

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Addressing the Intergenerational Disconnect through
Small Group Ministry in a Rural Church**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Programs and activities at church are designed primarily to minister to the needs of specific age groups. Though this style of ministry has its place in the church, if not monitored, it can cause a division among the generations in the church. The division that exists can create a “we versus them” mindset. The generational division can create an attitude that affects the unity of the church while also a competition for resources and style preference in the church. This division also creates a culture of anemic discipleship from a lack of investment across generational lines that is a biblical call and a need in the church. This study aims to explore an avenue of correction for this division through intentional intergenerational small groups. This study will establish the biblical foundation for intergenerational investment while working with others’ contributions to this area to build the corrective components. This study used small groups with an intentional intergenerational component as the corrective method. A rural southern church with an average size was the subject of the study. Over the course of the study, intergenerational groups were formed, and they studied current relevant hot topic issues designed to stretch the thinking of all generations involved. Data was collected through surveys, journals, and planned service activities in which the partners worked together. The data was collected and investigated with an emphasis on spiritual growth and generational engagement that built bridges to induce investment and interaction that closed the generation gap.

Keywords: Rural Church, Small Groups, Intergenerational Ministry, Generations, Family Ministry

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Abbreviations

CGBC *Cerro Gordo Baptist Church*

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Over the first three-quarters of its existence, Cerro Gordo Baptist Church (CGBC) would have been considered highly effective in impacting its location.¹ However, over the past four decades, there has been a slow decline in the effectiveness of the church's inward and outward mission. Much of this decline is due to an absence of a concerted effort to make disciples. As Greg Ogden, Executive Pastor of Discipleship at Christ Church of Oak Brook, suggests there is a deficit in discipleship and what does exist is really in some manner only superficial.² This shortcoming in discipleship has only exacerbated the church's ineffectiveness and created an issue of a gap among generations. This generation gap is not necessarily new in the sense that it has occurred in the last ten to twenty years. This issue has been building for the past hundred years. In the earlier parts of the twenty-first century, life expectancy was significantly lower, creating congregations that normally consisted of two generations. However, today life expectancy is much longer and now congregations are spanning four or five generations.³ Longevity and multiple generations are not negative aspects of congregational life. However, it does manifest the issue that there must be intentionality in keeping all generations connected in the church. Unfortunately, this expansion of generations creates the possibility of generational

¹It is important to note here that there is no formal written history of CGBC; therefore, much of the following information comes from and is verified by multiple conversations with people who have been members or faithful attendees for numerous years.

² Greg Ogden, "The Discipleship Deficit: Where Have All the Disciples Gone?," *Knowing and Doing*, Spring 2011, https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/The_Discipleship_Deficit_SinglePage.

³Sam Rainer, *The Church Revitalization Checklist: A Hopeful and Practical Guide for Leading Your Congregation to a Brighter Tomorrow* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2021), 28.

gaps, which in turn, impairs the ability of the church to carry out disciple-making the way Jesus Christ intended.

The project is an endeavor to discover a solution that rectifies this issue of the generational disconnect found in CGBC among its discipleship efforts. This endeavor will not be easy, for as Dr. Karl Pillemer, Professor of Human Development at Cornell University, suggests, this is possibly the most age-segregated society ever.⁴ Dr. Pillemer's concept is evident not only in society but also in the CGBC. However, it is vitally important for the church to come back together generationally to make disciples. Bringing the church back together intergenerationally enables generations to communicate meaningfully, provides regular interaction in fellowship, and provides generations opportunities to serve others together.⁵ Each of these aspects plays its own important role in the church being what God designed it to be. It is, therefore, believed that these generational connections and opportunities will provide the needed engagement to correct the disconnect that exists in CGBC. A disconnect that was not a deliberate act, as one will see in the coming pages, but one that emerged from misguided effort and a little neglect.

As in any endeavor that one takes when something does not seem right, it is crucial to understand the scope of one's surroundings to try and make sense of why things seem the way they are and make corrections to rectify the issue. In this chapter, one will set the scope of the surroundings and identify the issue at hand. To formulate a correct assessment, chapter one of this thesis project first describes the ministry context of CGBC to show the environment in

⁴ Karl Pillemer, *30 Lessons for Living Tried and True Advice from the Wisest Americans* (Detroit, MI: Gale Cengage Learning, 2012); see also Robert, W. Pazmiño, and S. S. Kang "Generational Fragmentations and Christian Education," *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (Fall, 2011): 379-94.
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/generational-fragmentations-christian-education/docview/896481302/se-2>.

⁵ Christine Ross, "Being an Intergenerational Congregation," February 28, 2022.
http://www.intergenerationalfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/being_an_intergenerational_congregation_-_ross.pdf

which the work of this project takes place. From this context, the problem and purpose are determined and discussed. The chapter then addresses some basic assumptions surrounding the project. This chapter also looks at some key terms that need correct understanding for the project to be understood clearly. This section also discusses the scope of delimitations in which this project investigates the problem determined from the ministry context. Next, it briefly describes any possible limitations that could flaw the project's work. Finally, it supplies and briefly discusses the overall thesis that the project works toward to offer a corrective to the problem determined by the ministry context.

Ministry Context

Beginning Context

Cerro Gordo Baptist Church was founded in Cerro Gordo, North Carolina, in 1906, in a town built around the lumber industry, railroad transportation, and agriculture. At that time, the town was a thriving up-and-coming area. In the hustle and bustle of this community, Cerro Gordo Baptist Church came about to meet the spiritual needs of the people. The church grew from its infancy to around three hundred active members. The town took a downturn when the prosperous lumber mill was destroyed by a fire and never recovered. This tragedy caused a slow downward trajectory from which the town would never recover.⁶ However, despite this community environment, the church held firm. It was relocated a mile from its original location on donated land to its current location in 1965, with new facilities and renewed excitement.

From the 1960s until now, the church has withstood the continued community downturn to its stabilized position. The church, of course, has suffered a decrease in active church

⁶ Due to no formal written history of Cerro Gordo, information on the lumber mill and its impact on the town of Cerro Gordo was obtained from the Town of Cerro Gordo records archive.

membership due to this community environment. The church's active membership has stabilized at around one hundred active members. However, this decrease in membership was not only due to the community dynamic but also to the poor leadership of the church. In the late 1960s through the late 1980s, strong conservative leadership was in place that kept the church focused on its foundational mission.⁷ During the late 1980s through the early 2000s, there was much leadership turnover and other internal church issues. These issues ranged from marital and family matters of the pastors and other church leaders, the death of a pastor, and poor leadership, leading to power and position grabbing among lay leadership. These issues caused much hurt and discouragement, resulting in many seeking church membership at other local churches.⁸ At the same time, those who stayed became disheartened and apathetic inwardly, and towards the community.

During the late 2000s to early 2010s, the church leadership began to improve, and the church walked through a period of healing and restoration. This time of reconciliation caused many seeking refuge elsewhere to return, while some were too wounded and apprehensive about returning. However, this time allowed the church to cultivate an environment with a desire to connect with the gospel and nurture within.

Changing Context

By 2012 the Cerro Gordo Baptist Church had stabilized at 85 percent family units to 15 percent individual units in congregational makeup.⁹ During the time of healing, the pastor retired from the full-time ministry, which left a leadership vacuum, and two families became the

⁷ Information about the church's leadership in the past was obtained and verified through multiple conversations with church leaders and faithful members across multiple decades.

⁸ The number of members seeking church membership elsewhere during this time is found in the church membership book, which calls for church letters of transfer with dates corresponding to that period.

⁹ These statistics were obtained by working with the church clerk. The numbers were derived by using the church membership roll, determining who active members were then, and using those members' family makeup.

primary leadership. In late 2013 the current leadership was called to lead the church. Though it took some time before establishing the new leadership, the church remained determined to grow in discipleship and reach the community.

Though there was a significant amount of desire, the church never addressed a shadow vein of apathy that was present. This evidence of indifference revealed itself when discipleship and outreach efforts required more time and effort. Many outreach and discipleship methods were attempted and were stunted or struggled due to a lack of participation and drive. Compounding these issues was the absence of support from the two families who assumed leadership in many of the congregation's minds. The combination of these issues led to the scrapping of efforts of discipleship and outreach, leading to stagnation and ineffectiveness.

During this period, the church endured a period of theological and doctrinal realignment. This realignment addressed issues that allowed congregates to live how they desired, racial and family makeup, and several ways the church is designed to function. This period again caused the congregation makeup to shift toward newer families that were not the traditional family style with which the church usually ministered. However, this season of transformation was a positive aspect for the church.

Current Context

The church realigned to a 45 percent traditional family, 35 percent non-traditional family (i.e., single parent, divorced, blended, etc.), and 20 percent individuals.¹⁰ The church began to be less apathetic. A renewed vigor was found in the church. Outreach and discipleship became seen as a necessity, not just an item to discuss. The church saw numerous families entering the

¹⁰ These statistical numbers were derived from the same method used in the changing context section.

congregation, including teenagers and children. This influx of people drew attention to the need for someone to minister to this new influx. The church hired a new staff member for the teens, children's, and music ministries.

Again, this created a shift in the style of church Cerro Gordo Baptist was going to be. First, the services and ministries offered changed with the influx of new families and younger individuals. The church moved from a more traditional to a blended style of worship and began to offer as many ministries as needed to meet the church's felt needs. Second, the leadership changed. The two families that held the most significant sway in the congregation's minds began to loosen their hold, which was not always about having the final say but from fear of change. Support began to grow from the deacon/elder board of the church. This group of leaders started seeing the need for better discipleship and outreach.¹¹ This new vision from the leadership cultivated an environment for the last change. The last change that took place was moving the congregation from knowledge to application. The people of the church began to carry out and do ministry. Involvement was increasing in all areas of the church. Almost every part of what a church could ask for could be seen. Church services were conducted in a way that allowed virtually everyone to have a great experience. Evangelism, forms of discipleship, and service opportunities were functioning at a high level.

Unrealized Potential

However, there was a missing component to the life of the church. There was an unrealized potential. Most everyone desires the church to grow and to make much of the glory of God. Nevertheless, the leaders all agreed that something was lacking. The church was

¹¹ The understanding of this new reality came from meetings with the deacons. Observing the change in attitude and drive to see others reached for the kingdom of God, this change continued without prompting.

experiencing a lot of slipping through the cracks of new members and low retention of guests. The leadership team and staff agreed that even though there was a great deal of ministry going on and they had a reputation as a loving church, there was still a lot of non-interaction among generations. Upon investigation, they discovered that each generation did not interact very well. When ministries planned or sponsored activities, they were scheduled for and attended almost solely across generational lines. When interviewing each generational group, there was a negative outlook on each other. The younger generation saw the older generations as parental and had difficulty conversing with them. The older generation saw the younger as too carefree and stubborn.¹²

The leadership team and staff began to be more observant and noticed the great extent to which there was segregation within the ministries of Cerro Gordo Baptist. The primary way that segregation occurred within the ministries was through age-appropriate ministry. The design of these age-appropriate ministries was to meet the felt needs of the families and individuals of the church. The consumeristic mentality of American culture fueled this segregated state. This mentality cultivated in the members of Cerro Gordo Baptist a mind and heart for "I." This mindset did not directly fuel the idea of the individual but more so the "I" concept of an age group. In short, the church's people sought after their age group as the primary focus of the church's effort. The leadership observed that each generation sought more of themselves than investing in the other generations. Each generation not investing in others created a great deal of division and, ultimately, the ineffectiveness of the church's efforts.

This division among the generations created an intergenerational disconnect still evident in the church. It has caused the church to function in a manner where it does not realize the

¹² This conclusion came from impromptu conversations while visiting with some of the older generations over a cup of coffee and interacting with the younger generations on church trips and activities.

potential for which God has created it. However, there is a great desire among the leadership team and staff to find a solution to what problems exist in the church. In this ministry context, this project seeks to find a corrective for the intergenerational disconnect that has developed in the church and stunted the church's work. It is from this understanding that one can draw out the definitive problem that exists within CGBC.

Problem Presented

The problem is that Cerro Gordo Baptist Church has an intergenerational disconnect which inhibits the mission, evangelism, and discipleship of the church. Cerro Gordo Baptist Church, from its inception, has been a family-oriented rural church. However, as years passed and the family structure began to change, the church, still striving to remain family-oriented, began to lose ground. The ground that was lost came about through the change in the demographic of the church body. The church's demographics transitioned from family-based to single parents, blended families, singles, and sometimes kids on their own. The church recognized that the demographic had changed and began changing the ministry methodology.

The methodology sought was that of many churches in the 1980s and 1990s. The idea was to develop and utilize age-specific ministries to reach each group according to their needs. These age-specific ministries included adult activities, adult groups, youth outings, youth groups, and so forth, with each group that appeared in the church demographic. This methodology was applied across the entire mission of the church. This methodological strategy has remained the persistent way of ministering to this day. This strategy was successful in the short term; however, the long-term effects are seen in the body and its stunted effort toward the church's mission.

Upon investigating the results, something that one does in conversations with different demographic ages, one can see that the purpose behind the age-specific movement led to some

success; however, it created other issues that have remained unaddressed. These issues that have remained unaddressed have stunted the effectiveness of CGBC in its mission to the local community. The greatest of these issues, one which is an umbrella to the others, is that of an intergenerational disconnect. This disconnect has created a gap between the different age groups that make up the church. It is common to hear conversations about other age groups with pronouns such as “them” and “us.” These conversations are not about doing life together but in the sense of competition.

This gap of disconnect between the generations has created an issue in the church's evangelism, discipleship, and overall mission. The disconnect has affected evangelism from the standpoint of the “them and us” mentality. Crossing generational lines does not happen even when an individual's faith works better for another generation. This generational issue has also affected the church's discipleship in the way of life experience. The disconnect works like a parent-child relationship in which no one wants to hear what the other has to say. This whole way of interacting, or lack thereof, inhibits the church's mission. The generations do not spend genuine time in fellowship and life together. They do not know how to interact with one another and therefore do not truly know how to share the gospel with others. They do not spend deliberate time together to share God experiences and thereby grow in their relationship with God. This generational disconnect is the opposite of what is commanded in Scripture and harms the body of Christ significantly. The disconnect has created anemic believers throughout all generations and has stunted the church's impact on the community in which it exists.

The generational disconnect is the problem that Cerro Gordo Baptist Church has and, until recently, has gone undiagnosed. This issue has caused much frustration among staff and leadership teams. It has led to unintentional division and stress that could have been avoided.

Now that the generational disconnect has been seen, much work must be done theologically and methodologically to return the church's biblical condition to full the commands of Scripture. The generations of Cerro Gordo Baptist Church must reconnect so that the church exemplifies the truth, hope, and power of the gospel.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to develop an intergenerational small group ministry that implements strategies to improve the generational disconnect. The generational disconnect exists not only in the church's fellowship, the traditional gathering around a plate of food, but also in the deeper biblical community of the early church. The purpose of the small group ministry is to create an environment in which a true biblical community is given room for expression and fostered into more significant influence and guidance in the lives of the individuals involved.

The main aim of the intergenerational small group ministry is three-fold. First is to provide an environment where generations genuinely spend time together, getting to know one another's lives, a small group ministry. The first aim stems from the understanding that one must genuinely know that person to have a life-guiding influence in someone's life. Second is the aim of creating a two-way avenue of influence in which each generation is learning from the other, unlike the traditional top-down mindset, a mentor relationship. This second aim allows the individuals in the small group ministry to adjust presuppositions so they can come alongside the others more effectively. The final aim is to provide an environment through the first two segments that will cultivate adequate fertile ground into which discipleship, evangelism, and missions will become intergenerational passions that exhibit the true body of Christ in action, expressed in a need-based community outreach event.

These three aims will be achieved through deeper biblical studies and opportunities to work together. These Bible studies will be in small groups with a mentorship component. The biblical studies will cover the biblical principles that are the foundations for intergenerational ministry and the motivation for such ministry over the first three weeks. Upon completing those studies, the small groups will conduct studies about current and day-to-day issues, such as how the gospel plays out in one's job and with racial issues. Here, intergenerational ministry will occur and be evaluated for its impact on the individual's life and the whole church's mission. There will also be an opportunity to apply and express each individual's faith through a needs-based community outreach event that will meet physical needs while addressing spiritual needs. The purpose is to create an environment in which each generation influences across generational lines and, therefore, reconnects the church's generations in more than a social way.

Basic Assumptions

This project assumes that the mission of Cerro Gordo Baptist Church has been affected by the intergenerational disconnect. Suppose this disconnect among the generations is not corrected. In that case, the church will continue to be ineffective in the mission of the kingdom of God, and the members of the congregation will not live the full Christian life for which God designed them to live. The project assumes that the communal disconnect will correct itself by implementing a small group ministry that intentionally consists of groups with individuals from multiple generations. This correction will enable the church to be more effective in discipleship while encouraging individuals to be more evangelistic daily.

The project assumes that with the generational blended groups, each generation will learn from the life experiences of others' faith journeys, strengthening each generation's journey. This learning from life experiences will flow both ways allowing for greater fellowship among the

church's congregation. This greater fellowship will, in turn, create an environment where the church can effectively reach the community. Therefore, the church will grow in maturity of faith and experience numerical growth in the kingdom as individuals and families come into the kingdom of God.

One can also assume that there will be a trickle-down effect that will infiltrate the families of the church and thereby affect the family structure of the congregation in a positive way. A final assumption of this project is that church members will make themselves available upon realizing the necessity of intergenerational community. Church members will take those without a solid Christian influence and develop those relationships to bring about maturity in others and greater maturity in their lives.

Definitions

This project consists of creating an environment in which the correction of the intergenerational disconnect among Cerro Gordo Baptist church members takes place. This correction is to aid the believers of the congregation to grow in their discipleship and evangelistic efforts. This correction will also cultivate an environment that aids the church in being effective in its overall mission. Throughout this project, terms will be used interchangeably and possibly in less traditional ways. This section of the paper will offer the definitions for these terms, which will aid in a clearer understanding of the material. Four primary terms must be defined to better understand the project: community, discipleship, generations, and small group.

Community. “Community is not a place, a building, or an organization; nor is it an exchange of information over the Internet. Community is both a feeling and a set of relationships

among people.”¹³ When thinking of community, many times, it is the opposite of this that comes to mind. For many, community is about place and structures. However, this is far from the correct understanding of community as applied to this project. Though biblical community is much deeper, many today stay shallow by viewing biblical community as a meal together or simply the time spent shaking hands before or after church services. However, biblical community is much more than having a simple rallying point but goes much deeper. For this project biblical community, or simply community, is understood as going beyond the here and now and “sharing with each other on a level that will enhance our spiritual relationships with one another and with God.”¹⁴ This aspect of community is where Cerro Gordo Baptist Church has a disconnect within the generations.

Discipleship. A disciple has been invited "to participate wholeheartedly and engage in fellowship" with someone, more specifically, in this case, Jesus Christ.¹⁵ Discipleship is the process by which believers become complete and competent followers of Jesus Christ.¹⁶ The style of discipleship varies from situation to situation or church group to church group. This process, though, is how the attitudes, actions, and attitudes are transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. It is this understanding behind the term used in this project.

Generations. In some minds, when they speak of generations, they seem to refer to a generation as an older and younger group. For this project, this is now how the term generation

¹³ David M. Chavis, and Kien Lee, “What Is Community Anyway?” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2015. <https://doi.org/10.48558/EJJ2-JJ82>.

¹⁴ Jerry Bridges, *True Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 6.

¹⁵ Tamara L. Anderson, and Shelly A. Skinner, “Feelings: Discipleship That Understands the Affective Processes of a Disciple of Christ,” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 66-78. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891318820333>.

¹⁶ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 17.

or generations will appear. When these terms appear, they refer to a group of individuals who share a life-altering event, similar social and economic factors, and a birth year span of fifteen to twenty years.¹⁷ It is between these groups of people that there is a disconnect.

Intergenerational. Intergenerational, in its simplest form, means between generations.¹⁸ For this project, intergenerational refers to the interaction, Bible studies, service, or fellowship of the multiple generations of CGBC. Intergenerational does not just mean that interaction is between directly preceding or following a pair of generations but is an interaction between any generation that currently exists.

Rural Church. According to the Census Bureau rural is any population, housing, or territory not in an urban area.¹⁹ Therefore, a rural church would be a church that is not in an urban area. That is a true definition but very broad in understanding. A rural church is a church that is not just non-urban but one that is different and unique from even other churches that are close in proximity. For this project, a rural church is a non-urban, non-suburban church that tells a story of the diversity and makeup of the surrounding community of farmers, school teachers, nurses, doctors, and retirees.

Small-Group. A small group is a group of three or more people, usually no more than fifteen, who are linked by a common purpose, influence, and shared identity.²⁰ As it pertains

¹⁷ Valerie M. Grubb, *Clash of the Generations: Managing the New Workplace Reality* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 15.

¹⁸ James J. Ponzetti Jr, "Family Studies and Intergenerational Studies: Intersections and Opportunities," *Journal of Intergenerational Relationships* 2, (January 2003): 9, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314329592_journal_of_intergenerational_relationships.

¹⁹ "Rural America," United States Census Bureau, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://mtgis-portal.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=49cd4bc9c8eb444ab51218c1d5001ef6#:~:text=The%20Census%20Bureau%20defines%20rural,rural%20based%20on%20this%20definition>

²⁰ "Communication in the Real World," University of Minnesota, accessed March 2, 2022, <https://open.lib.umn.edu/communication/chapter/13-1-understanding-small-groups/>

directly to the church world small groups are more about supplying a vehicle for individuals “to carry out God’s will in everyday life,” a concept grounded theologically in both the Old and New Testaments.²¹ In this project, small groups are the vehicle through which multiple generations will experience discipleship through shared experiences. For this project, a small group is not simply a small number of individuals but an intentional limiting of the number of individuals to promote more significant interactions and cultivate openness.

Limitations

While working through the steps of this thesis project, a few things stood out that could create some difficulties that may skew the project. These difficulties, or limitations, are due to the reality that projects like these are not performed in a vacuum but in the real world, which will provide issues that one cannot control. These issues affect the project's outcome, and one must address these factors first. The first of these limitations is due to the size of Cerro Gordo Baptist Church. The church is a small rural church, so the subjects to participate are limited in number.²² Not only is the pool of participants small, but the number of people who will readily participate also increases the possibility of the overall participation number being low. This limitation, too, will possibly lead to a broad application that is not based necessarily on a greater, more accurate solution that would come from greater participation.

A second limitation that is closely related to the first is that of genuine participation in the work of the small groups. This genuine participation is out of the control of this project. The reality that those who participate will be fully engaged in the studies and activities that may be a

²¹ Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Intergenerational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 6.

²² Though the church is small, this study pool will consist of the majority of the church's adult individuals across multiple generations.

solution to the generational disconnect in the church cannot be guaranteed. Genuine engagement is necessary to obtain the best possible solution, and therefore by lack of engagement, the conclusion may be less accurate than is the case.

