays, the loss of human and financial resources can be devastating. The attendance records presented in this study were consistent with these statistics, with weekly averages of adult attendance declining and the lack of any children in the traditional worship service at all in the past several years. The addition of the more modern worship experience saw a modest increase in adults, but the average weekly attendance of children at that

²³⁴ Aaron Earls, “Small, Struggling Congregations Fill U.S. Church Landscape,” Lifeway Research, March 6, 2019. Accessed February 20, 2020. <https://lifewayresearch.com/2019/03/06/small-struggling-congregations-fill-u-s-church-landscape/>.

service grew from zero to eight over the course of a few years. This is consistent with Danielson who noted that “the culture of a typical small church tends to grow organically, emulating the people who currently attend the church.”²³⁵ The fact that the traditional service continued to decline and the new service added numbers, including children validated the need for change in the presentation of worship as stated by all three of the pastors who served during the transition process.²³⁶ Further, the evidence presented in this case study at Fairview United Methodist Church confirmed that resistance to change, consumerism and the lack of resources have had a negative impact on the ability of the church to transition into IGW. Proof of these challenges was presented through first-hand accounts of pastors, members and the direct observations of the researcher, and were supported through church documents.

The resistance to change and the emphasis on consumerism were corroborated as the two main challenges in the movement to IGW in this study. Evidence was presented from meeting minutes and eye-witness accounts indicating that long-time members raised objections to more modern approaches of worship, causing the church to split into two separate worship services. When the decision was made to integrate back into one IGW, worshippers from both sides stated their preferences, most of which centered on music. While some members raised objections and departed before IGW began in the summer of 2019, others chose to leave following its inception. This is consistent with concerns raised by Parsley, who wrote, “Demographic niches and consumer conveniences are not attracting the next generation to join us. . . We are not learning enough from each other. We are not connecting generationally, and we are not birthing new

²³⁵ Danielson, 212.

²³⁶ Miller, Gerber and Tickle Pastoral Interviews.

family members.”²³⁷ Parsley also advised that “We will strengthen our family of believers if we aren’t overly protective of our own success and defensive of the way we’ve always done things.”²³⁸ In this study, the findings offered proof that the worship preferences and the changes enacted were a factor in the decision of some to leave, disregarding the need for all members of the church family to be represented and adjust to the changing culture.

One recurring theme raised by many of those offering eye-witness accounts in this study was the loss of long-time members of the church. Two of the pastors admitted that a lack of communication during the process contributed to these departures.²³⁹ Wallace noted in her article on small member churches that the process of change must be approached carefully:

“The family church may be apprehensive about change. It is usually easier to focus on conserving what has been than to experiment with what could be. Change means conflict, which may mean losing people that one cannot afford to alienate. New ideas need to be introduced patiently and tested with key leaders. To make accepting them easier, new ideas need to be shaped by past traditions and values and guided by the hopes and gifts of people in the church today (pastor, leaders, and all members, even the newer ones).”²⁴⁰

In the study at FUMC, the lack of advance communication to the existing congregation about the reasons for change coupled with the lack of involvement by members of all ages in the attempt to offer different experiences in worship erupted into a conflict of competing viewpoints. The findings, as presented in testimonies of pastors and members indicated that while the style of music was a major concern in worship transition, those interviewed noted a strong desire to remain connected to church family helped in easing the process to IGW. As illustrated in the

²³⁷ Parsley, 27.

²³⁸ Ibid., 91.

²³⁹ Miller and Gerber Pastoral Interviews.

²⁴⁰ Wallace, Worship Matters online article.

attendance charts, some at FUMC made the choice to leave, while others adapted and worked toward the complete integration of IGW.

The final challenge raised in the first research question was the lack of human and financial resources in the smaller church. In this case study, this concern presented itself mainly in the lack of volunteers for key ministries. Meeting minutes and member interviews commented on the need for additional help in worship and other ministry areas of the church. However, the researcher offered direct observational data that explained how the church was able to overcome the deficit in giving and still produce effective creative worship elements for IGW. Thus, in this question, the first two challenges were fully supported, while the third challenge was only partially proven.

Regarding the second research question, members highlighted the importance of music, drama, dance, visual displays, engaging teaching and a focus on Scripture as key creative elements in IGW, which was supported through physical artifacts and church documents. The need to approach worship in creative ways meant that members had to consider viewing worship from a perspective that was different than their own. This coincides with existing literature by Aroney-Sine, stating that “To reshape our spiritual practices periodically, intentionally planning to give God delight and experience God’s delight in us is awe inspiring.”²⁴¹ Utilizing the artistic and evangelistic gifts of the body of Christ at FUMC was a necessary part of honoring the church family that God had established in that place. McElroy agreed, noting that it is vital to explore “gifts designed by the Creator to ignite the heart and engage the whole person.”²⁴² He further defined the need for creativity by asking a poignant question, “How can we really be one unless

²⁴¹ Aroney-Sine, 160.

²⁴² McElroy, 16.

we are sharing our gifts, functioning as God designed us?”²⁴³ McElroy commented that Paul’s letter to the Ephesians was proof of God’s equipping of mankind, “and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12). Based on this Scripture, McElroy provided an answer to his own question, “If artists are not encouraged to contribute their gifts, observations, personalities and visions to the body of Christ, congregations and the universal church will continue to miss one of God’s key traits—His astounding creativity.”²⁴⁴ Specific examples of the use of gifts were documented in the study, as well as other artistic displays and activities in worship that enabled multiple generations to participate in IGW at the church in this study. Thus, using the artistic talents of individuals in creative elements for worship is a key function of worship when used to build up the body of Christ through IGW.

Implications of the Findings

Effective communication and patience are vital to any type of change to the worship practices of a church. Pastors must explain the need for revitalization and gain support of the congregation before implementing change. Baker commented that “It is imperative that the leader’s call is validated by the Word of God, so when the spiritual leader’s call is challenged, criticized by culture, and misunderstood by the congregation, Word of God will be the stabilizing force to keep the leader invigorated.”²⁴⁵ Baker further noted that “sound character is necessary to earn influence with followers. Successful spiritual leadership is achieved through the level of

²⁴³ McElroy, 17.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Jarvis Baker, “Leadership Matters: The Process of Leading a Declining Church to Revitalization Utilizing Early Church Principles.” (DMin., Liberty University School of Divinity, 2018). 39.

influence the leader has with his followers.”²⁴⁶ Wilson added that “Clarity of direction and purpose invites creativity and innovation as a church moves forward in substantial agreement toward a God-inspired future.”²⁴⁷ Once a vision is cast that is based on the Word and received in the Spirit, pastors and church leadership must involve members of the congregation to allow them to take ownership of the transition process.

The size of a church does not dictate the ability to engage in IGW. Smaller churches can continue to have an impact on the worship landscape by focusing on the strengths of their own body of believers and meeting the needs of the communities surrounding the church. Danielson commented that “Success in a small church does not look the same as in a large church.”²⁴⁸ She further noted that smaller churches can be perceived as “unsophisticated, unprofessional, and unable to compete in the large church world” and that this perceptions could cause smaller churches to “miss the ministry God has given them.”²⁴⁹ Each church must examine the resources it has and, following the vision given the pastor, utilize those resources to achieve IGW in their own settings.

Adding creative elements to IGW in the smaller evangelical church can be accomplished even in those churches where budgets are tight. The technological age has enabled churches to find low or no-cost resources through online sources. In addition, smaller churches have congregation of people in varying stages of faith development and each can bring levels of

²⁴⁶ Baker, 42.

²⁴⁷ Bill Wilson, “What Does a Healthy Church Look Like?” *Review and Expositor*, Vol. 113 (3) (2016): 335.