A final limitation is in the honesty of the people. Throughout the project, many surveys will be done to establish a foundation to work from, and then a final survey to document the progress made through the project process. In these surveys, the issue lies in the ability of the people who participate to be open and honest. The congregation of Cerro Gordo Baptist Church is a loving group of people who do not want to be hurtful in any capacity. Therefore, due to past experiences with survey taking among the congregation, there is a natural bent toward being light on the truth versus being brutally honest. In short, the congregation always gives information from a positive perspective, even when not always helpful. This reality, of course, would set the project on a foundation that would skew the results and not allow for the most effective solution to the problem of this project.

Delimitations

When trying to find a solution to an issue, the desire is to include as many people as possible in the research process. However, that is not always the best way of addressing the problem. Sometimes it is better to use a narrower focus that provides a better understanding and a more precise applicable solution. Therefore, for the work of this project, there is one primary delimitation. This delimitation is in the parameters set on the participants in the study. For this thesis project study, the generations that will participate will consist of those who are eighteen years of age and older. This means for this project that Cerro Gordo Baptist Church provides for this study groups that consist of those from the Silent Generation through the earlier Generation

Z.²³ For some locations, this many generations may be an excessively large group of individuals; however, for Cerro Gordo Baptist, this is necessary to create a large enough pool of participants to carry out the research project. This means that all adults in this age range are welcome to join; however, once the project begins, the opportunity to participate will be closed.

Limiting the group of participants to the above generational range limit appears to segregate the younger generations from participation in the project; however, there are three reasons for this apparent exclusion. First are the issues arising from including minors in research projects like this. Second is the current ministry efforts that the youth and children's leaders carry out. These efforts are keeping the kids engaged on their level and are currently working across the ages when opportunities arise. It would be better to allow them to continue carrying out their work while the project works for a solution before it is implemented in that age group. The final reason is an assumption that this paper will address later. However, suffice it to say that it is believed that once the other generations settle on the importance of the purpose behind this project, there will be a trickle-down effect to the younger ages. This mindset will allow parents and grandparents from these older generations to impact those following behind them. This process limits many of the younger generations at Cerro Gordo Baptist Church due to home structure, multiple job parents, or non-Christians, in which these younger generations live. However, this issue will later be addressed as ministry structures, due to the effects of this project, are adjusted to meet those needs.

²³ A list of each generation within this period can be found with a brief explanation of each generation in the literature review section of this paper.

Thesis Statement

If Cerro Gordo Baptist Church implements an intergenerational small group ministry, then the fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship of the church will be more effective. The desired outcome for this DMIN project is that Cerro Gordo Baptist, through an intergenerational small group ministry, is better equipped to impact the community and the lives of those who make up the local church body. This is seen in the generations of the church body walking through life's journey together. The people will not be so inwardly focused and private with their spiritual lives, but they will openly and honestly share what they are learning and experiencing. The project will create an environment where struggling people will know whom they can confide in and seek guidance. This project will provide for genuine biblical discipleship to take place. A discipleship process that imparts the truths of God into one's life and creates change through the Word of God and the Christian influence of others.

This discipleship would be a church with groups with two-way encouragement and discipleship in everyone's walk with Jesus. This connection will bring the church together as God created it and thereby begin to have more effective evangelism in the community, with the hope of the gospel. The effects would come from how people live out their faith at work, school, sporting events, and even in the intentional needs-based help that opens the door for addressing individuals' spiritual needs. In turn, it will create a continuous cycle of growth of the individual, the connectedness of the body of Christ, and outreach to the community.

For these intergenerational small groups to work for discipleship, they will study the Scriptures and how they intersect different life issues. These groups will also offer times to discuss how biblical principles intersect with daily life, such as sharing life experiences, how these issues have worked out in others' lives, and provide time to ask questions. As with

discipleship, these groups will better equip people to share their faith. These groups will help those involved see the need for and purpose of sharing one's faith.

The small groups will provide opportunities for one to share their faith; however, the emphasis will be on sharing one's faith throughout daily activities, not just in an organized church event. These groups will provide for accountability in both discipleship and evangelism. The final aspect of the church being more effective through these groups pertains to its mission. These groups will affect the church's mission through their effort in the other two areas. When discipleship and evangelism work hand in hand as they should, the mission will experience the effects. The church will see people investing in others, sharing their faith within their generation and across generational lines, and volunteering more freely for ministry, not just their generation's ministry. These groups will create a cultural shift through their discipleship and evangelism efforts that will be seen and experienced by the entire church. Therefore, if Cerro Gordo Baptist Church implements an intergenerational small group ministry, then the church's fellowship, evangelism, and discipleship will be more effective.

In this chapter, the backdrop in which this project will take place has been put forth. Against this backdrop, a problem of intergenerational disconnect has been identified as needing correction. A possible path for correcting this problem has been identified, and some guardrails have been implemented to guide the process. With the foundation laid in this chapter, attention can now turn to what information is already written and what actions have already taken place in this area of study.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A connection problem exists among the generations that make up Cerro Gordo Baptist Church. It is one thing to know a problem exists and yet a completely different task to do something about it. How will this be corrected? What can be done to reconnect the generations of the church in a biblical way? The concept behind this project is that of small groups working with mentor relationships to reconnect the generations.

Therefore, as stated above, this project will offer a possible path of correction to the generational community disconnect in the church. A key in this process is reviewing the work of those who have previously identified this problem and desire to correct it. A solid foundation is always better to work from for such an undertaking. Considering the work others have contributed, one can identify themes in the information or the lack of information, allowing one to expand or narrow the focus of their work area. The narrowed focus will create a more concise and productive contribution to correcting the problem. This section investigates the contemporary writings and the theological and theoretical foundations for this corrective effort in intergenerational communal disconnect.

Literature Review

As one begins to look at the concept of intergenerational church ministry, one will find that much has been written; however, one must know the terminology of this method of ministry. Though the terminology varies from intergenerational ministry to parent or family ministry, each one needs for generations to be connected, a need for generations to walk through life together to invest in the others' lives so that they can carry on the purpose of the church and advance in their relationship with God. This connectedness is more than the casual Sunday gathering for church

or the occasional meal fellowship. It is a biblical, intentional connectedness in which various ages interact purposefully with one another. As a result of searching the literature surrounding this subject, this literature review will look at the biblical backing for intergenerational connectedness, the current positions, the value of intergenerational connectedness, and a response. This section looks at the work of some key influencers on the subject, such as Holly Allen, Christine Ross, Cory Siebel, and Timothy Paul Jones.

The Current Environment

It is here where the literature converges in agreement. In a consumeristic and individual-centered world, the norm on the outside should not be the norm on the inside. For the church, the norm should be that it exists in a generational community.²⁴ This call to exist in a generational way can be seen in places such as Psalm 145:4, "One generation shall praise Your works to another..." (New American Standard 1995). And Joel 1:3 says, "Tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation" (NASB95). This generational mindset is also seen in the book of Acts as the whole church met together and when the jailer and his whole household were baptized (see Acts 16). These two realities, consumerism, and individualism, about people and leadership, have fostered the environment and condition in which the church finds itself, an environment that feeds the consumeristic and individualistic lifestyles of the congregation.²⁵ This environment leaves the leadership treating the church like a

²⁴ Holly Catterton Allen, "Bringing the Generations Together: Support from Learning Theory," *Lifelong Faith*, (Spring 2009), 28, https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/intergenerational_faith_formation_-_lifelong_faith_journal.pdf

²⁵ Darwin Glassford and Lynn Barger-Elliot, "Toward Intergenerational Ministry in a Post-Christian Era," *Christian Education Journal* 8, no. 2 (Fall, 2011): 366, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Ftoward-intergenerational-ministry-post-christian%2Fdocview%2F896481298%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

business, spending great amounts of time on the next big thing to satisfy the felt needs, catering to the few, or some combination of these. Ultimately, this breaks down the generational connection that is supposed to exist in the church community.²⁶

Leadership Issue

It is about this environment that Ben Freudenburg, director of the Concordia University Center for the Family and founder of Family Friendly Partners Network, and Rick Lawrence, Executive Director of Vibrant Faith, write, "The church needs to be less like a corporation and more like a family in its feels and structure."²⁷ This statement stems from their belief that this is the most effective way for the church to operate. While these two men speak to the structure of how the church is functioning, Timothy Paul Jones, Professor of Christian Ministry and chair of the department of apologetics, ethics, and philosophy at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, writes about the effect this problem has had on the state of the church. Jones writes, "Looking at the church from this new angle, I was concerned as I saw fault lines emerging between generations."²⁸

Speaking to the first of these two issues, leadership must understand the full ramification of what is happening in their churches. Leadership seems to have forgotten that in individualistic societies where "I" is the dominant mindset, it creates independence in individuals that value themselves, privacy, and very narrow friendships more than the communal aspects of the church. As a result of this congregational mindset and the leadership in the pulpits of the churches, many

²⁶ Ibid., 368.

²⁷ Ben Freudenburg, and Rick Lawrence, *The Family Friendly Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1998), 82.

²⁸ Timothy Paul Jones, and John David Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry: A Collection of Ideas for Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publishing, 2015), 6.

congregations have age-specific services and, if they were honest, cater to the “I” mentality instead the communal nature of the church, how it is “the family of God” and is to be known.²⁹ This issue falls upon the shoulders of the church's leadership to prevent such a mindset and to find a balance in the use of age-specific ministry.

Those in leadership must realize that they are not being true to the communal nature of the church as God proposed if the individualistic mindset is even inadvertently nourished. The blinded eye to this issue by leadership has sometimes led the church astray. The heart of leadership has not been an intentional attempt to undermine biblical principles. However, to be relevant in their communities, they have downplayed the importance of the church’s communal nature as God designed it. This indirect downplaying has come about many times through an effort to meet the felt or perceived needs of the congregation. Therefore, according to some in the field of intergenerational ministry, age segregation has become the dominant trend, and many leaders have bought into it to the detriment of the intergenerational community that should have a role in the church. Again, it is not that felt needs are not a guiding participant in ministry nor that age segregation has no place; however, it is seen as a detriment when those needs are only met in the context of age-segregation ministry. Advocates of intergenerational ministry suggest that it puts the church in a disadvantaged place to work when trying to meet the felt needs effectively due to the only input being from those dealing with the same issues.

In many churches, children are in a service designed for themselves, while parents worship in another place. Often Sunday school or small groups are geared for a specific age

²⁹ 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), 30.

range.³⁰ All the while, the youth ministry is off to itself. Then to keep the groups together, at least in perception, the church will offer a picnic day for all ages with games and activities. All these activities try to keep the church in some semblance of fellowship.³¹ This issue has created an environment where fellowship of any kind between generations is nothing more than a social exercise. To be relevant and meet the felt needs of the congregation, leadership has created an environment that is not conducive to the intergenerational community that teaches, guides, and strengthens the individual and the church.

Age Segregation Issue

The second issue stems from the previous, the detrimental generational disconnect created by the above environment. It is of note that leadership has played a role in creating the environment. Still, it is also this way because of a lack of understanding of the connectedness of the church and the value of intergenerational community. Holly Allen, Professor of Family Science and Christian Ministry at Lipscomb University, argues that churches see "the effects of an increasingly individualistic, peer-oriented society that celebrates personal experience and self-fulfillment over communal ethos and ethic."³² Bob Whitesel, founding professor of missional leadership at Wesley Seminary, and Kent Hunter, founder of Church Doctor Ministries, explain "[i]f ever there were a cauldron brewing with misunderstanding, disparate perspectives, and distortion, it is the emotional intersection called 'the generation gap.'"³³

³⁰ David A. Eikenberry, "Developing an Intentional and Transparent Intergenerational Ministry in a Small Congregation." (DMIN Theses, Trinity International University, 2014), 2.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Holly Catterton Allen, ed., *Intergenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018), 41.

³³ Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter, *A House Divided* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 20.

This gap is created by the move in ministry to age-defined grouping. This method of ministry has divided the ages and kept them from truly interacting with one another. The generational community supposed to be in the church is inhibited, incomplete, or at least stunted in its effort to impact across generational lines.³⁴

Age-defined ministry is not necessarily what is intended for the church. There are moments when an age group needs those from its own generation. For example, sometimes young mothers need to spend time with other young mothers, and a benefit comes from their time together, as can be said about different age-specific groups. Suffice it to say, it is not that age-defined ministry groups do not have a place in the effort of the church to make disciples, but it should not be the primary method. Michael Dorege, author and intergenerational coach with Vibrant Faith, writes that the church is no longer the church when it divides people by age into groups.³⁵ When the church separates generations, the teaching, guidance, and correction supplied by both younger and older are eliminated or severely impaired.³⁶

Growth in this generation gap has created a decline in the ability of the church to grow disciples in any generation with much success. This decline, in turn, has created a frail group of believers across every generational line, which has stifled the impact the church can have on individuals and the world it is to reach. This issue has grown from a deficiency of understanding the true church generational community. The following section will look at the truth of this kind of community.

³⁴ Holly Catterton Allen, "Why Churches Tend to Separate the Generations," *The Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3, no. 2 (2013) 8.

³⁵ Michael Droege, "Growing Together," in *Engage All Generations*, ed. Cory Seibel (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2021), 63; see also Daniel O. Aleshire, *Ministering to all God's People Through the Ages of life* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1988).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Current Generations of the Intergenerational Community

There is not excessive information directly detailing the generations currently included in a church's effort to be intergenerational; however, it is beneficial to look at the possible generations involved. The number of generations currently possible in a church's intergenerational community ministry is the greatest it has ever been. This present era is possibly the first time in the church's history that the church is dealing with working with five or more generations at any given time.³⁷ This situation is an excellent privilege while at the same time a significant challenge. Nevertheless, it is vitally important to understand each generation to effectively involve each generation. The following is a brief overview of the five prevalent generations in the church.

G.I. Generation

John Mabry, the pastor of Grace North Church and former journal editor of “Presence: An International Journey of Spiritual Direction,” divides the current possible generations in the church today into five groups with an unidentified designation for the generation after the Millennials. The first of these generations is the G.I. Generation which includes people born between 1901 and 1924. Though a great part of this generation is gone, some have invaluable lessons to teach. This generation was part of a transitional generation that learned to adapt and respected tradition and solidity. Possibly this generation's greatest formative moments are found in the events of World War One. This generation is proud of what they have accomplished with their lives, and many look upon them with great admiration. The G.I. Generation is possibly the most religious of all the current generations. For many in this generation, God is wise and right.

³⁷ Edward H. Hammett, Paul L. Anderson, and Cornell Thomas, *Reaching People under 30 While Keeping People over 60* (Danvers, MA: Christian Board of Publications, 2015), 60; see also Jeff Baxter, *Together: Adults and Teenagers Transforming the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010).

God expects obedience. The G.I. generation brings to the spiritual table an intense and steadfast loyalty.³⁸

Silent Generation

The second generation is that of the Silent Generation (born between 1925-1942). As with the previous generation, this group is dwindling but still has much to offer society. This generation follows close behind the G.I. Generation. This generation's formative experiences came from the prosperity of the previous generation and the events of the Great Depression. The ideologies of the American dream built this generation's purpose. They sought justice for all, which the horrors of the Second World War nurtured. The Silent Generation began to champion human rights and equal rights in general. This generation was known for peacemaking; however, they cherished faith but did not hold as tightly to it as the previous generation. God, for this generation, was transcendent yet intimate in nature. The Silent Generation was a more liberal generation that looked like the last, yet again held the truth of religion loosely. They bring to the spiritual table a spiritual life of inward focus and deeply contemplative.³⁹

Baby Boomer Generation

The next generation is possibly the most well-known, the Baby Boomer generation. This generation includes people born from 1943 to 1960, with its formative events significantly influenced by the Cold War. This generation is known for the exterior of happiness and perfection, while the reality is much different; for some, prejudice, domestic violence, and patriarchal dominance rule the truth behind this generation. This generation was the first to grow

³⁸ John R. Mabry, *Faithful Generations: Effective Ministry across Generational Lines* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), 1–38.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 39–71.

up with the influence of television. Boomers are known as the “find oneself generation.” This generation came face-to-face with the reality as they tore down what the previous generations built; due to what they saw as hypocrisy, they experienced the same human issues the last generation faced. These issues crippled their efforts. This generation was visionary and worked furiously to make it happen. Boomers have a tremendous sense of optimistic self-worth and see themselves as righteous. Spiritually, the Boomers pulled even further from the traditional faith of the G.I. Generation and experimented with more Eastern religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. They saw themselves as spiritual but not religious. Even those of the generation that stayed in the confines of more traditional religion morphed it into their own unique form. Their view of God is one of personal yet impersonal. The Boomer generation brings to the table a very open and vocal spirituality, though it is practiced privately.⁴⁰

Generation X

The fourth generation is Generation X or referred to by some as the Authentic Generation. This generation includes people born between 1961 and 1980. Many see this generation as burdensome and an inconvenience. It is a generation that struggled with the lack of values, suffered greatly from broken homes, and received tremendous influence from television. Gen Xers have self-determination while struggling with self-doubt. This generation is very suspicious of anything that they cannot see. "Due to the negative confluence of factors, [Gen] Xers do not feel like they belong—not to this culture, not to this country, sometimes not to the world."⁴¹ Many of this generation have little dreams of accomplishment and merely want to continue to exist. Ultimately Generation X sees themselves as betrayed. Spiritually speaking,

⁴⁰ Mabry, *Faithful Generations*, 73–111.

⁴¹Ibid, 119.

they are okay with the coexistence of worldviews and religions. They seek common ground and hold even lighter the beliefs of the former generations. Generation X is not opposed to God but is far from the God of the earliest generations. Many see God as more mystical and imminent. This generation is much like the Silent Generation, whose faith is a personal issue not shared with others. To the spiritual table, they are a mixed bag that is okay with the idea of faith but does not fall into any particular faith style. If there is a religious style they come close to, it is Agnosticism. This generation is very science-oriented though they process that it too must be challenged continually.⁴²

Millennial/Y Generation

The final generation is the Millennial generation. This generation, also called Generation Y, includes those born between 1981-2001. This generation's formative years come from the poor parenting of previous generations. Millennials' formative years were a flip from the previous years. This generation was exposed to and took part in virtually everything available. Parents hovered over their kids, which resulted in strong relationships between parents and children. Parental influence was strong during the formative years and continues to be as this generation continues to age. Millennials are profoundly relationship oriented. This generation was shocked by the events of September 11. Millennials are primarily concerned with seeking happiness. However, what may be happiness for one may not translate to happiness for another.

This generation is severely relativistic. Tolerance usually ranks among Millennials' top three core values.⁴³ The Millennial generation is an enigma because they have a bloated view of

⁴² Mabry, *Faithful Generations*, 113–48.

their potential while not having the desire to do anything with it. Spiritually, the Millennial generation has little to do with religion or any form of religious activity. This generation does not deny the existence of God, but if they believe there is a God, He is far from the God of past generations. They bring much the same to the spiritual table as the Boomer Generation. Millennials consider themselves spiritual but not religious.

There is another generation comprised of those born from 2001 to the present, but it is yet to be seen what it will be like, for it is now just coming of age and defining itself. However, these are the primary generations inside the intergenerational communities within the church. Though these generations differ on many points, the church must build a genuine intergenerational community. A community where generations push past the temptation to only congregate and converse with their segregated group.⁴⁴ This section's information is vital in strategizing ways to offer opportunities for intergenerational ministry to cross generational lines and impact individuals' lives and the church's mission.⁴⁵

Value of Intergenerational Church Community

When looking into intergenerational ministry, there are a few values that generational church ministry provides. These values may not be of the greatest level to everyone, yet they still are values to the individual offered by intergenerational ministry. The first of these, especially true of the society in which churches exist today, is that biblical community does not reduce the

⁴³ David Stark, *Reaching Millennials: Proven Methods for Engaging a Younger Generation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2016), 63.

⁴⁴ Tim Beilharz, "Intergenerational Church and Sociocultural Faith Development," in *Engage All Generations*, ed. Cory Seibel (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2021), 56.

⁴⁵ For more insight into the generation's composition, see also Michael Dimock. "Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins." Pew Research Center, Last modified January 17, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

individuality of its members, an issue that some struggle with, as most communal groups do. In most communal groups, one must give up their identity for the betterment of the community. However, the biblical community embraces the differences in individuality as part of building better communal harmony.⁴⁶

In a highly individualistic society where "I" is supreme, it is important to help people see that a connection is needed, but it is not at the loss of who one is. God has gifted everyone in the community with particular gifts, talents, and stories that he or she can bring to the community. Gifts and talents are beneficial; however, there is great value to each community member's story. These stories are more than what one says but are the stories that integrate both life experiences and how God has been working in one's faith journey. As Jerry Bridges, speaker and former Vice President of Corporate Affairs for The Navigators, writes, "One of the most important things we can share with one another is the Spiritual truth God has been teaching us that might be of great help to fellow believers."⁴⁷ This means that everyone does not lose who they are but brings to the community the work of God in their own life.

A second thing to understand is that of participation. This participation referenced here is seen in the Greek word "*koinonia*," the fellowship with other believers.⁴⁸ Though it is translated several ways, here it needs to be understood as participation and sharing with others, not simply in the sense of modern fellowship, which is just gathering as a group.⁴⁹ Many today see participation in the generational community of the church as optional and try to function as if

⁴⁶ Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community: Faith Formation from the Seminary to the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 25.

⁴⁷ Jerry Bridges, *True Community* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 50.

⁴⁸ Constance J. Tarasar, "Worship, Spirituality and Biblical Reflection: Their Significance for the Churches' Search for Koinonia," *The Ecumenical Review* 45, no. 2 (2010): 219-221, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6623.1993.tb02853.x>

⁴⁹ Bridges, *True Community*, 1.

they need no one else. The reality is that one learns best about everyday life through the relationships one gets involved in, and the same can be said about the Christian journey. This is a vital point, and each individual, as Boyung Lee, Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at Iliff School of Theology, observes, "...needs to recognize that none could survive without the others: 'Individually we are member one of another' (Rom 12:5); 'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it' (1 Cor 12:26)."⁵⁰ There is a degree of individuality; however, there is also an interconnectedness every believer needs and can only find in the participation of the community.⁵¹

The next point to understand is that the connectedness mentioned above gives everyone in the community responsibility. Paul tells the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell richly within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" (Col 3:16, NASB95).

According to James D. G. Dunn, former Professor Emeritus of Divinity at the University of Durham, England, this passage shows that the community as a whole had a teaching responsibility.⁵²

This teaching responsibility is not just for an elite few. It is not the responsibility of only the professionals who attend school. It is for all maturing adults and young people to model a life of faith that enhances the growth of individuals and the church across generational lines. Wayne Grudem, Professor of Theology and Biblical Studies at Phoenix Seminary, states, "According to

⁵⁰ Boyung Lee, *Transforming Congregations through Community*, 35; see also Mark Edward Taylor, *1 Corinthians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014).

⁵¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 777-778; see also James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16, Vol. 38B* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014).

⁵² James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 583; see also Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

Scripture, the church has an obligation to nurture those who are already believers and build them up to maturity in the faith.”⁵³ This maturity in faith, though, will occur best in the setting of an intergenerational community. It is like playing a sport; if one only plays with those on the same level, then that is as high as one will rise. However, if one plays those who are better, one can continue to rise to the next level of ability. The same is true of the Christian faith regarding generational communities. If young or old are perpetually only with those of their own age, those individuals' developmental levels will stagnate. This age-segregation grouping only increases the difficulty for individuals of said age to step into the next level of development.⁵⁴ This is why every generation needs to take the interconnectedness inherent in the church body seriously and make a concerted effort to bring about growth toward maturity in every individual and the church.

Benefits of Intergenerational Ministry

Considering the value inherent in an intergenerational congregation or ministry setting, one can identify the benefits at the heart of the intergenerational community. Whitesel and Hunter express this when they write that a grand spiritual healthiness exists in the church when generations truly interact.⁵⁵ This healthiness comes as a benefit when mature people share their life experiences of overcoming and standing firm in life across generations. However, as Bridges implies, one can see these benefits when moving beyond the here and now and how they contribute on a deeper spiritual level. This level enhances one another's lives and others'

⁵³ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1994), 867.

⁵⁴ Allen, and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 90.

⁵⁵ Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter, *A House Divided* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 97.

relationships with God.⁵⁶ This reality means that discipleship and intergenerational ministry must go hand-in-hand. Discipleship must be at the core of intergenerational ministry, just as it has been in Christianity from its inception, to reap the benefits of said ministry concept. For an example of this, one can look at the disciples. Though traditionally not looked at as a group of young men that would make for an intergenerational discipleship environment, some writers believe they were younger than Jesus. Therefore, their relationship was more intergenerational than first thought, and one can see the impact of that discipleship process throughout their lives and the writings of the New Testament. More is explored on the intergenerational aspect of Jesus and the disciples in the theological section below.

In this intergenerational discipleship community, younger and older people can see the Christian worldview fleshed out.⁵⁷ The visual nature of generational connectedness provides this benefit, giving a visual aspect to the Christian worldview in life.⁵⁸ This visual aspect, in turn, cultivates the hearts and minds of individuals and allows for the Christian worldview to begin to take root and influence almost every area of the individual's life. This tremendous visual influence upon an individual's worldview enables one to respond to the issues of life in a matter that is better for themselves and others around them. This fleshed-out worldview's influence allows the individual to see the world from a different yet correct perspective. This perspective takes all things in life and knows they are working for a purpose, not just some random occurrence. In this intergenerational community of discipleship, "a measure of God's grace is

⁵⁶ Bridges, *Ture Community*, 5.

⁵⁷ J Bennie, "Sharing an Integral Christian Worldview with a Younger Generation," *In Die Skriflig* 51, no. 1 (2017): 5. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fsharing-integral-christian-worldview-with-younger%2Fdocview%2F1919467065%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

⁵⁸Tawa J. Anderson, Clark, W. Michael, and Naugle, David K., *An Introduction to Christian Worldview: Pursuing God's Perspective in a Pluralistic World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017).

experienced when Christians talk together and eat together, when they have a time of work and play together, enjoying one another's fellowship."⁵⁹ This kind of discipleship is what Siebel proposes. Discipleship is more than lecture-style age-appropriate teaching but sharing life across generational lines. Discipleship that keeps the church living out its purpose together in mission Dei.⁶⁰

The church must understand the value of and importance of passing on a Christian worldview. The church must understand that a Christian worldview, though not held in high regard in some of the world, "is indispensable for a full and active Christian life."⁶¹ An active Christian worldview enables all generations to engage in the daily world issues that believers face. This understanding is true for both young and old. The young must receive what is being imparted to them, while the older must allow the younger to deepen and restructure what might be outdated in their worldviews. With the investment of a Christian worldview, one that is deeper and stronger, each generation should be prepared to foster the same investment in each generation that follows.

Another benefit of intergenerational community ministry is nurturing relationships, especially between church attendees who usually are unengaged. This nurturing provides what Holly Allen calls "belongingness." These belonging relationships provide support when facing challenging issues and opportunities to experience God's grace in authentic ways. These nurturing relationships provide freedom and opportunities for authenticity for the broken to find freedom and healing. The intergenerational community offers a deep sense of belonging to all

⁵⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 958; see also Elmer L. Towns, *Theology for Today* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thomson Learning, 2002) 647-648.

⁶⁰ Michael Droege, "Growing Together," 64.

⁶¹ J Bennie, "Sharing an Integral Christian Worldview..." 3.

involved generations.⁶² This belonging is especially needed today due to the younger generation growing up without the positive influences they need or living life with peer-oriented guidance and understanding. The older generations who have already passed that stage in life but are still living with the effects of that same lack of the younger generations also need this belonging.

The consensus in the literature is that of a positive effect of intergenerational ministry, though it still has not gained much traction in current church ministry. As Brad Griffin, Director of Content at Fuller Youth Institute, suggests, one reason for this lack of traction is that intergenerational ministry is a total paradigm shift. It is not something one does; it is something you become.⁶³ Intergenerational ministry takes work and is not simply a plug-and-play ministry style. However, those who decide to carry out intergenerational ministry may take a more central form to families or more towards a ministry that involves ministering to individuals with broken family backgrounds. There are many forms in which intergenerational ministry can take shape. There are two primary benefits that intergenerational ministry provides. The first is that intergenerational ministry provides an environment and material for traditional or faith-based families to impact across generational lines. Second, it allows deeper engagement, communication, and influence among younger and older generations.

Treatment

According to the literature, the church needs to see the impact of age-defined ministry on the congregation and the church. Though it varies by name and form to differing degrees, all the literature points toward an intergenerational church as the method of ministry. Again, it is not

⁶² Allen, and Ross, "The Benefits of Intergenerationality," 16.

⁶³ Brad Griffin, "Intergenerational Ministry Beyond the Rhetoric," *Fuller Youth Institute*, April 4, 2011, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/blog/intergenerational-ministry-beyond-the-rhetoric>.

that age-defined or age-segregated ministry does not have a place; it should not be the primary way churches impact their congregations' lives and communities.

Intergenerational church ministry is vital for the growth across generational lines. The community of faith of the church is the easiest ground to help each generation grow in their faith. Allen says, "Faith communities are perhaps the only places where families, singles, couples, children, teens, grandparents—all generations—come together on a regular interacting basis."⁶⁴ This truth cultivates ground in which one can flourish in their faith walk if the appropriate methods are utilized. In developing generational communities, churches provide the tools and opportunities for all ages to grow. Cory Siebel, the pastor of Central Baptist Church and professor at Taylor Seminary, writes that it is not in proximity to one's age that faith is developed. It is in the Zone of Proximal Development that vibrant faith flourishes. This zone means that individuals keep themselves in close relation to other who are more developed in their faith than they are. In this interaction across generational lines, an individual and faith community can grow. It is, therefore, imperative that intergenerational community develop in the church.⁶⁵

Seibel writes about this reality that the church community needs to think of seriously and develop further. It is essential to remember as it develops this treatment of the generational disconnect gap in the church that it is a two-way flow, one in which the older invest in the lives of the younger and the younger invest in the lives of the older. The solution of bringing the church together into a cohesive community is "not simply a matter of occasional events or new

⁶⁴ Allen, and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 30.

⁶⁵ Beilharz, "Intergenerational Church and Sociocultural Faith Development," 56.

programming; it is a philosophy of ministry that affects the culture of the church.”⁶⁶ It is a faith formation strategy involving younger and older believers being socialized into the content of the faith. It is a strategy in which those in the generational community are willing to spend intentional time with others in said community.⁶⁷

In this generational community environment, care for others is learned and expressed. In this place, an ethic of work, support, and life is taught to be based on, not according to one's desires or worldly pressure, but based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. In this environment, everyone across generations learns by seeing an example of this lived out. In this community effort, people are encouraged, corrected, and cared for in ways that age-defined and other attempts fail to supply. Generational community brings the church to a place where it can function as God intended. This community corrects generational fragmentation, which "undermines the church's teaching ministry because it artificially divides the body of Christ and fails to fulfill its calling "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."⁶⁸ If the church is to succeed in the mission that God formed it for, it needs to be one in which generations interact intentionally for the betterment of the individual and the church as a whole.

Conclusion

As stated before, the literature points to the reality that the church needs to demolish walls and build bridges. Bridges that bring the generations in the church together and make for

⁶⁶ Eikenberry, "Developing an Intentional and Transparent ...," 3.

⁶⁷ Glassford, and Barger-Elliot, "Toward Intergenerational Ministry..." 373.

⁶⁸ Glassford, and Barger-Elliot, "Toward Intergenerational Ministry..." 364.

the ease of two-way flow from old to young and vice versa. These bridges will create community and not divide it.⁶⁹ Age-defined ministry is not a completely conducive answer to building the community of the church the way Scripture intends. Age-defined, or age-specific, is an attempt to be relevant to the church's culture today. It is an attempt to utilize the perceived structures of the world; though it may have its benefits, it can lead to the distorting of lines that may weaken the communal nature of the church and its discipleship efforts. However, fitting into the world the way age-specific methods can lead is not what the church was called to do. Again, it is not that age-specific group ministry is not biblical and of no use; as stated earlier, it can have its place. However, it does not appear to be the primary method strongly advocated for in Scripture. For example, suppose Jesus and the disciples are an example of intergenerational ministry and discipleship, as mentioned earlier. When Jesus gives them the command to make disciples, that would be the natural method they would emulate. Again, this is not to say that it is the only method, just that intergenerational ministry and discipleship are stronger methods.

The church was called to stand out as "a city on a hill" (Matt 5:14, NASB95) as lights that "gives light to all who are in the house" (Matt 5:15, NASB95). The way the individuals of the church and the church itself do that is by growing in the faith. This growth happens when the people of God become the community of God by sharing their life across generational lines. Therefore, given the church's communal nature of the faith, discipling people of all ages must be a high priority.

According to the literature, the best way to disciple people of all ages is in an intergenerational community. Theologically grounded in the Old and New Testament, intergenerational concepts are vital to spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is better cultivated

⁶⁹ Hammett, Anderson, and Thomas, *Reaching People Under 30...*, 64.

in an intergenerational community. This community is essential for genuine development among individuals because every age contributes to the spiritual development table. These contributions from each generation can make the difference between advancement in faith or stagnation, a flourishing church community, or an anemic church community off mission.⁷⁰ This deeper level of spiritual formation and community is best carried out in small group settings. Getting several generations into the same place together is not that difficult. However, getting them talking and investing in one another isn't easy. Getting generations to recognize differences and put them aside to see similar grounds, utilize them, and trust each other enough to invest in each other's lives is challenging. In a smaller generational community, one can cultivate an environment that allows the walls to come down, see the need for others, and invest in others. It is moving away from the age-defined ministry model to a generational method that best fits the biblical precedent and allows generations to cross lines and share the wisdom they have gained to enrich the faith walk of others, the premise of the purpose of this project.

Theological Foundations

Concept Found in the Old and New Testament

Looking for the foundation in Scripture from which intergenerational ministry rises, one does not have to look further than creation.⁷¹ Allen and Ross, both advocates of intergenerational ministry, believe that the foundation for intergenerational ministry can be seen in the communal quality of the Trinity. Gareth Icenolge seems to confirm this when writing about the communal nature of God. He writes that God exists “in divine community, in dialogue with other members

⁷⁰ Holly Catterton Allen, “Intergenerational Ministry: A Forty-Year Perspective: 1980-2020,” *Christian Education Journal* 1, no. 3 (2020): 511.

⁷¹ Allen, and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 80.

of the God-self, an intra-communicating group who also created humanity to exist in group intra-communication.”⁷² Allen and Ross emphasize and rely on the communal aspect, not on the intergenerational side.⁷³ God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit exist in an eternal state of communion, and it is this nature of being that is passed on to humanity in creation. Scripture records man's creation, "Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’" (Gen 1:26, NASB95). It is the creation of humanity in this fashion that God imparted the communal aspect of being.⁷⁴

This communal nature was not satisfied, though still good, until the creation of woman. Genesis proclaims, "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18, NASB95). Therefore, God brought the animals, but none satisfied the communion that man needed. So, God created woman from the rib of man, and the desired communion was satisfied.⁷⁵ Humanities design is communal, just as God has always been, not just on a surface level but a much more relational and profound togetherness.⁷⁶

This communal aspect is pressed further as one reads in Genesis about the continued communal interaction of God with humanity. "They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen 3:8, NASB95). On a cursory reading, one may assess that this may have been a one-time occurrence. However, when one looks at the original language of this verse, one will see much more. The verb of the activity of God walking in the garden carries

⁷² Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry...*, 21.

⁷³ Allen, and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 111.

⁷⁴ For more on the complexity of this communal nature, see C. L. Crouch, "Genesis 1:26–7 as a Statement of Humanity’s Divine Parentage," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61, no. 1 (2010):1-15.

⁷⁵ Kenneth A. Matthews, *The New American Commentary: Genesis 1-11:26*, vol. 1A, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 213.

⁷⁶ Allen, and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 111; See also Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2001).

an understanding that suggests iterative and customary actions on God's part.⁷⁷ Therefore, this walk in the garden was ordinary and suggests the communal nature of God's relationship with man and woman.⁷⁸ So, three individuals were in the garden in community, God, man, and woman in intimate relationship with one another. Icenogle believes that this primal community brings forth, at least in a fundamental way, a foundational element for small groups.⁷⁹ This communal quality is foundational as a launching point for many different ministry styles, including intergenerational ministry. However, here the point is not the intergenerational aspect as much as the grounds for the importance of communal ministry. From this vital communal quality, the building of intergenerational ministry happens.

Early in Scripture, one sees this communal nature, though one-on-one and not a group, play out in generational investment in the relationship between Moses and Joshua.⁸⁰ The primary point here is not the grouping but the fact of generational investment. Joshua was a young man that stayed close to Moses, as displayed in Exodus 33.⁸¹ In this relationship, Moses utilized this time to invest in the life of Joshua, seen later as Joshua ascends to the leadership position over the nation.⁸² While in Numbers eleven, it is evident that not only did Moses invest in Joshua, but Joshua also invested in the life of Moses.⁸³ In this passage, one sees that Joshua was a servant or

⁷⁷ Gordon John Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 270.

⁷⁸ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapter 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 157.

⁷⁹ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 22-23.

⁸⁰ See Exodus 17:8-16, Exodus 24:12-14, and Exodus 33:9-12 for examples of the intergenerational relationship between Moses and Joshua.

⁸¹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 617; See also John L. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 2018).

⁸² See Numbers 27:12-23 and Joshua 1.

⁸³ See Numbers 11:28.

minister to Moses and a relationship in which Joshua aided Moses in any way possible. These are small pieces of evidence of the communal nature God placed in humanity playing out and the critical role generational investment has in the life of individuals.⁸⁴

This communal nature is observed in one passage referenced by several writers. In Deuteronomy 6:4-7, which is a command from God for the nation of Israel to love God with all they are and to integrate all of God's commands into every area of their life. This passage speaks of the natural intergenerational ministry that should exist in the home; however, that is not the full extent of the passage. The passage also states, and is vital for this project, "And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up" (Deut 6:7, NASB95).

In this passage, one gains a glimpse of the heart of God toward investing in generations. Glassford writes about this passage, "Embedded in Deuteronomy 6:4-6 is a mandate to the people of God to instruct their children, to uphold to explain the Scriptures with the expectation that all, from the youngest to the oldest will participate in the feasts, festivals, and sacrifices."⁸⁵ God is here, impressing upon this young nation that each adult is to seize every opportunity to teach the instructions of God; they are all to be teachers.⁸⁶ This passage is part of a generational covenant, with its foundation resting on generations educating and passing on the faith of the

⁸⁴Jerusha Drummond, "Leadership Formation Through Mentoring in the Old Testament," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 1, no. 9 (2019), <https://www.regent.edu/journal/journal-of-biblical-perspectives-in-leadership/moses-and-joshua-relationship-leadership-formation-through-mentoring-in-the-old-testament/>; See Also David J. Zucker, "Elijah and Elisha," *The Jewish Bible Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2012).

⁸⁵ Glassford, and Barger-Elliot, "Toward Intergenerational Ministry..." 373.

⁸⁶ Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 185; see also Michael Alan Grisanti, *Deuteronomy*. (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017 and Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-21:9*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: MI, Zondervan, 2018).

covenant to successive generations. Deuteronomy's generational covenant, as some stress, is not only between parent and child but even extends to the grandparents.⁸⁷

The drive to take and instill, in the next generation, the instructions and statutes of God is a direct result of one's love for God. As Daniel Block, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Wheaton College, implies, this love for God is not simple verbiage or emotion but a commitment displayed in actions.⁸⁸ It is not simply words spoken of, but a life of actions lived out in the nation's community that instills a love for God. This ultimate love for God will reproduce the process in actions that instill a love for God that equips the next generation for success in following after God.

Though some view this passage as a one-way flow, one can see that this passage, through any amount of interaction with a younger person, has a two-way flow. It can be said that this two-way flow is supported in Deuteronomy 32:7, which states, "Remember the days of old, consider the years of all generations. Ask your father, and he will inform you, your elders, and they will tell you" (NASB95). For this familial intergenerational ministry to work, there is respect from younger to older, while respect, though not the same, for the reverse. In one's life, to adequately invest the truths into the other generations, one must know them personally. This personalization leads to a need for those from whom the investment is coming to not simply impart knowledge but understand how to help the other generations know the information and integrate it into their lives. This ability comes from intentionally incorporating the truths of Scripture into one's own life and learning from other generations so that one can guide them to

⁸⁷ Josh Mulvihill, "A New Way of Life for the Old," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 3, no. 2 (2013): 24.

⁸⁸ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 189; see also Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1994).

do the same. Allan Harkness says, "Our children and youth develop and grow in the faith by walking and celebrating with [adults]. The delightful surprise is that our adult faith too will develop and grow in unexpected ways as we received gifts of ministry from children and youth in our midst."⁸⁹ This understanding of Harkness transcends one-way generational investment but is a mutual generational boundary intersecting that develops both the older and younger generations. This understanding appears to be a piece of the structure of the desire of the command found in Deuteronomy 6.⁹⁰

The command of Deuteronomy 6 can be seen in several instances in the Scriptures, even though the people did not always carry it out. One such example is in the words of Psalm 78. The opening verses of the psalmist declare how those who know the things of God now need to make them known to the next generations. Asaph, the writer of the psalm, is signaling that he knows and understands the command given in Deuteronomy 6:7. Asaph is suggesting that he and the others of his generation should do as their fathers did for them and pass on activities and wonders of God to the next generation; which will enable the next generation to not rebel against God and instead walk in His statues.⁹¹ Also, passing on the marvels and commands of God to the next generation will enable them to do the same. Therefore, faith and obedience will continue in each successive generation.⁹² This passage makes a case for investing not only in the wisdom

⁸⁹ Allan G. Harkness, "Intergenerationally: Biblical and Theological Foundations," *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/073989131200900109>

⁹⁰ For more information on parents' involvement in passing on the faith, see Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk, "Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass their Religion on to the Next Generation," (New York: NY, Oxford University Press, 2021) and Karen Sue Smith, "Please Pass Down the Faith." *US Catholic*. 63, no. 11 (1998).

⁹¹ Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Erich Zenger, and Linda M. Maloney. "Psalm 78." In *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, edited by Klaus Baltzer, 282–301. 1517 Media, 2005. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvb6v84t.36>.

⁹² James M. Hamilton Jr., *Psalms Two Volume Set: Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 52-53; see also Weiser, Artur. *Psalms-OTL: A Commentary*. Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 1962.

found in the educational system of life but also in the foundations of the faith. As this psalm stresses, it is necessary to invest in each generation to establish their confidence in God and set up guardrails from the life experiences of what one can and cannot do.⁹³

Another such instance in Psalms is Psalm 145. In writing this Psalm, David gave an interesting twofold emphasis in verses 4-13. This section of Scripture is bracketed with the repetition of generation. This bracketing creates a pathway through which one can see how "the Scriptures communicate God's glorious and fearsome deeds from one generation to the next."⁹⁴ In verse four of this passage, the emphasis is that one generation should invest in the others by imparting upon them the knowledge and wisdom of the acts of God.⁹⁵ This imparting is accomplished by the community of Israel intentionally passing on their life experiences which is most effective in close relationships. Passing on this knowledge encourages growth in faith and equips other generations to not turn away from God. The intentional sharing of God's past and present acts, as emphasized in this passage, to the next generation enables the assurance of the next generation of God's people that God's kingdom continues without end from generation to generation. These passages are not direct evidence of a command for intergenerational ministry but support the underlying concept of the importance of generations investing beyond themselves.

It is this understanding that flows into the New Testament. Harkness states, "The churches in the New Testament maintained the intergenerational model drawn from their Old

⁹³ Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner. *The Book of Psalms*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 475.

⁹⁴ Hamilton Jr., *Psalms Two Volume Set*, 497; see also John Goldingay, *Psalms: Psalms 90-150*, vol. 3, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁹⁵ Daniel J. Estes. *Psalms 73-150: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 59-60.

Testament roots, with persons of all ages considered to be integral.”⁹⁶ This Old Testament model does not have a direct name but references how the Old Testament supports every generation investing in the other generations to continue the statutes and commands of God. One of the first possible instances of generational ministry in the New Testament is the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. Over the years, many almost automatically assumed that the disciples were older men. However, it is suggested that the disciples may not have been as old as many believe.⁹⁷ This age issue is debated from how the disciples referred to Jesus as a teacher. This argument is from the standpoint that teacher-student relationships, especially at that time, were mainly reserved for a teacher older than their younger pupils. This understanding can be obscured in the modern English translations of Scripture from the original Greek. Such passages that point to this are found in Mark 9:31, Luke 11:1, and John 12:16, to name a few. Each of these sections of Scripture encourages an understanding of an older teacher and younger students. The disciples may have been younger than many assume due to their familial relations mentioned in Scripture. This idea comes from the point that Peter is the only disciple ever referenced to have family or marital ties.⁹⁸ Again, if this is true, then this would imply that the disciples were somewhat younger than Jesus. So their relationship may well be considered intergenerational and would therefore lend credence to that ministry format.

More concretely, the Old Testament model that is carried over into the New Testament can be seen in the teaching of Paul as he exhorts Titus to train the older to live godly lives and, in

⁹⁶ Harkness, “Intergenerationally,” 127.