²⁴⁸ Danielson, 206.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 207.

understanding and insight that segregated worship cannot achieve. McElroy explained that the church must be willing to explore a variety of avenues to bring the creative arts back into the:

“May we be willing to seek God for the creative means he would use to convey his messages, willing to risk and to empower the artists in our congregations to contribute to what God is speaking to our churches, willing to make room for the arts and creativity to take their fundamental place in communicating the astonishing love story of our creative God.”²⁵⁰

Involving multiple generations in these creative elements fosters a family environment that aides in the success of IGW.

Limitations of the Study

Since this research was conducted as a part of a case study, there were unavoidable limitations. These limitations included the time period in which the study occurred, the worship knowledge and stylistic preferences of those interviewed, the specific community in which the church is located, and the unique circumstances involved in the transition. In this section, these limitations are reviewed for the consideration of other churches desiring to transition to IGW. The study covered a period of only ten years of history at FUMC. As such, it was not possible to determine the effects of other historical changes in worship that may have impacted the attitudes of church members or shaped their worship preferences. In addition, the source interviews were limited only to the pastors who led the church during the study period, and members who are still actively engaged in worship, or had left in the few months when IGW was enacted. The study therefore excluded both the historical artifacts and the insight of those who left prior to the study period which could have added significant insight into the findings.

The body of believers who attended FUMC throughout the study period had varied understandings of and about worship. The lack of proper education and communication with

²⁵⁰ McElroy, 132.

members may have skewed their statements. In addition, their accounts may have been uncontrollably tainted by their own stylistic preferences. Although these are considered limitations, those interviewed presented a broad spectrum of worshipers and are likely indicative of the body of believers encountered at other small churches.

The setting of the church studied was of a small, white-collar community. The church had evolved from a rural church at its inception to one situated in the heart of a town comprised of many young families that had moved into the area. The findings in this study were characteristic of the demographic of people within the local area. Other small churches in rural or urban settings may experience differing viewpoints based on the cultural diversity of their own communities.

This case study occurred at a church which originally offered one traditional worship service, transitioned into two age-segregated services and then back to one IGW over the ten-year time period. In addition, there may be some limitations due to the fact that the researcher was employed at the church during part of time period that was studied. Although care was taken to exclude the opinions of the researcher, there is a possibility of personal bias in the situations that occurred and may be overly represented. Therefore, events that unfolded in this church resulted in events that may not occur in churches who have only one worship service and desire to incorporate changes that will establish IGW in their setting.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provided insight from a single small church engaged in transition to IGW with a specific focus on the effectiveness of creative worship elements. One recommendation for future study would be to expand the research by investigating several small churches within the same community or other churches with parallel demographic populations and geographic

definitions. The study could include the historical movements within the individual churches and then be compared to this church and others to track similarities and explore other means beyond creative elements in IGW.

Another possible study could involve the impact of other ministries on the effective integration of IGW in the smaller church. Exploring the involvement of members who are involved in a variety of other church ministries such as Education, Mission or Outreach may provide insight into how overall attitude about a shift to IGW is received. This study could further emphasize how the intimacy of the members as they serve together in ministry affects their willingness to accept and participate in IGW.

A final area of consideration would be the effect of burnout for the volunteers who serve in worship ministry in the smaller church that engages in IGW. Research could include a study of the number of those participating in multiple aspects of worship ministry (i.e. choir, drama, sound team, visual arts, etc.) and the strategies utilized by churches to recruit more members to volunteer. This study could also incorporate statistics that indicate how long volunteers are able to sustain participation in multiple ministries across the church and possible habits to avoid burnout among those who serve in smaller churches.

Conclusion

This case study explored the process of Fairview United Methodist Church transitioning toward a single IGW service. Existing literature explored the foundation for establishing IGW and the evidence gathered through source interviews, church documents, eye-witness observation and physical artifacts brought understanding to the challenges faced by smaller churches. Information gained from this study can guide smaller churches to a better understanding of the methods, processes and resources necessary for those who may be considering the move to IGW.

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