⁹⁷ Nathaniel J. Erickson, “A coin, a fish, and a disciple: How Old were Jesus’ disciples?,” NT Greek ET Al., July 28, 2020, <https://ntgreeketal.com/2020/07/28/a-coin-a-fish-and-a-disciple-how-old-were-jesus-disciples/>; see also R. Herbert, “How Old were the Disciples?” Living with Faith., Last modified November 28, 2018, <http://www.livingwithfiath.org/blog/how-old-were-the-disciples>

⁹⁸ Otis Cary, and Frank Cary, *How Old Were Christ’s Disciples?* December 2, 2021. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/475815>

turn, for the older to teach the younger.⁹⁹ In this exhortation, Paul states not just doctrinal knowledge but practical teaching based on truth. It is also emphasized in Paul's exhortation to be an example for others, implying a close interlaced life of connectedness.¹⁰⁰ This connectedness also appears in the relationships between Barnabas, Paul, Silas, and Timothy.¹⁰¹ For example, in Acts 18:1-5 one sees Paul, Timothy, and Silas reunifying. This passage expresses what Paul began to do during the group's time together. Specifically, this insight is gained when Paul refers to Timothy as a son, such as in 1 Timothy 1:2.¹⁰² This time together would supply serious times of investment in Christian living and the nature of ministry.¹⁰³

The connectedness also is seen in the teachings of Jesus when He uses children to make a point about the faith.¹⁰⁴ Such an example is seen in Matthew 18:2-3, "And He called a child to Himself and set him before them, and said, 'Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven'" (NASB95). In these relationships, especially in the communication between Paul and Timothy, one can see a generational connectedness that flows both ways and enables each in the relationship to express and grow in their faith.

⁹⁹ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 501.

¹⁰⁰ Walter L. Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical test to Contemporary Life*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 329; see also NT. Wright *Acts for Everyone: Part 1*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

¹⁰¹ See Acts 13, Acts 16, Acts 17, and 1 Timothy 1.

¹⁰² Andreas J. Kostenberger, *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary: 1-2 Timothy and Titus*. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 64.

¹⁰³ Stacy E. Hoehl, "The Mentor Relationship: An Exploration of Paul as Loving Mentor to Timothy and the Application of this Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Challenges," *In Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 2, no.3 (2011). <https://www.regent.edu/journal/journal-of-biblical-perspectives-in-leadership/paul-and-timothy/>.

¹⁰⁴ Daniel M. Doriani, *ESV Expository Commentary (Volume 8): Matthew-Luke* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 372-373.

Allen and Ross point to this type of connectedness in their article, "Many biblical texts further emphasize the idea that older generations are responsible for passing on God's truths to the younger generations. However, some passages offer examples of the younger generation leading or teaching the elders."¹⁰⁵ A couple of Old Testament examples would be young Samuel ministering before the Lord in 1 Samuel 2-3 and King Josiah at his young age leading the nation of Israel to worship God in 2 Kings 22-23. This concept is also seen in the New Testament when the young Jesus is found in the temple teaching the religious leaders in the latter part of Luke 2 and Mark 10 when Jesus rebukes His disciples over not allowing the children to come to Him.

Concept found in the Church

The biblical concept of intergenerational connection is in the idea of the church. Unfortunately, this is missed in the consumeristic mindset of many in America today. Today, the church is seen more as a place to consume the good offered than a place to be connected and invest. In Greek, *ekklesia* is the single most repeated term used by Paul to refer to the groups of those who met under the name of Jesus.¹⁰⁶ This group is a community of all genuine believers of all generations.¹⁰⁷ Allen and Ross explain the church as all generations meeting together, sharing meals, praying, and ministering to one another in an intimate community.¹⁰⁸ This understanding of the church is that Jesus commanded the Apostles to make disciples.¹⁰⁹ In this community of

¹⁰⁵ Allen, and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 80.

¹⁰⁶ James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 537; see also Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible: The Church and the Last Things*, vol. 3 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998).

¹⁰⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 853; see also Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit: Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ Allen, and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 83.

¹⁰⁹ Elmer L. Towns, *Concise Bible Doctrines* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2006), 326-327.

generations, individuals come to faith in Jesus Christ and grow into the fullness of whom God had planned for them from the beginning of time. In this community, one learns to live the understanding of what Paul writes to the Ephesians: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them" (Eph 2:10, NASB95). This is a church community in which Paul believes God desires to bring about maturity. One of the chief responsibilities of the church is to be a community in which individuals become fully mature in the faith; in return, each individual contributes to the growth of others because they also have matured.¹¹⁰

In the church, God intended for each generation to interact and grow in their faith in Him. Hence, Paul's emphasis is found in Ephesians 4:1-16. In this passage, Paul emphasizes the gifting of everyone for the building up and edification of the church.¹¹¹ In this passage, the focus is on every single member's involvement in the church's work. This work is primarily about strengthening those who already belong to the church.¹¹² The church is a group of generations of people who share life to impact one another's lives for the individual's growth and the church's advancement. "For it is the relationship that exists between Christians that shapes the development of one's faith."¹¹³

¹¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 147; see also Lynn H. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020).

¹¹¹ E.D. Mbennah, "The Goal of Maturity in Ephesians 4:13-16," *Acta Theologica* 36, no. 1 (2016): 121-127, <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/actat.v36i1.7>; see also R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians (ESV Edition): The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 117-119.

¹¹² Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians The NIV Application Commentary: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 204-05; see also Wright, N.T. *Paul For Everyone: The Prison Letters* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

¹¹³ Tim Beilharz, "Intergenerational Church and Sociocultural Faith Development," in *Engage All Generations*, ed. Cory Seibel (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2021), 54.

The emphasis here is not taking responsibility away from the family to instill upon the generations in its own home. The emphasis here is on the spiritual growth of every individual and how that growth works out for the church's edification. Generational investment can take place through the outworking of each individual's faith in the church's edification. Israel was a spiritual nation with statues and ordinances that God handed down to the nation. The nation was to teach these to each generation. The church today mirrors this pattern of investing. Each member of the church must take time to invest in each generation that makes up the church. Each generation has a responsibility, whether older to younger or younger to older, to utilize the gifts and life experiences to invest in others for the maturity of both. This understanding is especially true if the church desires to succeed in the mission that God has placed in its care.

From the beginning of the Scriptures to the continuing work of the church, one can see that it appears apparent that generational connectivity through interaction and investment has always been a high priority. Although not always the only method in the Old Testament, generational connection and investment was carried out through the family unit. As the importance of this connection was carried into the New Testament age of the church, though still primarily encouraged through the family, a shift can be seen. This shift was a move not from just a biological family but to the new faith family of the individual as well. No matter the context, biological or faith family, the emphasis is found throughout Scripture of the need for and a design for each generation to stay connected, interacting, and investing in one another. This all-around involvement was to encourage and build each other up for the strengthening of the individual's faith and for the faith to continue to spread in each successive generation. It is the how of investing and the interacting of generations this project now turns.

Theoretical Foundations

Upon seeing the theological foundations for intergenerational interaction and church ministry, the question of what has been done to remedy the issue arises. One quickly discovers that a great deal of research has been done in the broader sense of the issue by people like Holly Catterton Allen, Christine Lawton Ross, and Cory Seibel.¹¹⁴ While in a more conceptual manner of small groups and family-based ministry, several individuals, such as Bob Whitesel, Kent Hunter, Timothy Paul Jones, and John David Trentham, address the issue.¹¹⁵ These people, many times, are working together on projects and supply foundational insights into addressing the issue of this project. This section first addresses the broader issue, followed by a look into the options of family-based and small-group ministry.

Broader Theory

When dealing with the issue of developing intergenerational ministry in the broader sense, Chris Barnett, responsible for intergenerational ministry with Uniting Church Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, suggests two issues to keep in mind.¹¹⁶ The first item to remember rests upon the leadership and the knowledge of the required leadership. This knowledge means one must know who the church is, the behaviors, and how the leadership must lead. The second of these items to remember is that a great deal of intentionality is required. This intentionality means that leadership must be about resourcing, identifying, supporting, and equipping the effort

¹¹⁴ See Allen: *Intergenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*; Allen, and Ross: *Intergenerational Christian Formation*; Seibel: *The Generative Church*.

¹¹⁵ Bob Whitesel and Kent R. Hunter: *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church*; Timothy Paul Jones and John David Trentham: *Practical Family Ministry: A Collection of Ideas for Your Church*.

¹¹⁶ Chris Barnett, "Tools for Developing Intergenerational Ministry," in *Engage All Generations*, ed. Cory Seibel (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2021), 213-14.

toward intergenerational ministry.¹¹⁷ Running in the background, Barnett continues laying out steps to address the issue by saying that the first step is understanding the generations one is dealing with

To effectively create an intergenerational community, one must know whom the ministry includes. Knowing the appropriate generations enables the ministry to cultivate a ministry that meets people where they are. This idea is the concept that John Mabry addresses in his book *Faithful Generations: Effective Ministry across Generational Lines*. Mabry describes each generation, what they bring to the spiritual table, and how other generations can minister to them.¹¹⁸ Weight is given as Allen and Ross, when dealing with this issue, provide evidence that people from different generations are coming back to the church community to help them overcome the bad decisions they made early in life and are looking for resources to aid them where they are.¹¹⁹ Those who supplied information for this used methods such as small groups of varying ages that recounted recent church messages, read Scriptures together, and shared life experiences. These groups were also organized around specific life circumstances or decisions. These groups organized this way focused on boundaries, belief systems of right and wrong, and developing relationships around other generations that can function as role models for accountability purposes.

In continuing to address this more broadly, an essential item to work with is the idea of communication. Communication among generations is an issue in creating intergenerational

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 213-14.

¹¹⁸ Mabry, *Faithful Generations*.

¹¹⁹ Allen, and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 131.

ministry due to the cultural nature of modern generations.¹²⁰ Overcoming this issue requires cultivating an environment where the generations can be open and honest and have the attitude that it is ok not to agree on specific topics. This environment is critical to successful intergenerational ministry.

A final item that Barnett addresses in the umbrella approach to the issue of intergenerational ministry is that of culture change.¹²¹ This culture change is not about the individual but the church's culture. To be effective in intergenerational ministry, one must express the benefits of intergenerational ministry, plan with intergenerational intent, and realize that intergenerational ministry is not one-size-fits-all, so plan with variety and be intentional in intergenerational outreach in the surrounding community.¹²² In an overarching address of intergenerational ministry, a significant takeaway one can use and integrate into local ministry efforts is leadership working to change one's current ministry culture. When one changes the culture, it creates an environment that influences lives, and growth in faith can occur.

Family Ministry Theory

The family ministry theory advocated by Jones and Trentham is a theory that takes intergenerational ministry into the home. The key to this theory is to “equip parents to disciple their children in the context of their daily lives together.”¹²³ In their book, Freudenburg and Lawrence agree with this idea as they confess that even though they were expending tremendous amounts of effort, they were not seeing the maturity they were working for in the lives of those

¹²⁰ Melissa Cooper, “Cross-Generational Communication,” In *Engage All Generations*, ed. Cory Seibel (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2021), 224.

¹²¹ Barnett, “Tools for Developing Intergenerational Ministry,” 214.

¹²² John Roberto, “Pathways to an Intergenerational Future,” In *Engage All Generations*, ed. Cory Seibel (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2021), 232-38.

¹²³ Jones, and Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry*, 11.

they ministered.¹²⁴ This ministry theory proposes that the church trains and equips families to do ministry in everyday life. The understanding is that intergenerational ministry through families supplies a natural place where multiple generations are possibly present while also providing adequate time needed to invest in other generations. Jones and Trentham have dubbed this “family-as-church,” which assigns parents as the primary discipling agent.¹²⁵ This way of intergenerational ministry seems to align greatly with the mandates found in Scripture.

In this ministry theory, the church transitions from primary to secondary. The church transitions its events to family-oriented; retreats, service events, and special event nights become family-focused. The church becomes an arena where events double as training events that enable better discipleship at home.¹²⁶ Again, the church is about equipping for discipleship in this ministry theory. This equipping is the shared effort of the church to come alongside parents or guardians to aid in the family's spiritual growth. Though there is a shared effort, and God designed the church community to cultivate spiritual growth in each generation, this theory sees the home as the primary way of having the most significant impact on each generation. This method believes that the most significant generational impact the church can foster is through the family unit. It is believed that if the church equips the family for generational ministry, it will be doing generational ministry, thereby seeing the result played out in the church itself. This method is cyclical as it works itself out. For the church to be effective with intergenerational ministry this way, it must balance its duties to the family.

¹²⁴ Freudenburg, and Lawrence, *The Family Friendly Church*, 17.

¹²⁵ Jones, and Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry*, 12; see also Timothy Paul Jones “Family-Based Youth Ministry, Twenty Years Later,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry* 4, no. 2 (2014).

¹²⁶ Freudenburg, and Lawrence, *The Family Friendly Church*, 112; see also Bruce A. Ware, “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit: The Trinity as Theological Foundation for Family Ministry,” *The Journal of Family Ministry* 1, no. 2 (2011), 4.

The greatest issue with family-based intergenerational ministry is the reality of the family structure in the home today.¹²⁷ There are homes where family ministry cannot occur as readily as in others. In some homes, there may not be other believers, or at the same time, there may only be one in the household. This issue is either assumed to work itself out or simply goes unaddressed.

Small-Group Theory

Small groups have been the most popular way of discipleship in the church for some years now. Harley Atkinson, a former professor in the Christian Education and Ministry Department at Toccoa Falls College, believes small groups are a "major source of values, beliefs, norms, and attitudes that define the basic institutions of society."¹²⁸ Though this belief references everyday educational settings in life, he suggests that this is true for forming the spiritual side of these areas. Small groups are not so different as Atkinson grounds them in the Old Testament Hebrew family structure. He describes the groups as intergenerational due to the Hebrew family's extended family.

While Atkinson works from the Hebrew family, Jeffery Arnold makes his case for the validity of small groups from the Old Testament to the "one another" statements of the New Testament.¹²⁹ Both of these men make a case for biblical foundation and the natural use of small groups that should be in the church. These small groups provide the intimate community many long for and the opportunity for intergenerational investing. If the church desires to influence the

¹²⁷ Jones, and Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry*, 91.

¹²⁸ Harley T. Atkinson, *The Power of Small Groups in Christian Formation* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2018), 95.

¹²⁹ Jeffery Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 22; see also Theresa F. Latini, *The Church and the Crisis of Community: A Practical Theology of Small-Group Ministry*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011).

behaviors and beliefs of generations, they need to understand that, according to sociologists, the groups with which people belong greatly influence them. These influential benefits found in small groups express themselves, as Atkin mentions, by providing people with a perception of community, assistance from others in the spiritual journey, a point of access to the church, an environment that is safe for the individual's exploration and learning of Scripture and biblical beliefs, while also mobilizing others to do ministry.¹³⁰

Though not always intergenerational but age-segregated, many believe small groups can provide the foundational environment for rectifying intergenerational disconnect. As one sets up a small group structure for intergenerational ministry, there must be intentionality in ensuring that groups gather, not just according to similar age, which is the natural tendency, but to the diversity of generations. Herein lies the difficulty of using small groups to address the issue of intergenerational disconnect. However, if done correctly, small groups can significantly benefit the church seeking to build an intimate intergenerational community that others long to be a part of due to its genuine Christian community.¹³¹

Conclusion

Building off the previous chapter's foundational background, chapter two laid the building blocks by investigating what others have observed and the problems that have led to the current condition this project is addressing. Not only did the literature reveal an issue of an anemic environment, but it also built the case for the need for intergenerational ministry in the

¹³⁰ Atkinson, *The Power of Small Groups in Christian Formation*, 4; see also Joshua J. Knabb, and Joseph Pelletier. "A Cord of Three Strands Is Not Easily': an Empirical Investigation of Attachment-Based Small Group Functioning in the Christian Church." *Journal of psychology and theology*. 42, no. 4 (2014).

¹³¹ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 25-26.

church today. Once the need was established through the literature, the question of "what do the Scriptures say about intergenerational ministry?" must be addressed. In investigating this question, one could see quickly from Scripture that intergenerational ministry is rooted firmly in the Old and New Testaments. Being so firmly grounded in both Testaments, the next question to be addressed was, "what is being done about it?".

To answer this question, the project turned to the theoretical works of others. As one investigates the different theories that address the issue, one will see much diversity in opinion on the best method to proceed. For the issue of intergenerational ministry to be effective in the modern church, there appears to be a need for a hybrid small-group church as a family method that would best address intergenerational ministry needs. This project aims to develop a hybrid small-group format of ministry to address the need for intergenerational ministry in the local church.¹³² Chapter three of this project will explain in greater detail how this hybrid small group format will take shape.

¹³² For more insight into the makeup dynamics of small groups, see Emerson T. Manaloto, *Let the Church Meet in Your House!: The Theological Foundation of the New Testament House Church* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2019).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

With the expanding number of generations in the congregation and the potential for generational gaps that need bridging, the church must intentionally address this issue. Sam Rainer, president of Church Answers and cofounder of Rainer Publishing, says, "The tension inherent in the widening generation gap is both reality and an opportunity."¹³³ Understanding this reality and seizing the opportunity, the following section will give the details of what the small group and mentorship intervention looks like and what it involves. This chapter looks at the three phases for carrying out this project intervention. Phase one lays the groundwork, phase two is forming the small groups and establishing the generational investment more broadly, and phase three details the mentorship aspect in the small groups. This methodology section also details the evaluation process that will take place throughout the project. The following phases that comprise this project's process are the steps in which Cerro Gordo Baptist Church will walk to invest in the completion of this project.

Intervention Design

Phase One

The first step in the process of this project, and the first step in phase one, is church approval. The church approval process normally begins with the Senior Pastor's approval. However, for this project, this step is not necessary. Therefore, approval will begin with the deacon board. The researcher will present the plan to the chairman of the deacon board, John White, in a one-on-one meeting held at the church. The presentation to the chairman of deacons

¹³³ Sam Rainer, *The Church Revitalization Checklist: A Hopeful and Practical Guide for Leading Your Congregation to a Brighter Tomorrow* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2021), 29.

will explain the purpose, the process, the time needed to complete the project, and the intricate details of evaluation and steps for confidentiality. It will be presented that upon the completion of the project, if the church desires, services go back to usual, or they can continue in the manner of the project, with any modifications that need to be made. Upon presenting to him and placing the issue on the agenda, the project will be presented to the entire deacon board, consisting of six men elected by the church congregation. A detailed presentation comprised the purpose, the intervention process, the time necessary, the level of commitment, the evaluation process, and the above assurance that services will resume as usual unless the congregation decides to continue the corrective carried out in the project.

Following is an explanation of items presented in the presentation mentioned above. The project aims to correct the generational disconnect that has developed in the church over the years. The project aims to close the generational gap by using small groups subdivided into intergenerational partnerships. Phase two explains this process in greater detail. Once the process is understood, a commitment of twelve weeks will be requested, and an explanation will be given for the need for this amount of time. The final part of the presentation will be the evaluation methods; they will be explained in depth later and included in the appendix section. It will be explained that portions of the evaluation may be anonymous, but not all will be that way; however, all information gathered will be kept confidential.

Upon completing the presentation, the deacon board will decide whether the project can proceed.¹³⁴ Once the deacons approve the project, it will move to the church body. The same information presented to the chairman of deacons was then presented to the complete deacon

¹³⁴ The approval was obtained without objection as the deacons were consistently informed of the project and had shown support for it.

board before being presented to the congregation. Presented with the deacons' support, the church will vote to proceed with the project. Again, the church was consistently informed of my work on this doctor of ministry (DMIN) degree in full transparency. After church approval, the project will go on to the second part of phase one.

The second step in phase one is the recruitment of participants. The recruitment of participants will begin with a brief explanation of the project during the period for announcements at the end of the corporate worship service on Sunday morning, followed by an invitation to an in-depth presentation held the following Sunday evening. At this recruitment meeting, an in-depth presentation will provide all the intricate details of the project. There will also be a time of questions to provide as much clarity as possible surrounding the project. Everyone will be given a week to review their calendars and evaluate the time commitment. At the end of the week, a meeting to sign a commitment covenant will occur. At this point, everyone who commits to participating in the project will begin a baseline questionnaire.¹³⁵ The questionnaire establishes the makeup of the participant pool and the what, when, and how of the group's understanding of intergenerational ministry. Phase one will be complete upon completing this step, and phase two can begin.

Phase Two

Phase two begins with dividing the participants into gender-specific small groups. The small groups will be divided gender-specific due to the close mentorship component that takes place within the small groups. When compiling these small groups, a conscious effort will be made to create groups that include individuals from different generations. This intentionality is

¹³⁵ See Appendix A for Baseline Questionnaire.

due to the natural pull of many people to be with those their age. These groups will meet to complete the project research over the next 12 weeks.

It is vital to note the intricacies of how the divisions inside the groups will take place, specifically as it relates to the intergenerational partnerships. As stated, these groups, once divided into groups according to gender, will again be divided into partnerships of different generations. The selection of these intergenerational partnerships will be carried out as randomly as possible by the primary researcher. In this division process, however, the researcher will take an additional step to ensure that genuinely differing generations will work together throughout the project.

The additional step in forming the intergenerational partnerships involves using the actual age of each participant. The participants' physical age will be obtained on the baseline questionnaire; this baseline questionnaire can be located in Appendix A. Taking the extra step concerning the age of the participants will ensure that the most significant gap in the generations is obtained. Obtaining the optimum age gap will allow differing ideologies and backgrounds to collide and spark authentic, challenging conversations regarding each hot topic. This additional step is guided by observation and discussion with individuals from different generations yet is located at the end of one step and the beginning of another. A Gen X participant within two to three years of the beginning of the Millennial generation, for example, may have a worldview very similar to that of the Millennial who is only two or three years removed from being a Gen Xer. This issue has been observed and, to some degree, expected. Therefore, although the pairings would be intergenerational, they would be closer to age-segregated pairings rather than a genuine group of generations investing in one another. Therefore, the intergenerational pairings would, in reality, be closer to an age-segregated pairing and not a genuine group that would be

generations investing in one another. This line of thinking would apply to all generations in the participant pool. Therefore, using the actual age of participants to create the groups is necessary. As stated, this additional step in group pairing aims to enable a more genuine cross-generational interaction.

Male and female individuals will be selected using the previous baseline questionnaire that asks them to participate in an additional observational way. These two individuals will be chosen based on their understanding of the subject of the project. These individuals will journal about their observations and conversations they have across the project's duration.¹³⁶ These outside observational journalists will meet every two weeks with the researcher for information gathering and to avoid as much bias as possible.

The Bible studies will begin with the division of the small groups and once the outside observers are selected. At this point, each participant will obtain a journal to record their journey through the project. They will record their current assumptions, changes in thought, and any experiences they have or observations about small groups and mentorship relationship impacts.

The groups will remain divided into small groups, but they will meet for the first three weeks to study the concept of intergenerational investment in the Scriptures. Week one covers the biblical precedent and the positive and negative implications. Week two investigates the Old Testament examples and what can be applicable for investing generationally. Week three examines New Testament examples and their application for generational investment.¹³⁷ The small groups meet independently once a week on Sunday evenings upon completing this study together.

¹³⁶ See Appendix D for Outside Observation Journaling prompts.

¹³⁷ See Appendix E for Foundational Bible Study Lesson plans.

When the small groups start studying, the members will remain in their previously assigned pairs for one-on-one mentoring. These pairs will be generational and separated in age to the greatest degree possible. The one exception will be if the participant group does not allow one-on-one pairs. In the case of this exception, groups will have a max of three people that will still be from different generations, if possible, with as wide an age gap as possible. These intergenerational relationships will be asked to meet weekly at their discretion. They may meet over coffee, for lunch, or via a web-based video platform. These pairs will develop accountability and progress through a guide reviewing the previous small group study for clarification and questions that may have come to mind.

The small groups will investigate the seven current hot-topic issues. These hot topic subjects were determined through conversations in the church pew, over lunch, and through different media outlets. The subjects proceed weekly in the order they are listed. The topics for the study are prayer, abortion, guns, gender identity, poverty, immigration, and suicide. These subjects were chosen due to the deep-felt need for a better grasp of these issues and their relevance to current hot topics in today's culture. Christians need a gospel-centered biblical approach to these topics and ways of life and what better way to gain a better perspective than through a two-way generational investment?¹³⁸ Due to the subject's hot topic nature, covering these are the best way to carry generational influence beyond the study.

For clarification, each study will proceed apologetically and theologically. For each study, the argument for the issue, such as abortion, or the current method for dealing with the subject, such as poverty, will be presented. Following that portion of the study will be what the Scriptures say about the issue. The desire for such a way of studying the issues is three-fold.

¹³⁸ See Appendix F for the seven-week study lesson plans.

First, it will cause individuals to process the information instead of simply regurgitating it. The desire is not merely to give the participants ammunition to win an argument but to educate them so they can both intelligently and compassionately share the truth about the issues. Second, it will help address presuppositions that individuals may have either for or against an issue giving grounds for intergenerational interaction later. This idea of addressing any presuppositions will cause uneasiness in their worldview that will cause serious consideration or affirmation of how they hold the lens through which they view the world. Finally, it will give the participants a confident ground to stand upon when discussing these issues outside of the project and even the church. Again, the desire is for the participants to have the confidence to meet these issues head-on and share the truth of Scripture regarding these issues. Many believers today do not speak on these issues because they need a firm grasp on or confidence in their beliefs.

The final component of phase two is midway through the small group study. There is an intentional, planned evangelistic outreach event between the weeks of sharing one's faith and understanding one's job in light of the gospel. This event centers around the small groups coming together on a Saturday to meet physical needs in the community.

Possible activities for this event are building wheelchair ramps, painting, cleaning yards, and doing other general repair work. These items will be selected because they are hands-on and based on need. This event takes place because of the environment created when people come alongside and work together for the betterment of others. This event allows the small groups and mentor pairs to work together to learn about one another and an opportunity to invest in a less church-centric way. A component of this event will be that each mentoring pair is asked to share the gospel with someone in the community. It is important to point out that participants have been trained in multiple methods of gospel presentation and how to share the gospel naturally in

conversations without feeling the need to force it on anyone. The Sunday evening following the event, a debriefing questionnaire will be given, and a time of discussion about the event instead of a Bible study.¹³⁹ After this weekend service event the following week, the small groups will resume and finish the study topics. The final week will consist of debriefing and the final questionnaire to evaluate progress.¹⁴⁰

Phase Three

The third and final phase of the project includes evaluating research data. This data comes from the questionnaires from both the beginning and end of the study, the journals of each participant, the outside observational journalists, and the primary researcher's journaling. Working alongside those who completed the outside observation, all the research data will be gathered to evaluate any progress made through small groups and mentorships in solving the current generational disconnect in the church. Many different facets will be analyzed through the research data. Such things as which gender was most affected by the project, which age group was most impacted, and at what level was discipleship and evangelism of the church affected. These areas and others will be evaluated to determine what the data reveals and what area, or areas, the intergenerational ministry is most effective for Cerro Gordo Baptist Church. A conclusion will be drawn, necessary adjustments will be assessed, and the generational ministry will continue.

¹³⁹ See Appendix B for the Event Questionnaire.

¹⁴⁰ See Appendix C for the End of Project Questionnaire.

Research Instrument

Questionnaires

Three questionnaires were created to collect the required data to determine this project's effectiveness and to come to an accurate conclusion. The questionnaires can be found in appendices A through C. The first of these questionnaires asks both open and closed-ended questions to set a baseline for the project. This baseline is the point of reference for the effectiveness of this project. On this first questionnaire, for anonymity, only the participant's number, gender, and age will be obtained on the survey. This information will determine how effective the small group ministry is overall and whether it is more effective with a particular age or gender group.

The end of the project questionnaire is similar to the baseline questionnaire. This questionnaire asks the same questions as the baseline questionnaire. These same questions are asked to determine the amount of change, if any, that occurred. As with the baseline questionnaire, participant number, age, and gender will be obtained.

During the middle of the overall project, an intergenerational community service project will take place. A questionnaire was developed to determine the effectiveness of what was going on in the small group ministry and to garner information regarding the interaction between generations before and after. This questionnaire will be compared for the effectiveness of learning generationally and for the comparison of age and gender group effectiveness.

These three questionnaires were created out of researching the literature surrounding the issue of this project. The literature led to identifying what appear to be universal areas that need addressing. Upon finishing combing through the literature, the questions were created through

the advice of two other individuals who use surveys regularly.¹⁴¹ However, for accuracy and proficiency, a group of three third-party individuals who regularly work with questionnaires will evaluate them to determine if they will collect the desired data. The first individual in this third-party group is Dr. Dave Heller. He is the Association Mission Strategist, formerly Associational Director of Missions, for the Columbus Baptist Association. He studied for and obtained a DMIN at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is responsible for assessing and creating mission opportunities for the association and assisting churches in evaluating their health. The second individual in this group is Reverend Billy Roy. He is the current pastor and church planter of Crossroads Baptist Church in Columbus County. Reverend Roy currently serves on the Columbus Baptist Association's church replant team, which evaluates and surveys the condition of local churches for the possibility of replanting. He is also an evaluator and recruiter of possible church planters and planting locations. The final member of this group is Jerry Strickland. He is the only secular career member of the team. He holds a Master of Education from Francis Marion University and is currently in his forty-eighth year in education and educational administration. He currently holds the position of Director at the Dillon County Applied Technology Center. He is not only responsible for the operation of the school but also for the evaluation of teachers' performance and curriculum, for which he is state certified. These three men were chosen for this group due to their extensive experience and effectiveness in creating and administering evaluations in church and secular settings.

¹⁴¹ Both individuals desired to remain anonymous. However, one individual works in a local school system evaluating curriculum effectiveness, and the second evaluates local business efficiency and productivity.

Journals

For this project, a journal will be kept by each participant. Participants will be given a series of weekly verbal prompts to aid in the journaling process. These verbal prompts consist of questions about the subject that week. The weekly prompt will also have a simple question prompting the participant to write about their time with their intergenerational partner. A word of understanding here, these prompts are not to obtain what information is desired to prove the project's point but are given to aid in journaling for those who may struggle. To minimize this issue, and genuinely obtain participant information, the prompts will decrease in amount and specificity as the weeks continue. This decrease will allow for more individualistic natural thought from the participants rather than simply answering questions. These prompts were created in the same manner as the questionnaire questions and will be verified by the third-party group to ensure they are not too guiding.

As an added avenue for evaluation of the effectiveness of this, corrective journals will be kept by the primary researcher and two observers for bias control. The journal of the primary researcher will contain observable information obtained from time during the study, thoughts on how things are working, and weekly evaluations. The journals of the two observers will collect similar information to the primary researcher. However, they will have prompts to assist them in obtaining information. Appendix D contains the prompts for the outside observer.

Each of these instruments is designed to collect data on intergenerational small-group ministry effectiveness. The information will not be used to determine the relationship between the church, the participant, or the investigator of this project. This includes their ability to participate in any activities in the church.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Plans on paper sometimes flesh themselves out differently than when they are written. Issues can arise when plans are created in a vacuum of the ideal. This may require a situation where original plans must be altered slightly. The above-stated methodology for this project is considered the ideal plan to investigate this project's aim. However, it is understood that this plan may materialize in a different form than the exact one presented. Therefore, the following section describes how this project emerged from idea to actual implementation.

Phase One

Phase one, the obtaining of permission, went as desired. The first step was a meeting with the chairman of deacons on July 31, 2022, in the pastor's study. This meeting took place to obtain a space on the agenda for the upcoming deacons meeting. During this meeting, the primary researcher presented the scope of the project. The presentation discussed the purpose, the process, the time needed to complete the project, and the intricate details of evaluation and steps for confidentiality. The chairman was also assured that upon the completion of the project, the congregation would be given a chance to decide, depending on the effectiveness of the project, whether to continue with the new paradigm or to return to the former way of conducting service. After a substantial conversation, the chairman, John White, approved presenting the project to the entire deacon board.

The next step was to present the material for this study to the church's deacon board. A presentation of the scope of the project was formally presented at the monthly deacons' meeting on August 1, 2022. The board received a presentation in the same manner as the chairman and was allowed to ask questions. After reviewing the detailed material involved in the project, the deacons briefly discussed the project and voted to proceed with the study's approval.

The next step was to present detailed information to the church during the August 3, 2022, business meeting. This was similar to the presentation made to the chairman and the deacon board. After presenting the material, the congregation voted unanimously to move the project forward. Roughly two-thirds, or fifty-five individuals, attended the meeting and participated in the vote. The start date of August 21, 2022, was set for the initial meeting of the project to begin and the final meeting to take place on November 6, 2022.

Session One

Before week one, verbal requests for voluntary participation from the church's congregation were made. The requests for participation were made two weeks before the first meeting, on August 7, 2022, and repeated one week before the first meeting, on August 14, 2022. Voluntary participation was emphasized, along with a brief explanation of the project with each verbal request. At this point, the generation, or age limitation, was explained during the verbal request. The invitation to join on Sunday evening, August 21, 2022, for further information was extended to all who were of the suitable generational range.

Week one's meeting occurred in the small chapel in the church's Sunday school department on August 21, 2022. Forty individuals attended this meeting, from the Silent to the Millennial generation. During this first gathering, an in-depth description of the intergenerational small group ministry project was given. A short period of time was given for questions to be asked. During this meeting, everyone received a consent form and an explanation to inform them that they could sign it and turn it back in if they desired to participate. Thirty-five of the forty decided to participate in the project. The breakdown of the thirty-five can be seen in table 1. The participants received the baseline survey in Appendix A and were given time to complete it.

Upon completing the survey, they were dismissed and given instructions for the meetings to start the following week. Session one ran approximately one hour.

Table 1. Group Make-up

Generation:	Silent	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Millennial	Total
Female:	1	8	8	5	22
Male:	0	6	3	4	13
				Total:	35

For this project, everyone was partnered with a different generation. For the purpose of confidentiality as well as anonymity, everyone was given a number and only referenced according to this number from this point forward. These intergenerational groups were assembled initially by sorting everyone by their given generation. The generational breakdown of the participant pool can be seen in table 1. Upon completing this phase of sorting the participants, the age of the participants was added to the equation, and participant partnerships were established.

As stated earlier in chapter three, the generational pairing was sorted by a combination method to form the most significant age gap possible. Ten years was determined as the standard for the division. However, this became more difficult when groups comprised more than two individuals. A concerted effort was made in the groups of three to maintain as significant an age gap as possible, with most groups averaging an eight-year age gap. Once more, this was due to the belief that although participants were in different generations, being in groups of individuals close to the beginning or end of a generational segment would possibly have similar worldviews. Therefore, the effectiveness of the project would be limited. Though part of the project is about

creating a more biblical worldview, it is not the project's primary thrust. The project's design is to build bridges that enable the generational gap in the church to be done away with, enabling the church to cultivate a greater biblical worldview. Though there may be some differences, any pairing of individuals within a five-year age gap is believed to skew the results. Therefore, the greater the age gap, the better the results, whether positive or negative.

Once the sorting was complete according to generation, individuals were randomly selected from the large generation and age groups and placed with another randomly selected individual from another generation, ensuring a significant age gap. Following the previously given guidelines for this project, the larger generational groups were also divided by gender, so the process was done twice. It is also important to note that there was an uneven number of individuals in each generation; therefore, in the women's groups, pairings one, six, seven, and eight contained three individuals, while in the men's groups, only group three contained three individuals. The groups of three, where possible, were placed with three different generations.

Phases Two and Three

Phase two of this project comprises the small group Bible study portion and the intentional intergenerational interaction. Encapsulated in phase two is phase three, which entails an outreach ministry event in which participants will work together across generational lines to serve the community and communicate the gospel. The following is a summary of the Bible studies and the outreach event.

Session Two

Session two took place on August 28, 2022, in the small chapel room in the church's Sunday school department. This session officially began the Bible studies designed to stretch

each individual's understanding, convictions, and approach to everyday interaction with others. During session two, the groups studied different examples of intergenerational interaction in Scripture. The Old Testament groups discussed were Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, and Naomi and Ruth. From the New Testament, Paul and Timothy and Barnabas and Mark were considered. Following the study, the intergenerational pairs were announced after gleaning application points and a clearer understanding of how intergenerational interaction looks. These groups remained in the small chapel area and were then given time to get together and discuss the material of the Bible study as well as to become better acquainted. Before they were dismissed, each participant was provided a journal, and the journaling process was explained. Verbal prompts were given for journaling, and everyone was dismissed.

At this point, the outside control observational journalists were indiscreetly provided an additional journal. The second journal was provided to separate their personal experience from their control input. These journalists were also given a list of prompts to aid them in observing the group's interaction during the project. These prompts can be found in Appendix D. Session two ran approximately one hour and thirty-five minutes.

Session Three

The third week of the study took place on September 4, 2022, in the small chapel in the Sunday school department of the church. Session three began with a brief opportunity to share thoughts about the previous week's meeting. Following this time of sharing, Bible study took place.

The Bible study covered the subject matter of prayer. This study focused on the prayer life of Daniel, Paul, the church, and Jesus. This study discussed the need for prayer, being fervent in prayer, consistency, and what prayer looks like. The study concluded with a brief

description of the types of prayer found in Scripture. The generational pairs were then given time to discuss the subject matter and encouraged to practice prayer for one another and others. Some groups stayed in the small chapel area, while others moved to other classrooms in the Sunday school department for more privacy. Before dismissing to the group time, everyone was encouraged to continue to journal their thoughts, personal application from the study, and group time. An emphasis was placed on honesty and genuineness to their thoughts. Participants were strongly encouraged to not simply answer the verbal prompts given but to journal their true thoughts and experiences. Groups were dismissed to group time and could head out when they finished. Session three ran for approximately one hour and fifteen minutes.

Session Four

Week four's meeting occurred on September 11, 2022, in the small chapel in the church's Sunday school department. Session four began as the previous week did, with a quick debriefing of the previous week. It is important to note that week four of the project Bible study turned more towards an apologetic approach to the topics. The first two studies were more theological, while the remaining were apologetic. The subject matter for these studies is more hot-button issues in society. The subject matter for week four was abortion. In writing this project, this subject is in the news and one of the top election issues.

During this study, the most common argument for abortion was discussed. Following this discussion, the point was made that abortion is not directly mentioned in Bible; however, the point of apparent silence is not a concession for abortion. It was then shown what the Bible does say about different aspects of the abortion issue. This investigation looked at abortion in the minds of the Hebrew people, innocent life, the issue of murder, and the Old and New Testament language when referencing the unborn and the born.

Intergenerational groups were dismissed for discussing the subject matter and spending time on intentional investment. Groups also received verbal prompts for journaling during the week. The groups dispersed throughout the Sunday school department classrooms and the small chapel area in the same matter they did the previous week. Each group was instructed to spend as much time as needed discussing the material and spending time together. They were dismissed once they felt they had sufficiently discussed the material. Session four ran approximately one hour and fifteen minutes. One interesting observation surfaced after the study. Groups stopped to converse about how they had either never worked through the issue biblically or were at a genuine loss with their newfound understanding.

Session Five

Session five took place on September 18, 2022. The group met in the small chapel in the Sunday school department of the church. Like the previous week, the fifth session began with a time of open discussion to allow individuals and intergenerational pairs an opportunity to express any insights or struggles they may be encountering. The session then moved to the Bible study portion of the session. This Bible study session investigated the issue of guns and violence. This session looked at this subject three-fold: current cultural thought, biblical perspective, and application. The point of application that the intergenerational pairs were presented to discuss was understanding the need to defend life. This point includes pursuing common sense laws enabling life's defense from both perspectives. Groups were then dismissed for discussing the subject matter and praying for each other. Session five began the decrease in the number of verbal prompts for journaling.

A unique event occurred upon the dismissal to group time in that many of the groups stayed in the small chapel, with only three groups leaving for other rooms in the Sunday school

department. The groups were advised to take as much time as needed to discuss the material and spend time together, and they were dismissed when they felt they had spent enough time together. Session five ran approximately an hour and ten minutes.

Session Six

Session six met on September 25, 2022, and began with a gathering and fellowship held in the small chapel in the Sunday school department of the church. This time was used to observe the participants to obtain insight into the outward evidence of bridges being built between the generations. Upon the completion of this time, as with previous weeks, a time was given to express any insights into what was going on in the groups.

Session six then progressed to Bible study time. This time of study covered the subject matter of homosexuality and transgender philosophy. Once again, this study took the same approach to the subject matter as the previous weeks. This study first built a foundation to enable everyone in the study to function from the same spot. Next, the most common defense was given for why these lifestyles are argued for. The study then progressed to how the Bible addresses the subject of homosexuality and transgender thought. Finally, the study gave a simple way to defend one's standing on what the Bible lays out while also addressing the issue of how a believer should interact with those who live this lifestyle or view it differently.

The groups were then dismissed for weekly interaction. Unlike the previous week, the groups returned to their regular manner, with most of them leaving the small chapel area for other classrooms in the Sunday school department. Each group was instructed to spend as much time as they needed discussing the material and spending time together, and they were dismissed once they felt they had sufficiently discussed the material. The only verbal prompt the groups

received about journaling was to journal that week; no additional information was given as to what to write about. Session six ran approximately one hour and ten minutes.

Session Seven

Meeting seven took place on October 2, 2022. The group met briefly in the small chapel in the church's Sunday school department due to the session's purpose and requirements. Session seven, also phase three, was a week of intergenerational service and evangelism. Groups were given maps highlighting a two-mile radius around the church facilities and instructed to visit homes within this radius. Groups selected different areas, usually determined by roads, to avoid overlap and to in order to cover the entire two-mile radius. Most intergenerational pairs also combined with other groups upon their own initiative. This project was planned for a Saturday; however, due to many conflicts, it was shifted to Sunday. The groups were sent out door to door to share the gospel, pray for needs, and seek out opportunities to serve individuals and families. The groups gathered early due to shorter days and a desire for the safety of every individual. Groups were given a two-hour window to canvas their assigned area.

Upon the groups' return, they gathered back in the small chapel. Each participant was allowed to verbally report any insights they may have gained about ministry opportunities in the community. Pairs were also allowed to express verbally any personal insights about the overall experience. The verbal session was conducted to allow both the facilitator and control observational team to obtain any possible data that would help determine the effectiveness of the project or points for improvement in the future. Upon the conclusion of this time, individuals were dismissed. Individuals were encouraged to be as detailed as they could in their journals about their personal experiences involving the outreach event. No other prompts were given for journaling purposes. The debriefing time lasted for approximately thirty-five minutes.

Session Eight

Session eight was held on October 9, 2022, in the small chapel in the Sunday school department of the church. Session eight began by distributing the outreach event survey (see Appendix B). This survey was given to collect the data needed to determine the effectiveness of the outreach event. All surveys were completed in the chapel area to provide the ability to answer any possible questions that might arise. After providing the opportunity to complete the survey, the session moved to a time of open discussion where anyone with questions, thoughts, or concerns could share.

After the open discussion, the group moved into the Bible study portion of the session. During this session, the issue of poverty was discussed. During this study, the issue of poverty was defined so that all participants were studying from the same point of reference. In the study, the group also looked at misunderstandings concerning the issue of poverty, what the Bible says about poverty, and then the application to everyday life. At the end of the study, groups were dismissed for discussing the subject matter and spending time investing in one another's life. Many pairs dispersed to other rooms in the church's Sunday school department, while a couple of groups remained in the chapel area. They were dismissed when the groups were finished in their time together, however long that might be. Individual participants were encouraged to write in their journals, with no other verbal prompts for what to write. Session eight ran for approximately two hours. This amount of time was due to completing a questionnaire, a discussion, and a Bible study.

Session Nine

Session nine took place on October 16, 2022, and the group met in the small chapel in the church's Sunday school department. The session was conducted much like the previous sessions. This session first began with a time of observation. During this time of observation, the two individuals who were journaling about what they were seeing were given time to mingle among the participants, without any direct conversations, to observe the effectiveness of the project. After this time, the group moved into the time of Bible study.

Session nine's topic was immigration. The session defined key terms to lay a foundation for understanding during the study and interaction with others. The study worked from the biblical principle that all of humanity is created in the image of God and therefore is God's image bearer. From this point, the session study looked at the Old and New Testaments as the guidelines for God's people when dealing with immigration. In the Old Testament, the study looked at God's law and the provisions that God included when dealing with outsiders or foreigners. The New Testament perspective came from the point of loving one's neighbor. The study summed up with being realistic and sensible regarding government laws regarding immigration and a challenge for each individual to find ways to love immigrants.

The session dismissed to intergenerational partner time for discussion on this issue and time of ministering to one another. Groups found different locations in the church's Sunday school department to spend time together, with the same groups remaining in the chapel area. As in previous weeks, individuals were encouraged to journal with no additional verbal prompts to guide them in journaling. After this time, the session was dismissed. Session nine ran for one hour and thirty-five minutes.

Session Ten

Session ten, the final session for this project's study, met on October 23, 2022, and was conducted in the small chapel in the church's Sunday school department. As with the previous sessions, the session began in a similar manner. Everyone was given a time of interaction and mingling for basic observational clues as to if the project was achieving its goal. After this, a time to express concerns and thoughts was given. It is important to note that these times of sharing with the group, as a whole, are limited in time not to force inaccurate input but to obtain clues about the effectiveness of the intentional intergenerational aspect of the project.

This session's Bible study consisted of the topic of suicide. The study began by looking at current statistics and trends concerning suicide. The study then discussed three questions that many people have concerning suicide. The first of these questions was the question, "Why?" The second question was, "Can a Christian commit suicide?" The final of these questions is, "What can a Christian do to help with the issue of suicide?" The session study turned to Scripture to answer these three questions. The challenge for this session was being proactive in dealing with the topic of suicide personally and with others with whom one interacts. Upon completing the study, groups were dismissed to their groups for discussion. Like in previous weeks, groups dispersed to various classrooms in the church's Sunday school department.

After some individually-determined time, the groups were instructed to return to the main study location to complete a final survey. This survey, found in Appendix C, was given to analyze responses compared to the baseline survey to determine the effectiveness of this project. All individuals completed the survey in the chapel area to aid in answering any questions that might arise. Upon completing the survey, individuals were instructed to complete their journals regarding this week's study and review their experience during the project and its effectiveness.

They were asked to return their journals the following Sunday, November 6, 2022. It is sufficient to note that all journals were returned on November 6 per the request. Session ten ran for two hours and twenty-five minutes.

Conclusion

In retrospect, this study had a great deal of continuity over its ten weeks. Three issues changed to the planned study, none of which were major issues. The first of these issues was time constraints. These constraints caused the study to be shortened in length due to community and regular church events during this project's implementation. The primary method for dealing with the need for shortening was combining the first two weeks into one study and extending some sessions to accommodate the completion of surveys. A second issue was that of the service project. The service project was moved from the midway point of the sessions to session seven. This movement was due to extenuating circumstances, such as inclement weather conditions and accommodating participants' schedules. The final issue was that of participant dropout. Two participants dropped from the project during the study due to health-related issues. These two participants' information was pulled from the project and will not be reflected in the data review.

Two additional observations can be mentioned here after looking back over the methodology and not digging too much into the result. These observations did not directly affect the study but deserve some clarification and further explanation. The first of these is time allotment. Many of the sessions ran just over an hour. However, those that involved questionnaires ran substantially over the desired one-hour to one-hour and fifteen-minute time allotment. Participants did not directly complain or comment on the length of the weekly study. However, it was observed that the weeks the studies went longer, less time was spent with the intergenerational partners. This, in turn, could affect the project's impact on the participants and

the data that will be collected. The weeks when time ran long were the questionnaire completion week and a couple of open discussion weeks. The ability to control the time allotted for open discussion and the ability to distribute and collect questionnaires is a need that must be addressed.

The second of these observations revolves around the verbal prompts. As mentioned earlier, the participants were given verbal prompts to aid in their journaling. The concept of journaling was something new for many of the participants, especially for the older generations. These verbal prompts were only given due to the participant's desire for insights. These prompts were very simple, such as "what did this lesson mean to you" or "how did your intergenerational partner challenge your thinking on this issue?" Not providing a set of questions each week allowed for and promoted the necessity of the participants to think and process versus just regurgitating information. This desire and method were confirmed by many conversations with individual participants wanting specific questions to answer and wanting to give them exactly what was needed for the project. Keeping the prompts simple should have produced the participants' desired results and genuine input.

The project's study material for each session was chosen based on current issues directly affecting the Cerro Gordo Baptist Church or its surrounding community. These subjects worked well for this project's study, giving applicable knowledge to individuals for personal use and interaction. The interaction, among others, is especially true regarding intergenerational interaction. Again, the project progressed for the most part as planned, and now the project turns to analyzing the data to determine the ultimate results regarding the project's desired effect. These results can be found in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In chapter one, Cerro Gordo Baptist Church's history revealed a generational disconnect. This project offers a corrective path for the church to navigate to overcome this disconnect. In chapter four, the collected data to determine the effectiveness of the proposed corrective path is presented. Collecting the data without its evaluation and applying it is ultimately just useless knowledge.

This chapter begins by compiling the foundation from which the participants involved in the project were operating. This chapter lays the groundwork for determining the degree of effectiveness of this corrective action. The chapter also compares the data collected after the two key action steps to the foundational point to assess the outcome of the proposed project's corrective path. When analyzing the data, a few areas will be assessed—specifically regarding the effectiveness of the project between the different participating generations.

Foundational Data

The data was collected from three different surveys (see appendices A, B, and C) and the personal journals each participant was required to complete. The participant pool consisted of a total of thirty-five participants. The participant breakdown was twenty-two females and thirteen males. This group's generational makeup spanned four generational groups; see table 2 for a generational breakdown.

Table 2. Generational Breakdown

Generation:	Silent	Baby Boomer	Gen X	Millennial
Female:	1	8	8	5
Male:	0	6	3	4

While establishing the foundational base, it was revealed that 94 percent of the participants, thirty-three out of thirty-five, agreed that generational interaction is essential. In comparison, 6 percent or two out of thirty-five either somewhat agreed or were neutral on the issue. Though thirty-four out of thirty-five participants, 97 percent, felt as though generational interaction was significant, 62 percent, twenty-two of the thirty-five, only gave a generic explanation to no explanation as to why they felt that way. Such explanations were given by participant twenty-five, who said, "We can learn from each other." Participant fifteen also stated, "It is important for communication," and participant eighteen, who wrote, "Being involved with different generations is important," were the general concepts as to why the interaction of generations is essential. However, a third, eleven of thirty-five, of the participant pool gave more substantial information about why they felt the interaction was necessary. One example of this section's understanding comes from participant seventeen, who stated that they believed in intergenerational interaction for the "purpose of pouring life experiences into others while having life experiences and understandings poured into them."

From the beginning, most participants generally understand that interaction between people, even across generational lines, is needed. However, the vast majority of Cerro Gordo Baptist Church is lethargic in its effort to do so. This nature is emphasized by the fact that 57 percent of participants, twenty of thirty-five, only interact directly with those of their generation. At the same time, an additional 22 percent, eight out of thirty-five, declared that their interaction with other generations was limited to parents and siblings.

Intergenerational Ministry Defined

While still establishing from what point the project was working, the participants were asked more directly about what intergenerational ministry is. The information obtained in this question was similar to the previous one about generational interaction. The numbers for intergenerational ministry were 86 percent or thirty of the thirty-five participants, and no participants could describe the concept of intergenerational ministry in more than a generic way. Such broad generic descriptions were like that of participant five, who described it as "different age groups interacting together in a common ministry," or participant two, who stated, "offering activities and opportunities for all ages." These two examples express a similar understanding among most participants about intergenerational ministry. The remaining 14 percent could describe intergenerational in a somewhat tangible way.

An example of this can be found in participant twenty-six, who wrote, "People from different generations studying together, learning from one another, and sharing different viewpoints." Participant thirty-four states that intergenerational ministry is "a ministry that brings all generations together in the study of God's word. With each generation listening to each other."

The above information demonstrates how participants have a minute knowledge about and the "how to" when it comes to the need for intergenerational ministry in the church. This understanding is reinforced from two aspects. The first of these aspects is that the church does not offer any intergenerational ministry. Not offering any intergenerational ministry was substantiated by 60 percent, twenty-one of thirty-five, of the participants who disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the church offering these opportunities; table 3 shows this data. Though the church does not offer any intergenerational ministry, 40 percent of the participants, fourteen of thirty-five, believed that the church did to some degree. However, of the fourteen participants who fell into this category, all but two either did not define or gave generic definitions of intergenerational ministry.

Table 3. Intergenerational Ministry Offered

Disagree 3	Somewhat Disagree 18	Neutral 4	Somewhat Agree 5	Agree 5
<hr/>				

Discipleship

The second of these aspects is that of discipleship. Seventy-one percent, twenty-five of thirty-five, are involved in discipleship, while the remaining 29 percent, ten of thirty-five, are not. However, the twenty-five participants involved in discipleship are only involved in age-segregated Sunday school classes. When one turns to how the participants defined discipleship as they understood it, one comes to understand why there is possibly not more intergenerational interaction. To begin with, 37 percent, thirteen of thirty-five participants either did not define it at all or defined it in a church cliché manner; this data is shown in figure 1. Examples of this

simplistic and cliché manner are found in statements like that of participant eleven, who states, “trying to be more like Christ,” while participant seven states in a cliché manner, “to be determined.” While this third of the participants fell into the above category, 54 percent, nineteen of thirty-five, proved a considerable understanding of discipleship with two unifying similarities. The first is that discipleship is a process, and the second is it is personal. The consensus among the responses was that it is a personal process spoken of as it is on oneself to become a more mature disciple of Jesus.

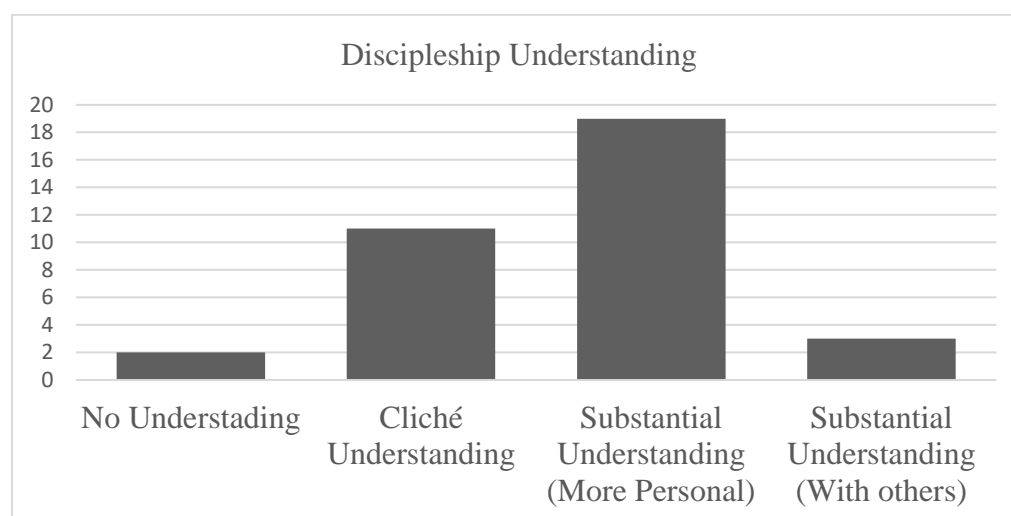


Figure 1. Discipleship Understanding

In contrast, out of the thirty-five participants, three described discipleship involving self and others. Participant thirty-five speaks of how discipleship is a process that shapes how Christians believe, act, and mature through a life lived out among others for input and guidance as output to others. Participant seventeen describes discipleship, simply but accurately, as being in God's Word and praying so one grows in maturity, all while maintaining healthy interaction with others of varying maturity levels. None of these responses necessarily hit every aspect of

what discipleship is on its most profound level. However, these three participants demonstrate a slightly more robust understanding of discipleship than the others.

Spiritual Maturity

There are a couple of final areas of consideration for laying the foundation to evaluate if the intergenerational small groups were a success. The first of these areas is spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity was not explained as something one does, like reading the Bible and praying. Instead, it was more a display in the daily living of the character of God being cultivated in one's life. It was further explained that spiritual maturity, in a more straightforward way, was not just about knowledge but about the conformity to Jesus that the application of biblical knowledge brings to fruition. Each participant was asked to grade themselves on a scale of one to ten. Figure 2 shows the scoring of the participants.

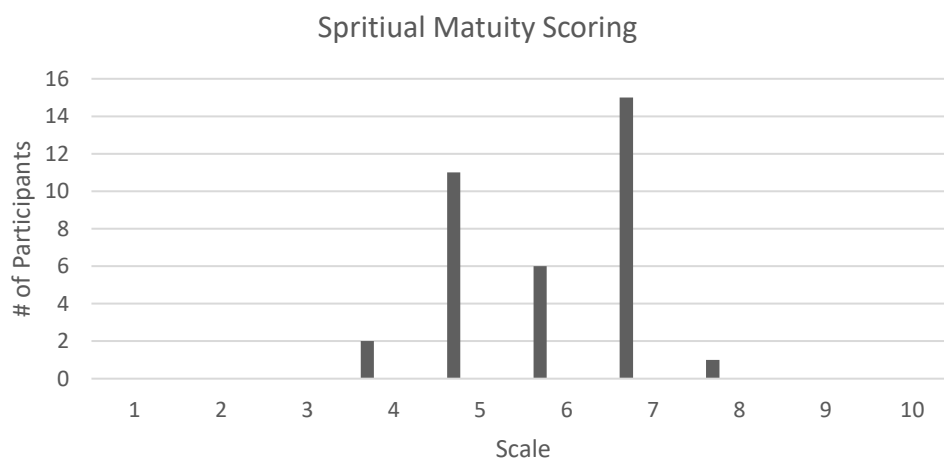


Figure 2. Spiritual Maturity Scoring

Upon evaluating the data in the distribution of participants on the maturity scale, there were a couple of interesting observations that deserve noting. The first is the virtual flip between the male and female participants on the scale pertaining to where they scored themselves and

how they expressed their understanding of discipleship. Of the twelve men involved, only three scored themselves as a seven on the scale, while five scored themselves as a five. The remaining male participants scored themselves as a six on the scale. The female participants had one score herself as an eight and twelve scoring themselves as a seven, while two participants scored themselves at four on the scale.

This difference between the male and female participants was clarified upon investigating the follow-up question about spiritual maturity. The follow-up question pertained to the relationship between spiritual maturity and discipleship. The participants were considerably more knowledge-based when describing the relationship between spiritual maturity. Participant thirty-four stated that we need to “have an open mind to God’s word,” while participant twenty-one referred to discipleship as "studying God's word." Still others of the male participants expressed a need for more understanding of discipleship, such as participant ten, who described salvation and not discipleship.

On the other hand, the female participants were not so much about knowledge being the connection between spiritual maturity and discipleship but described the connection as an action. The overall consensus among the female participants who scored themselves a seven or higher could be summed up in the answer of participant thirty-five. Participant thirty-five wrote in her answer to the spiritual maturity and discipleship question, "Discipleship guides and shapes what Christians believe, how they act, and how they mature." This participant implies in the complete answer that discipleship is conforming one's character to the true meaning of the title Christian. Though this is not how most female participants answered the question, there were a few, like participant fourteen. Participant fourteen stated that the connection between spiritual maturity and discipleship was to "read the words of God continually." This vague and general answer is

consistent with those who scored themselves as a six or below. This description of how spiritual maturity and discipleship connect also applied to two participants who scored themselves as a seven on the maturity scale.

This difference, visualized in figure 3, on the scale between the male and female participants who scored themselves on the scale may not reflect the actual spiritual maturity of the participants as that of a distorted understanding of the connection between spiritual maturity and discipleship. With the emphasis placed on character and less on the doing in explaining spiritual maturity, one could assess that the male participants would score themselves lower than the female due to their understanding leaning toward knowledge rather than doing. At the same time, the female participants would have scored higher due to the emphasis on character in action and not just on knowledge. As a result, the male participants at this stage may have scored higher on the scale if it had been explained as character in action as a reflection of applied knowledge. This idea will be investigated further in a subsequent section.

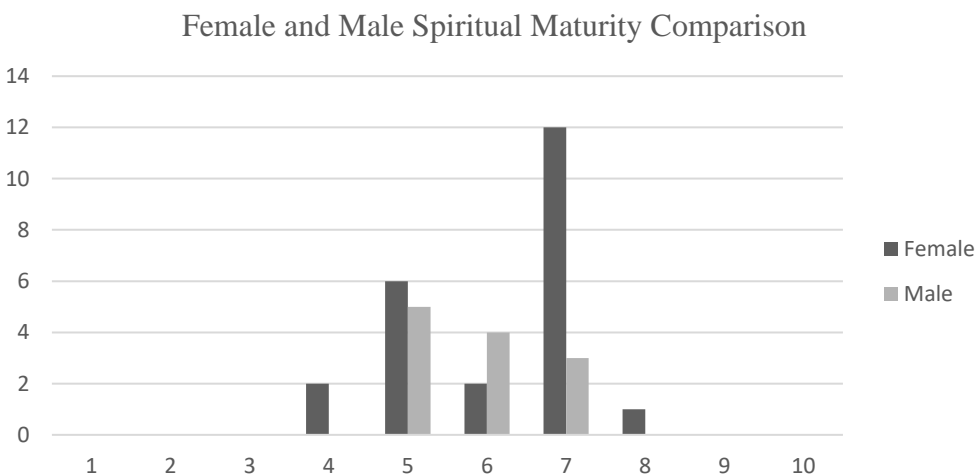


Figure 3. Female and Male Spiritual Maturity Comparison

A second point of interest that needs to be noted involves those not involved in any formal form of discipleship. Formal discipleship is an organized investment method connecting individuals to at least one other person for teaching and learning. Of the five participants who declared they were not involved in discipleship, three of the five participants, 60 percent, scored themselves a five or below. The remaining two participants scored themselves as a seven on the maturity scale. It is perplexing that those who marked themselves as a seven on the spiritual maturity scale did not respond definitively to the connection between discipleship and spiritual maturity or how they have matured and plan to keep growing in the faith. This anomaly may skew the overall score on the scale for an authentic assessment. However, the three participants who scored themselves as a five or below could make the connection between discipleship and spiritual maturity to some extent. Curiously, these five participants are not involved in any discipleship, yet they vehemently admonished discipleship as vitally important to spiritual maturity. What made this concerning pertains to the need for a concerted effort to correct the fact that they are not involved in discipleship. However, they know it is essential for the believer's spiritual maturity.

The distribution of participants on the scale of spiritual maturity was as expected, except for the high grading level of those not involved in any discipleship method. The overall spiritual maturity, though time was limited for this project, will be assessed later for comparison to ascertain any spiritual growth through this intentional intergenerational interaction.

Sharing of Faith

The final area of consideration is that of sharing one's faith. Fifty-seven percent of the participants, twenty of thirty-five, in this area stated that they share their faith infrequently among their generation or with other generations. This infrequency is true of slightly over half of

the participants, even though they profess that sharing their faith is very important. For this section of the participants, it may be as some, but not all, expressed that fear of rejection or feeling of ill-preparedness caused their hesitation. Among the participants, 40 percent, fourteen of thirty-five, share their faith often to very often believing, in line with the previous 57 percent, that it is very important to share with every generation. The one concerning thread was the commonality among many of the participants was that they considered sharing their faith as simply inviting others to church. Roughly 90 percent of the participants, thirty-two of thirty-five, never mention in their descriptions the gospel, sin, or the life, death, or resurrection of Jesus Christ. This issue was addressed, and encouraged to practice each week during the intergenerational interaction break-out session of each week. When the outreach event data is analyzed, a more in-depth comparison will be made.

Foundational Data Summation

Thus far, the church understands that generations need to interact. However, it does not have a method to intentionally address generational interaction. This lack of intentionality is especially true regarding the interaction between generations regarding faith and spiritual growth matters. Discipleship is a priority but lacks the depth of both being invested in and investing in others. Most participants, and even those on the positive end, have latency in their efforts to grow spiritually and to help those around them to grow. Many participants profess to understand but do very little with that knowledge. The state of spiritual maturity may not be what it should or can be, but the potential of this intergenerational corrective work has a foothold to work.

Outreach Event

The first point of reference to analyze the effectiveness of this project was the outreach event in which intergenerational groups were sent out to engage with the community, share the gospel, and seek out ministry opportunities for the church groups. The outreach event occurred on October 2, 2022, and was conducted within a two-mile radius of the church facilities. This event was initially scheduled for the study's midpoint but was moved to week seven due to weather and attendance issues. Upon looking at the data, this may have worked for the benefit as it gave more time to participants to prepare.

The first thing noticed from the survey that was returned after the event was that 71 percent of the participants, twenty-five of thirty-five, interacted with people of different generations than their own during the event. This interaction is virtually a complete turnaround from the 79 percent of participants who said they only interacted with others of their generation or that intergenerational interaction was limited to family. For many participants, this was intentional interaction across generational lines, while some did comment that it was just who came to the door. Working to clarify this information further would be good to do in furthering the use of this project. Though the intergenerational interaction selection during the event was random, additional information suggests that it may have been more intentional. On a scale of one to ten, participants were asked how well they felt the study and the generational group prepared them for the event. Figure 4 visualizes the scoring data regarding how well the participants felt prepared for the outreach event. As one can see through figure 4, there was a high degree of effectiveness in the method of preparing individuals.

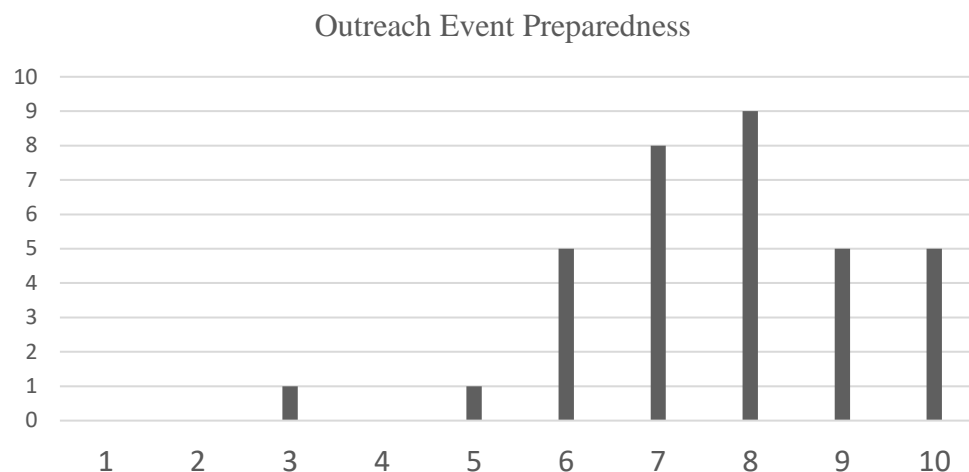


Figure 4. Outreach Event Preparedness

While examining the data, two predominant items persisted throughout the data obtained through the outreach event follow-up survey. The first of these items was confidence due to preparedness. This confidence was achieved by addressing hot topic issues biblically and providing time for intergenerational discussion. This confidence was expressed by multiple participants but was indeed summarized by participant twenty-two, who explained that the overall material equipped them for the task. Participant twenty-two wrote, "the examples and subjects enabled me to open up conversations and helped me feel comfortable about sharing."

A closer look at the numbers shows that 94 percent of the participants, or thirty-three out of thirty-five, felt well prepared for the event, even with one participant scoring themselves in a neutral position. In addition, it is interesting to note that of the two participants who felt unprepared, those who scored themselves a five or lower, one was a member of the Baby Boomer generation. The other came from Generation X. According to their other surveys, both participants tended to score themselves at the lower end, usually provided very generic responses, and appeared to be more introverted. These three facts may have influenced how they viewed their preparedness for this event. In contrast, when grouped by their generations, the

remaining thirty-three out of thirty-five participants were well represented across the scale of those who felt prepared. The numbers here show that the project and its ability to prepare individuals was not strictly working in a single generation but was working well in each generation group.

The second item that persisted throughout the investigation into the outreach event data was the positive impact the event had on the participants regarding working with other generations and how it affected their faith. Twenty-eight out of the thirty-five participants said the experience positively impacted them, while seven were neutral or did not answer the question. The positive effect was expressed in many ways. Participant sixteen wrote about being more comfortable now working with other generations. Participant sixteen even reiterates how "we all can learn and grow from each other" and confess how they have grown to care more for one another and learned from their partner. Participant twenty-one expressed positivity by writing about how it showed that "we are all important" and continued using a rope illustration to describe how people are stronger being together this way. Another participant, who did not give their participant number, wrote about how all the different points of view and how things were carried out encouraged and challenged them. Again this positive impact, though stated with different nuances, all point to how the generations of the church need to work together. It is important to note that the seven other participants who answered the impact questions expressed how they were still processing the significance of the event opportunity.

In summation, the data suggests the time spent in the small group setting and then in the even smaller intergenerational group setting for the study, to varying degrees, was effective in improving the cross-generational interaction of the participants. Compiling this information lends toward the intergenerational corrective positively affecting the church. Even simple

responses like participant thirteen, when explaining their experience, said that their time with the intergenerational partner was advantageous, or participant sixteen, who explained how they had learned and grown from the wisdom and experience with their partner. This information was reiterated by numerous participants and lent credence to the reality that believers function better in and need that community and influence of other godly generations. The benefits of intergenerational ministry were on display for this event. These benefits can be seen expressed by many participants. Take, for example, participant thirty, who wrote, "It was so beneficial. I pray that as I get to the age of the older generations that I will have matured as much as they have. Stuff like this event has and will help me do just that." Also, participant five says, "As long as we can go in groups with our generational buddies." Even participant seventeen states, "it builds individuals which builds the church which brings more individuals closer to God!" Again, the benefits and the data all point towards a positive impact of the project on the church.

Participant Journals

The second data point for the analysis of the effectiveness of this intergenerational small group ministry corrective was collected through the journaling process of each participant. Each participant was encouraged to journal to obtain a more honest insight into the effectiveness of the project. Journaling was an adventure for many participants for one of two reasons. First, they had never journaled before and were trying to figure out the process. The second was the desire to write what was wanted by the facilitator. However, once they understood that the journals were for the participants to express their thoughts freely, ones that they might not feel comfortable sharing in group time, everyone settled into the process.

Emotional Apprehension Insight

The first insights revolve around the inward emotional state of apprehension revealed through one's words and hesitancy toward actions. Hesitancy regarding emotional apprehension can be seen in big and small ways. In the case of this project, emotional apprehension is understood as that inward drive or feeling that will direct one, in differing degrees, to a state of paralytic inability to complete a particular activity regardless of its benefits. Much of what causes this emotional apprehension is when a circumstance arises, and the occasion requires a shift in the individual's action that might not be comfortable to them. As they pertain to the project, the journals gave insight into how the project affected the emotional apprehension and thought processes in the participants' daily lives. The journals gave insight into how the participants were digesting the Bible study information and the need for intergenerational church interaction. Analyzing the journal data of participants provided two primary insights into the effectiveness of the project. The two key insights observed were regarding shifts in the participants' emotional apprehensions and their overall mindset toward the need for intergenerational investment.

First, many participants, at some point during the process, professed their nervousness surrounding the interaction with other generations but were usually up for the experience. Such evidence of this issue is seen in the comments of participant six, who writes about how her first comment to their intergenerational partner was that they were nervous and would struggle because of this nervousness. Struggling to do because of overpowering nervousness could be seen in the writing of both participants, eight and twenty-three, who repeatedly stress throughout their journals how their anxiety keeps manifesting. They reiterate how they struggled to step out and converse with their partner and the group. Other participants declare how nervous they are

but genuinely hope they can overcome it. These comments fall in line with the data in the baseline survey. These emotions were expected due to the individualistic nature of the church.

However, digging deeper into the journals, the tone of these emotions and apprehensions corresponding to that individualistic mindset began to change. Take, for example, participant fourteen. This participant began journaling about how uneasy they were about getting out of their comfortable friend area and into a partnership with an intergenerational partner. In the last journal entry, this participant concluded how they loved their intergenerational partner and how their partnership helped them synthesize what they learned and how to interact better with others. Information like this is scattered throughout the participants' journals.

Another example of this is participant thirty-four. In that participant's journal, one can see a growing progression of the intergenerational partners sharing deep and more intimate thoughts on issues and discussing ways to help each other continue integrating these topics into their belief systems. Though this is not a word-for-word recitation of the information in every journal, the concept is expressed in the writing with different nuances according to personality.

The emotional apprehension shift was even exemplified in the outreach event. Again, as participants journaled about this event, many individuals began professing their apprehensions; however, through the encouragement of their intergenerational partner, they overcame and gained significant strength to accomplish the task. Participant twenty-two wrote about the time spent with their partner and others, "while the outreach may have touched people who do not attend our church, I believe the benefits, at least on this occasion, were more beneficial to our own church family." This participant talks about how they could not accomplish what they did without their time with their intergenerational partner. Though not said verbatim, this mindset of participant twenty-two was a common component among 85 percent of the participants. This

mindset adds confidence to say that the intergenerational partnership has been successful on some level.

Mindset Shift

Working through the journals of the participants, one could find, in various journaling days, insights into how this project changed the mindset of participants from various generations. Participant seventeen writes about how this project with their generational partner has been eye-opening because it showed them that other generations cared and wanted to hear what they had to say. The participant continued stating how they appreciated and benefited from the guidance they obtained in the short time they spent together. Participant seventeen concluded that journal entry by stating, "I hope my relationships continue and I add new ones!" Some of these entries were less in-depth than participants one and twenty-three, who expressed how listening and learning from other generations was much easier, especially in the one-on-one time, than they thought it would be.

Additional insight about the mindset shift, gleaned from the journals, was found in the journal of participant twenty-five. This participant writes, "This was an awesome experience for me. It was great to find intentional times to become more personal with someone else. This study helped create a great deal of transparency which enabled everyone to be more open about their views and those of others." Participant twenty-five concluded the journal entry, "God created us to have intentional relationships with others, and we need to be more intentional about it." This participant's understanding was aligned with what this project was trying to accomplish. This alignment lends a degree of evidence that the bridge between the generations of the church can be built through intentional intergenerational interaction.

A final journal entry that gave great insight was that of participant five. This participant began the journal entry by writing about how they enjoyed the weekly studies, the encouragement they brought to talk more confidently with those outside the four walls of the church, and their time discussing these things with their partner. Those comments were insightful, but what followed was most revealing. Participant five writes, "I did use to think things in the church had to be done in set and like-minded age groups. However, as we have been doing small groups and this intentional intergenerational study, I believe there is power in generations working together to serve the Lord." The participant concludes the entry by writing how they hope to continue this way of studying because it helped them grow, and they saw the church grow as well. The insight given here by this participant again gives credibility to how the intent of this project to build bridges between generations in the church is possible, and the intergenerational small group initiative provides a way for this to take place.

It is important to note that not everyone in the journaling process wrote about the project's success. As one of the outside observational journalists wrote, "some just seem to go through the motions as if it were a school assignment." When one does the statistical analysis of this, through insight from the journals, that number comes to around five to six individuals. Upon conference with the two outside observational journalists, they agreed on this number. Again it is not that everyone gave a considerable amount of insight as the two final participant examples; everyone still lined up in the same manner regarding their experience with the project's purpose.

End of Study Survey

Just as the baseline survey was given at the beginning, the end-of-study survey was given to establish whether the project successfully corrected the intergenerational disconnect in the

church. The survey also looks to establish if the project was successful and to what level of success it was. Three areas of comparison will be looked at in this section.

Comparison of Importance

The first of these areas is the importance of intergenerational ministry. For the most part, the numbers here did not change, with roughly 92 percent of the participants agreeing that it is very important for the generations of the church to interact. While 5 percent were neutral to the idea, and 3 percent somewhat agreed with the idea. The primary indicator in this area about the issue of intergenerational ministry comes from the participants describing why they felt the way they did. These numbers were a virtual turnover. Initially, 62 percent of participants could not give any reason as to why they agreed or no reason at all.

In comparison, 38 percent of participants could give a somewhat informed reason. The numbers now reveal that 38 percent of participants are either neutral or still do not understand the issue on more than a general level. At the same time, 62 percent of participants who agreed demonstrated an understanding of what and why intergenerational ministry is needed in the church. This data can be observed in figure 5.

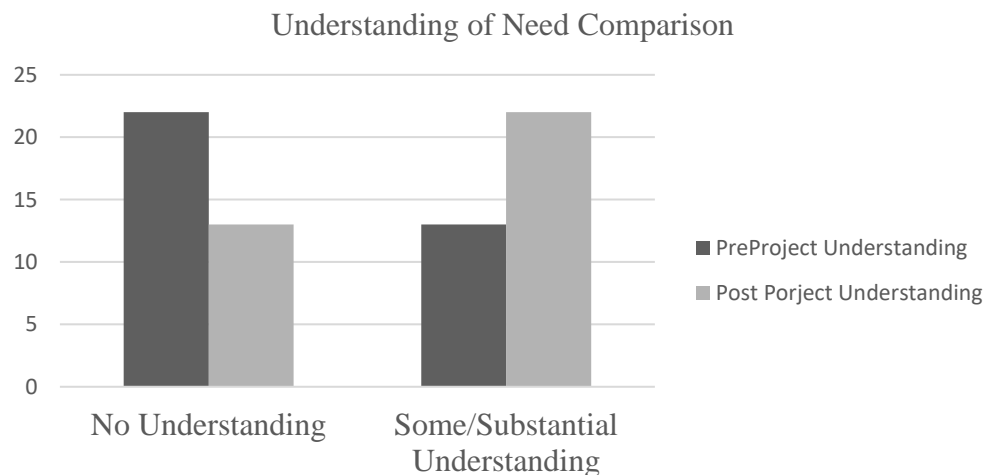


Figure 5. Understanding of Need Comparison

These understandings are reflected by participant eight, who stated that it is "an investment...one that allows you to discuss current issues while also learning how these issues have affected others' views." Participant twenty-five writes, "it is an important part of building the church and tearing down walls that separate intimate levels of friendship that Jesus says we should have. While also allowing us to hone our strengths and improve on our weaknesses." In comparison, these two participants related more towards the discipleship side, while participant twenty-two related to the friendship side. Participant twenty-two writes, "We see people in church on regular occasions. We speak in general conversations and know some connections to the other person. However, intergenerational ministry allows you to get to know, really know people, and learn from them." Participant twenty-two hits the right spot in understanding that intergenerational ministry allows believers to know each other, for believers must know each other to invest spiritually in their lives. These three participants sum up, in more words than others, the consensus as to what most participants believe is what and why of intergenerational ministry.

Comparison of Necessity

The second area of analysis revolves around whether the church should offer more opportunities for intergenerational ministries and would the participants be willing to be involved. An astounding 97 percent of the participants agreed that the church needs to offer more opportunities for intentional intergenerational ministry in the church. One participant, or 3 percent, said no to offering more opportunities. This participant, participant ten, felt that the church should go back to the traditional way Sunday night church had always been done. This participant stated that they preferred the preaching style of the church over the classes and the

interaction. This standing was due to the feeling that the project's premise was accomplished in other ways throughout the church activities. It should also be noted that, for the sake of being thorough, the one other participant who was neutral on the intergenerational ministry did not have a preference as to whether or not more intentional opportunities were offered.

Outside of these two participants, all said they would emphatically be part of any opportunity to do intergenerational ministry offered. The participants described how they grew during this time, both spiritually and in the community. Again, participant twenty-five wrote that it benefited the whole church and all age groups. The participant continued describing how the opportunities allowed them to sharpen themselves and others while also getting to know the heart of one's church family. Participants one, twenty-two, and seventeen went as far as to advise on how to improve and extend the study. Participant seventeen wrote that the intergenerational ministry needs to be extended to the student ministry area of the church. At the same time, participant twenty-two gave suggestions to enable more interaction with other generations by possibly limiting time together before one switches partners. The overall mindset of each participant was the same at the conclusion, except for the two participants, that the intergenerational ministry project worked, is needed, and had a level of impact on their spiritual maturity.

Comparison of Spiritual Maturity

The third point of comparison is that of spiritual maturity. If the project did not have any effect, though it was a short period, on the participants, then ultimately, it did not reach its biblical or designed goal. This question is a question that many times is vaguely understood. The question is, therefore, only sometimes answered with the most accuracy. To help elevate some of this, as the participants worked through this question, they were reminded that this was not just

about obtaining knowledge but was about the overall impact of the small group study and the intentional interaction with their intergenerational partner. To assist in analyzing, figure 6 shows the comparison of the baseline survey spiritual maturity and that of the end-of-study survey.

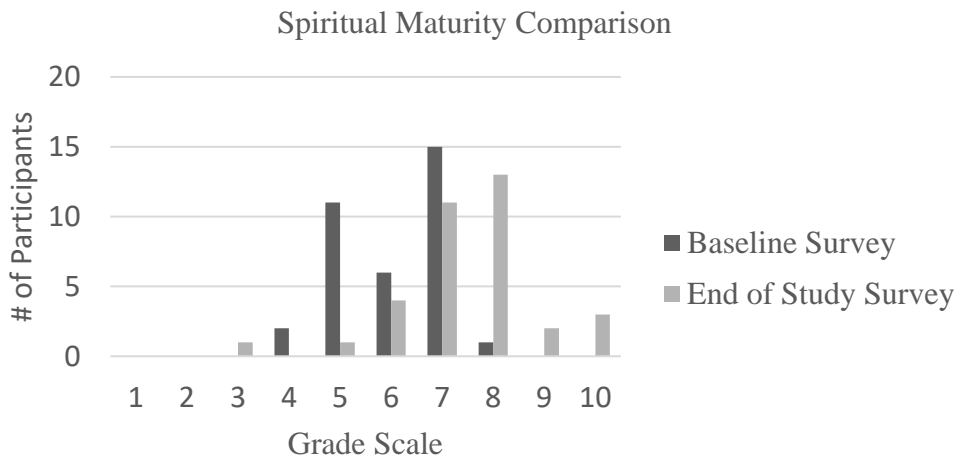


Figure 6. Spiritual Maturity Comparison

Looking at the data in this chart, one can see a shift in spiritual maturity from the beginning of the study to the end. Looking at the chart, one can ascertain a margin of error due to possible overzealousness or misunderstanding of the question. Another curious data point is the score of three by a single participant on the second survey. Participant ten did not explain why they marked themselves two places lower than the first survey. For possible clarity and insight, this participant was the one who did not value the project or see the necessity to continue such interactions. However, taking the two extremes into account, one can still see an uptick in effect on the spiritual maturity of the participants. The most significant change came on the scale of five, which went from eleven participants to one, and grade eight moved from one to eleven. Considering the two margins' values, the movement was right around a one-point increase in their spiritual maturity grade with only a few increasing two-grade scale points. As it pertains to

this project, even though it was short-term, one can deduce that the intergenerational small groups had a positive stabilizing effect on the spiritual maturity of the participants, even if one were to factor in a margin of error.

There were two points of analysis that, through the process, did not provide insight into the effectiveness of the project. The first of these was that of discipleship. The information garnered through the questions stayed virtually in the same place statistically. Roughly 62 percent, an unchanged amount, of participants gave any substantial insight into discipleship or the effect this process had on their idea of discipleship. This unchanged number could be because this being a discipleship process should have been emphasized. The stress was placed on intergenerational interaction. The final area that did not change drastically was sharing the gospel or one's faith. The statistical data for this area was the same, with slightly under 57 percent still not sharing often and just over 40 percent sharing their faith often to very often.

These percentages are puzzling with all the positive comments from the outreach event. However, this could be due to the later time in the project when the event took place. It could be that the actual effects have yet to come to fruition or that the participants need more experience with other generations to see if there is any correlation between intergenerational interaction and willingness to share one's faith more. All this data combined, both positive and negative, having been compiled should give us a complete analysis of the effectiveness of this project.

Final Safeguard

The desire to analyze all this data is to determine the effectiveness of the corrective offered in this project. So, the question arises when one takes off the blinders of what one wants to see and evaluates the evidence; what kind of outcome did this project have? As one looks to the matter's conclusion, one must not read into what one wants to see. That is why some

individuals were assigned outside observers as a safety precaution. Their duty was to be a second and third set of eyes to draw from as a control to keep this project's facilitator from seeing what he wanted to see.

Upon collecting their journals, both observational journalists testified to the same things. They both began describing a group of nervous and anticipative participants. Journalists one and two discussed how people moved from a familiar grouping to expand their comfort zones to their new intergenerational partners. They both wrote about how conversations among the intergenerational partners began short and pointed and moved to longer and more intimate issues being discussed. About halfway through the project study, observational journalist one referred to some participants going through the motions as if it were an assignment to check off. Observational journalist two did this, but not until after the outreach event. However, both outsider observational journalists concurred that they thought the intergenerational small group partnerships were accomplishing the set forth task. Observation journalist two, in the last journal entry (their journals were taken up a couple of weeks after the study was completed), described how they were still seeing individuals who were partnered together interacting on multiple levels. The guiding summary that can be gleaned from the outside observational journalist is that the project had its points that need improvement and adjustment. However, the primary purpose did appear to be accomplished.

So, what does all this data prove? What does it say about the desired outcome of the effectiveness of the project? Did the project work as intended? What possible adjustments to the process if it did or did not? What about expansion, as some participants suggested, in implementing other age groups in the church? It is to these questions that chapter five will turn and address.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This project set out to offer a corrective avenue through which Cerro Gordo Baptist Church could navigate to address the generational disconnect in the church and thereby exist in a state of a fit church.¹⁴² The generational disconnect was not something that happened in a single event. Generational disconnect related to Cerro Gordo Baptist Church has developed over many years and in an ever-so-incremental manner. Disconnect grew over the years as the church continued to age and segregated into smaller and smaller segments to the point that it was virtually a single age in a group. The over-application of age segregation created an environment in which the generations of the church very seldom interacted, much less invested in one another. It is important to note that age-segregated ministry is not wrong, and proving so was never the intent of this project. Age-segregated ministry has its place and needs in all church ministry; however, the overuse causes the problem, especially in Cerro Gordo Baptist Church.

Theological Premise

Theologically speaking, the interaction and investment between generations are commanded and seen in various relationships throughout Scripture. Two primary Scriptures in which one can see the command are Deuteronomy chapter six and Titus chapter two. In the Deuteronomy passage, one sees the generational covenant in which the very foundation of the faith carrying on rests in the generations imparting on the others the knowledge and instruction of God. The Titus passage is the New Testament's version of what is commanded in the Deuteronomy passage. This passage, too, is the previous generations' passage on the knowledge and instruction of God to the next generations.

¹⁴² For more insight into what defines a fit church, see Gary L. McIntosh and Phil Stevenson, *Building the Body: 12 Characteristics of a Fit Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018).

Not only as biblical commands does one see the importance and necessity of intergenerational investment but also relationally. In the Old Testament, one can see intergenerational investment going on in relationships like that of Moses and Joshua and Elijah and Elisha. The Scriptures in Exodus 33 describe how Joshua stayed close to Moses, and therefore Moses was able to invest in Joshua, which prepared him for the next phase of his life. In the book of 1 Kings, one finds the history of Elijah and Elisha. As these two walked with each other, Elijah invested in Elisha, preparing him for the next phase of life. In the New Testament, one sees the intergenerational investment in relationships such as Barnabas and Paul, Paul and Timothy, Paul and Silas, and even some scholars imply Jesus and the apostles. Also, in the New Testament, the writers use the imagery of the household. Using this imagery, the writers describe the intimate nature of relationships in the church, the development of its leaders and the church's growth, and the relationship between believers and God.¹⁴³ The vital aspect to grasp here is that intergenerational investment, or ministry, is not simply a new method for ministry but solidly finds its foundation in Scripture as a command and exemplified for the ready in many relationships.

Theoretical Premise

Much research has been done in a broader and conceptual sense of intergenerational investment by people like Holly Catterton Allen, Christine Lawton Ross, and Cory Seibel. More conceptually, Bob Whitesel, Kent Hunter, Timothy Paul Jones, and John David Trentham address the issue through small groups and designing family ministries. Allen and Ross Barnett address the issue of intergenerational ministry in their book *Faithful Generations Effective*

¹⁴³ Cory Seibel, ed. *The Generative Church: Global Conversations about Investing in Emerging Generations* (Eugene, OR: WIPF and Stock, 2019), 53.

Ministry across Generational Lines and give foundational information to the concept of intergenerational investment and ministry. Each of these individuals who have contributed to the greater work of the importance of intergenerational investment agrees that communication among generations is an issue due to the cultural nature of modern generations. According to the proponents, intergenerational investment also strongly suggests that it is not simply the individual's responsibility to correct. The consensus is that leadership must work to change the current ministry culture in how it influences lives and grows the faith. Sean McDowell, author and professor of apologetics at Talbot School of Theology, writes, "Time is short, the challenges are pressing, and the need is great. Now, more than ever, we must embrace strategies that will help young people set their hope in God, remember God's works, and keep God's commands—so that the next generation will know."¹⁴⁴

Even though there are a lot of strategies out there, there are two primary approaches under which most of the others will fall. The first of these is that of family-based ministry. In family-based ministry, intergenerational investment should be a natural occurrence. The family ministry theory is a theory that takes intergenerational ministry into the home. The key to this theory is to "equip parents to disciple their children in the context of their daily lives together."¹⁴⁵ In this ministry theory, the church transitions its events to family-oriented. Retreats, service events, and special event nights become family-focused. The family-based intergenerational ministry believes that the most significant generational impact the church can foster is through the family unit. This equipping is the shared effort of the church to come alongside parents or guardians to aid in the family's spiritual growth. It is believed that if the church equips the family

¹⁴⁴ Sean McDowell and J. Warner Wallace, *So The Next Generation Will Know: Preparing Young Christians for a Challenging World* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook 2019), 27.

¹⁴⁵ Jones, and Trentham, *Practical Family Ministry*, 11.

for generational ministry, it will also be doing generational ministry. This method is cyclical as it works itself out.

The second approach is small groups. Small groups are groups of individuals or couples who gather to walk through life together. These groups present the church with the ability to build an intimate community among its members, thereby investing in one another's lives. Harley Atkinson, a proponent of small groups, argues that small groups provide the close-knit community many long for and the opportunity for intergenerational investing. Taking it a step further, some sociologists reaffirm this by holding the idea that the groups to which people belong greatly influence them. However, for small groups to be viable, there must be intentionality in making sure that groups gather, not just according to similar age, but in the diversity of generations. The intentional variety of generations in the small groups is the foundation for correcting the intergenerational disconnect found in Cerro Gordo Baptist Church.

Data Interpretation

Interpretation of Intergenerational Knowledge

The project's corrective plan was compiled upon the foundation of small groups with an intergenerational component. The procedure was carried out, and the data was collected. Examining all the data and the points of comparison, one can determine whether the project accomplished its goal. Looking at the data, the first observation is the move from an absolute lack of knowledge of the need for generational investment. By the end of the study, the participants had a working knowledge of what intergenerational ministry was about and the motivation to make sure such ministry was part of the church's ministry life. Therefore, the project was successful in the area of setting a precedent for intergenerational investment.

Interpretation of Discipleship

A second area for examination is that of discipleship. At the beginning of the project, most participants were involved in age-segregated forms of discipleship, with only five total participants not involved at all in discipleship. After the project, all but one participant is involved in discipleship now. What is most important to note as it relates to the effectiveness of this project is that the thirty-four participants currently engaged in discipleship are in an intergenerational environment where it is taking place. It is not that they have left their age-segregated groups; instead, they have formed new groups across generational lines with intentional investment across those lines. It is exciting to note that these groups have also invited other individuals to participate that were outside the original study. This is evidence that they have embraced what Jerry Bridges put forth when he wrote that one of the greatest acts one could do in the church is to share the spiritual truths that God has been teaching us.¹⁴⁶ The data also reveals that the church's people have begun to understand that the church is a community that must nurture one another in the faith.¹⁴⁷ The data reveals that discipleship is not only important for growth spiritually but also that it needs to take place among other believers.

Interpretation of Spiritual Maturity

The next area of examination from the data is spiritual maturity. As stated in chapter four, there was a substantial shift in the individuals scoring themselves on their spiritual maturity level. According to the survey questions and journals, this growth was primarily credited to the time spent discussing and working through the study materials with their intergenerational

¹⁴⁶ Bridges, *True Community*, 50.

¹⁴⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 867.

partners, even considering a margin of error. In the journals and surveys, many participants stated that spending time with people of different generations, dealing with differences of opinions, incorporating the material into their worldviews, and having the opportunity to talk about it enabled them to process and integrate it all genuinely. The growth in spiritual maturity accomplished through this project lends credence to the effectiveness of this method of intergenerational small groups as a corrective to the generational disconnect.

Interpretation of Outreach Event

A final area of data examination pertains to the effectiveness of the project, as found in the outreach event. Digging through the data in journals and the outreach event survey revealed two lines of information related to the method's effectiveness. The primary evidence was revealed in the question about how the participants felt the course of study and intergenerational interaction prepared them for the outreach event. The data reveals that thirty-two participants felt prepared for the outreach event. This preparedness is corroborated by the information from the surveys and journals that had participants writing that their time spent with their intergenerational partner enabled them to talk with others with greater ease and made others seem more approachable. They also reiterated that their time out with their intergenerational partner enabled them to encourage and be encouraged by others of differing generations. The interaction between the participants is a vast difference from before the project. Now instead of gathering with friends their generational age when the church does outreach, individuals tend to congregate with different generations, primarily those they interacted with during the study, while also pulling others who did not participate and of different generations along with them.

While credence is lent to the method's positive impact on the project's preparedness, the positive impact is also seen through how the different generations interacted with the generations

they came in contact with throughout the community. Before the outreach event, roughly three-quarters of the participants, in some manner, either verbally, on a survey, or in a journal entry, voiced concern about talking with others of different generations. During the study, the older generations were concerned about communicating with the younger generations, and the younger generations were concerned about sharing with the older generations they would encounter. However, through the input of the outreach event survey and the journals of each participant, which were discussed in the previous chapter, one could deduce that the participants, through the intergenerational contact of their partnership and the material of the small group study they had the confidence to approach others in sharing the faith as well as seeking ministry opportunities in the community. Through the felt preparedness, written survey responses, voiced participant responses, and observations made of the groups, this event lends credibility to how small groups with intentional intergenerational investment work to correct the disconnect in the church.

Additional Insights

After reviewing all the information related to the project, some additional insights should be considered. These insights include intentionality, sustainability, and modification. These insights are derived from the data collected and observations made while conducting the project.

Intentionality

The first insight is intentionality. As the project phases began being carried out, it was noticed that the project required a great deal of intentionality. This need was first observed when the study started, and over the first couple of sessions, though the partnerships had been created, individuals gravitated toward those they were most like. It was then tested upon the completion of the official partnerships and study period that groups, after a month, began shifting back.

However, upon reiterating the premise and intentional encouragement to keep those other generations connected, it was observed that partners began investing and communicating again. It was then concluded that maintaining the bridges between generations being used would not necessarily become natural over a short period. Therefore, there would need to be intentionality in keeping the concept before the participants to allow it to truly take root in their lives and church culture. Just as God, as the great Shepherd, is ever vigilant in guiding the lives of His flock, so too must the church's leadership be where God has placed them to shepherd.¹⁴⁸ Leadership must then be committed to aiding the process in various ways.

Sustainability and Replicability

During the process of carrying out the project, while intentionality was a discovery, sustainability, and replicability were looked for each week. The sustainability of the intergenerational small group method rests primarily on commitment. As part of this commitment, the church's leadership must continue to support and invest in the process. If the church leadership does not see the need, or if they do but do not push it forward, the church will regress to its former ways. The leadership must lead by example. For the process to be sustainable, the leadership team must regularly evaluate to obtain data to make needed adjustments and modifications.

There is also the commitment of the church congregation to the method. The church must be willing to commit and walk the process. The process will be anemic if members are half dedicated to the technique. They must also be willing to allow the process to work itself out, even if it means church culture shifts must occur. For the intergenerational small group

¹⁴⁸ Daniel L. Akin and R. Scott Pace, *Pastoral Theology: Theological Foundations for Who A Pastor is and What He Does* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2017), 208-209.

investment method to become normative, it will take a concerted effort from both leadership and those who participate.

As for the replicability of the method, it builds itself from the above sustainability. As long as the church leadership and those willing to participate in bridging the intergenerational disconnect through small groups are committed, it can be done. If followed, the phases of this project's methodology are simple enough to begin an intergenerational small group ministry. Modifications will need to be made due to the context in which the method is being used will differ. However, the overall implementation of the project should be easy. The difficulty level rests more in the buy-in of leadership and the church than in the method itself.

Modifications

Like so many other portions of life, the need for adjustments sometimes presents itself. These adjustments are sometimes major, while other times, they are minor. It is important to note that through the carrying out of the project, three possible modifications were observed or deserve a moment of consideration; this is not to say there are no other possible modifications, but they are more contextually related.

Modification One

The first of these modifications revolves around the implementation of younger generations. This modification to the method comes from several participants who wrote in their journals and end surveys about how the method needs to include the younger generations of the church. The desire to include younger generations reverberates the notion of Glassford and Barger-Elliot, who believe that generational segregation synthetically divides the church and

fails to prepare it for the works God has for it to do.¹⁴⁹ Though this is a modification to the project, it reveals to some degree that the corrective is altering the base concept of ministry that has been so prevalent in CGBC.

The inclusion of those under the age of eighteen would require a good deal of cautionary measures. Such measures include parental consent to participate and background checks for everyone over eighteen. Other safety precautions should be taken, such as limits on communication and places that could be used to meet. Though groups would be same-gender groups, these precautions must be in place to protect the younger and older generational participants and the church itself. This modification is a cautionary modification due to the reality not everything can be prepared for, and nothing is perfect.

Modification Two

Another modification related to intergenerational partner groups is the duration partners are given to invest in one another's lives. The premise for this modification also comes from some participants who suggested limiting the partnerships by switching them around periodically. The positive of this modification is how it gives the ability to have multiple backgrounds and stages of life, investing in other generations. However, there is the possibility that this changing of intergenerational partners will handicap the ability for a genuine community to be established among the partners. As long as the regrouping of partners is not too frequent, this may not be the case, but it will need to be monitored if the project's communal part is to be accomplished. The communal aspect of the intergenerational partners is vital to correcting the disconnect between the generations of the church.

¹⁴⁹ Glassford, and Barger-Elliot, "Toward Intergenerational Ministry..." 364.

Modification Three

The third modification pertains to the evaluation through surveys and journals. Input for this modification comes from the personal information of the primary project investigator. For this modification, the simple suggestion is to be more direct in the open-ended questions. This more direct questioning would allow for less interpretive data analysis and more direct input. For example, the surveys look at points of evidence that hint at possible success, such as questions about spiritual maturity or asking if such methods should be used again. The participants were never directly asked if the project successfully bridges the generational disconnect. Although information about the effectiveness of the project has been determined in other ways for future evaluation, more direct questions could provide more information regarding what parts of the project are working and what components need to be modified.

Research Limitation

During the study, the researcher identified one primary limitation. The limitation arose from the pool of interested participants. The original pool of fifty participants comprised mainly down the middle of half female and male individuals. However, when the potential participants learned more about what would be required for the project study, the number of people who decided to participate was reduced to thirty-five. The shrinking participant pool created a lack of male participants and a loss of only a few female participants. Most of those who declined to participate were concerned about either work commitments or the taking up of Sunday afternoon activities. Because of the lower number of male participants, the study could not gather as much information to more accurately assess the overall effectiveness of this project among males in the church. The lack of more male participants is not to say that the effectiveness conclusion is inaccurate but that more male participants could better support it.

Though it is not detrimental overall to the project, it does seem to express the continued need for the men of CGBC to understand the great importance of intergenerational investment, especially in the current cultural environment. They need to understand the stability and wisdom they can provide to other generations while gaining energy and passion from other generations. The men of the CGBC need to gain a drive for other generations to sustain the faith and for the faith to move forward.¹⁵⁰

Further Research

Throughout the research project, a few ideas for further research surfaced. These ideas contain the inclusion of the next generation of the church. At what level does the process lose effectiveness in training participants for this ministry? The following is a brief description of these areas of further research.

Next Generation Inclusion

The next phase of research for this project will be to extend the intergenerational small group corrective into the next age group not included in this project. This extension will consist of the involvement of those who are in grades nine through twelve. Initially, ninth through twelfth-grade participants were omitted from the project due to the desire to maintain current ministry initiatives. Adding this group of individuals will give insight into how effective this corrective can continue toward building intergenerational bridges that close the generational disconnect in the church. Executing this inclusion will require both supervision as well as evaluation. The first step that will have to be established concerns safety for both the teens involved as well as the adult participants. As stated in a previous section, safety measures will

¹⁵⁰ Allen, ed., *Intergenerate*, 118.

have to be in place for the involvement of those under eighteen. The church will establish background checks and a method for complete transparency with parents or guardians.

The second step will be to establish intergenerational groups. These groups will function much like the groups from the primary project. Adding new participants to the already established intergenerational groups will create even greater input diversity and create an environment that will stretch the established ideology of the other generations. This newfound triad will study both hot-button issues, what the Bible says about them, and individual books of the Bible. Opportunities to serve the community, which should aid in building the needed unity among the generations, will be provided.

Assessment will be conducted on both hot-button issues and studying individual books of the Bible to see which seems to have the most significant impact on daily life and spiritual growth. The desire for these groups is to continue building bridges between the generations, closing the disconnect between them, and ultimately creating unity in the church. Assessing these aspects will be conducted by utilizing both surveys and journaling. A team will evaluate the conditions of the groups at regular intervals. This evaluation will ascertain if group modifications or study materials are needed.¹⁵¹

Research of Age Range

A second area to carry out further research for this project is to develop a version of the corrective that revolves around the introduction to and the generational investment of the younger kids of the church. This area may seem similar to the previous area of research; however, the primary desire here is to determine to what age level this corrective can be

¹⁵¹ For further insight, see James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017).

effective. This reach into younger ages is to be proactive in assimilating younger generations so that they are grounded and rooted in the faith, something Whitesel and Hunter suggest has been a church struggle.¹⁵²

To accomplish this connection, the idea is to take intergenerational small groups' positive aspects and introduce intergenerational bridge-building incrementally. This portion of the corrective action would place one to two kids in an already existing intergenerational small group, creating more of a genuine small group than simply a partnership. These groups would consist of at least three to four generations that would interact once every three months or every two months. These groups would be given subjects to discuss and possible activities to do. At least once a year, for one of the meetings, all the groups would come together for a community service project. All these activities and times would emphasize investing in everyone in the group's lives, not just having fun together.

When adding ninth through twelfth-grade participants to maintain a safe and secure environment, the same safety protocols will be applied when putting these groups together. When the process begins, it will be a gradual grade-by-grade integration. The integration will start with eighth-grade participants and work its way down gradually so that there can be an evaluation of the interaction. This evaluation is to ensure investment is taking place and to assess at what grade to stop the integration of students; the presumption is that it will stop around fifth or sixth grade.

Again, these groups are to function for genuine investment and as an introduction to the concept. These groups would also continue to open up the older generations to the concepts and ideologies that the younger either hold to or have been exposed to, thereby keeping the learning

¹⁵² Whitesel, and Hunter, *A House Divided*, 16-17.

process going both ways. Therefore, starting at a younger age will, at minimum, stunt the widening divide between generations in the church and possibly inhibit the divide from forming.

Research of Training

A final area of further research pertains to training. While walking through the data and rereading the journals, many participants needed clarification about how to carry out certain aspects of the project. This need for clarification was observed in the number of participants questioning what needed to be in the journals or through the participants repeatedly saying how they hoped they were giving the information required. This issue could have impeded the total effectiveness of the project overall. Therefore, it could be beneficial to have a way of training before incorporating participants in the process.

The desire is to develop a training course to better equip the individuals who make the most of the intergenerational small group process. The training would consist of how to carry on intentional conversations, methods of being a good listener, and how to journal.¹⁵³ This training would be conducted before each new session of intergenerational small groups would begin. The design of this training is to be both establishing and refreshing for new and seasoned participants.

Once carried out, the training sessions would allow for comparing the untrained data with the new data gathered from the trained participants. This comparison would allow for assessing if the training is beneficial and cultivates a better environment for the process to work. It is the desire that the whole process involving intergenerational small groups is most effective in both generational investments across generational lines, the overall spiritual growth of the

¹⁵³ To understand these areas, see Christopher Smith, *How the Body of Christ Talks: Recovering the Practice of Conversation in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2019).

participants, and the closure of the generational disconnect gap that has inhibited unity and church growth.

Conclusion

What does all the above information say about the project's effectiveness at small group intergenerational partnerships being a viable corrective path for the church? There are three questions at hand that need to be answered. The first two questions will determine the answer to the third. The first question relates to the effectiveness of the project. Influential in this question is looking from a higher position at all the intricacies and if they produced the results they should. For example, was how the partnerships were assembled effective, or did the surveys collect the data efficiently and the correct data? Upon analyzing the intricacies that made up the project, from the data collected and how it was collected to how groups were formed and so forth, one can conclude that the project and its design were effective. This effectiveness concerned creating an adequate environment in which the project could be carried out. This information, of course, is not suggesting it was perfect; however, with slight modifications to things like the surveys and group formation, the project could be carried out to a greater extent.

The second question that needs to be answered is the project's replicability. This project could be applied to any church situation that has or wants to prevent generational disconnect. It can be said that it is replicable, though it may be a culture shift for some churches due to its simplicity. Simplicity here is not about difficulty, for intergenerational investment requires work and can be a process that is culture shifting, which can be difficult for churches. However, simplicity is about the reality that once the theological precept is set and the reward of generational investment is seen, carrying out said method becomes simple. The project has sustainability if there is a commitment by the leadership and the participants to see the process

through and a commitment of intentionality. If there is a commitment to both, the process can be extended and repeated for as long as needed.

One final question remains to be answered. Was the project successfully offering a corrective to the intergenerational disconnect in Cerro Gordo Baptist Church? Considering all the data and the above answers, the simple answer is yes. The project cultivated an environment where the disconnect between generations was bridged. This bridging did not simply occur during the project but is still ongoing six months past the completion of the study. What was once missing in ministering, serving, and teaching across generational lines is still occurring. The bridge building is working its way into other ministry and generational groups outside the project's parameters. It is believed that if the church continues to commit and practice intentionality to the need and process, it will be effective in creating disciples of all generations that will create disciples of the next, and this generational disconnect will cease.

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APPENDIX A

BASELINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: _____

Gender: _____

Age: _____

1. To which of the following Generations do you belong? (Circle One)

G.I. Generation (1901-24) Silent Generation (1925-42) Baby Boomer (1943-60)

Generation X (1961-80) Millennial/Y Generation (1981-2001)

2. Which of the following generations do you most often interact with on a regular basis?
(circle all that apply)

G.I. Generation (1901-24) Silent Generation (1925-42) Baby Boomer (1943-60)

Generation X (1961-80) Millennial/Y Generation (1981-2001)

3. Describe what kind of interaction you engage in with this generation(s)?

4. Do you believe that generational investment and interact is important?

Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Somewhat Agree Agree

5. Please explain your above answer.

6. To the best of your knowledge explain what intergenerational ministry is.

7. Cerro Gordo Baptist Church offers intergenerational ministry opportunities?

Disagree Somewhat disagree Neutral Somewhat agree Agree

8. Are you currently involved in a discipleship class, small group, or mentorship? Describe why or why not.

9. On the scale below rate your spiritual maturity. One being not mature at all and ten being very mature.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Describe to your best ability your beliefs about discipleship in regards to one's spiritual maturity.

11. How often do you share the gospel?

Never Not very often Often Very Often All the time

12. Describe to the best of your ability the importance of sharing the Gospel.

APPENDIX B

OUTREACH EVENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Gender of Participant: Male Female

1. Explain the outreach activity which you participated. (What was your work experience like with your mentor partner.)

2. Did you share your faith during the outreach event? Why or why not?

3. What generation was the person you shared your faith with? (Circle)

G.I. Generation (1901-24) Silent Generation (1925-42) Baby Boomer (1943-60)

Generation X (1961-80) Millennial/Y Generation (1981-2001)

4. Why was the above individual chosen?

5. How well do you feel you were prepared by the small group studies and mentorship to share your faith?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Were you encouraged by your mentor partner in sharing your faith? Explain.

APPENDIX C

END OF PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Name: _____

Gender: Male Female

Age: _____

1. To which of the following Generations do you belong? (Circle One)

G.I. Generation (1901-24) Silent Generation (1925-42) Baby Boomer (1943-60)
 Generation X (1961-80) Millennial/Y Generation (1981-2001)

2. Which of the following generations were you involved with during this project mentorship? (Circle One)

G.I. Generation (1901-24) Silent Generation (1925-42) Baby Boomer (1943-60)
 Generation X (1961-80) Millennial/Y Generation (1981-2001)

3. Describe what kind of interaction you engaged in with this individual during the project?

4. At the conclusion of this project do you believe that generational investment and interact is important?

Disagree Somewhat Disagree Neutral Somewhat Agree Agree

5. Please explain your above answer.

6. Now at the conclusion of this project to the best of your knowledge explain what intergenerational ministry is.

7. Should Cerro Gordo Baptist Church offer more intergenerational ministry opportunities?

Disagree Somewhat disagree Neutral Somewhat agree Agree

8. If offered will you continue to be involved in a discipleship class, small group, or mentorship?
Describe why or why not.

9. At the conclusion of this project on the scale below rate your spiritual maturity. One being not mature at all and ten being very mature.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. At the conclusion of this project describe to your best ability your beliefs about discipleship in regards to one's spiritual maturity.

11. At the conclusion of this project how often do you share the gospel?

Never Not very often Often Very Often All the time

12. At the conclusion of this project describe to the best of your ability the importance of sharing the Gospel.

APPENDIX E

FOUNDATIONAL BIBLE STUDY LESSONS

Session One:

Title: Foundations for Intergenerational Ministry

Passages: Genesis 1, Deuteronomy 4 & 6, Psalm 145, Matthew 10, and Colossians 3

Goal: This lesson aims to demonstrate intergenerational ministry from a Scriptural foundation. This lesson hopes to show that this style of ministry is beneficial to both the individuals involved and the Church. The information in this study is taught to build the foundation for and a need-based desire to participate in intergenerational ministry.

Session Two:

Title: Intergenerational Ministry in the Old Testament

Goal: This lesson aims to show Old Testament examples of intergenerational ministry. The motivation behind this is to show the positive and negative ramifications of this style of investment in other generations. This study will also provide participants with insights into carrying out intergenerational ministry.

Session Three:

Title: Intergenerational Ministry in the New Testament

Key Books: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts

Goal: This lesson aims to show New Testament examples of intergenerational ministry. Some of these examples will be Jesus' interaction with children, the relationship between Jesus and the disciples, and relationships between Paul and his ministry companions.

APPENDIX F
SEVEN WEEK BIBLE STUDY

Session One:

Title: Prayer

Goal: The purpose behind this weeks study is to look into the prayer lives of examples found throughout Scripture to glean information for a more effective prayer life. Both Old and New Testament individuals these individuals include Hannah, Daniel, Jesus, and Paul. This study will also discuss the different types of prayers that are found in Scripture. This study of prayer is intended encourage intergenerational partners to develop both individual prayer lives as well as developing a prayer life for others.

Session Two:

Title: Abortion

Goal: The subject matter of this session will be to provide a foundation for the believers stance on the issue of Abortion. This study is designed to provide the biblical information that may believers say they believe but do not know how to defend what they believe. This study will also investigate the line of thinking that guides the pro-choice stance then addressing what the scriptures say about those points. This study will not only inform them as what to believe but give those involved the confidence to defend their stance. It is important to note this study is not about condemnation of others but serves as a point of clarification and correction. This issue was chosen due to the large variants in opinions among different generations both inside and outside the church.

Session Three:

Title: Guns and Their Use

Goal: This study will investigate the 2nd Amendment, gun ownership and a believers right to defend themselves and others. This study will look at arguments for and against guns and their use. The session will also look at what the guidelines that scripture brings forth concerning defense and the use of weapons. The desire for this session is not to convince anyone to purchase a weapon or any kind or to convince anyone to lay down their weapons. The purpose is to bring forth a godly and biblical perspective on the issue of guns and gun rights. This subject was chosen to get generations to interact on a level so as to see the differing perspectives that even exist in a small rural community across generational lines.

Session Four:

Title: Homosexuality, Transgender, and other Gender Ideas

Goal: This study will begin by looking briefly at the cultural dimension of gender issues and at a few very broad but almost universal questions that are asked by those dealing with these issues. This session will also define key terms so that everyone is working from the same understanding due to how many words are used interchangeably. The study will then turn investigating what the Bible says concerning these issues. The point is not for the empowerment of overzealous condemnation but to establish for believers where what they believe is found and for them to be able to interactive effectively in the lives of others with. This subject material varies drastically from generation to generation and so this study's desire is to bring generations to a point where they address the issue but do so with the compassion and concern of Jesus Christ.

Session Five:

Title: Poverty

Goal: This session's purpose is to uncover the reality that poverty is more than the lack of material positions, especially the lack of money. This study will look at how poverty can be multi-dimensional meaning that it includes living situation, income, and emotional and mental health. This session will study what scripture says about God's heart concerning poverty both locally and worldwide. This session will encourage individuals to look at poverty differently and to make room in their lives to help those in need through more than just monetary means. This subject matter is viewed differently across generations and each individual can benefit from the views of others concerning people and poverty. The desire to move individuals from assumptions to reality and from callousness to generosity.

Session Six:

Title: Immigration

Goal: This session's subject was chosen due to the hot button nature of the issue as well as being a rural community there is a great number of individuals and families who move into the area for jobs. This session will look at prejudices that occur many times towards those who are coming to the area for a better life. The study will also address two aspects of the relationship between the host area and those coming as immigrants and refugees. These two aspects pertain to the responsibility of the host to love and share the gospel while also the responsibility of those coming to not be a burden but to contribute. This session will give a biblical view of God's heart for the strangers in the land while giving guidelines for individuals for interaction with immigrants and refugees. This again is a hot button issue and varies from individual to individual

as to how they perceive the issue of immigration. The subject was chosen in order to bring a biblical centrist view godly interaction and sharing of the gospel.

Session Seven:

Title: Suicide

Goal: This session aims to establish a biblical understanding of surrounding the issue of suicide. With the increase in recent years of this issue it is important to have a biblical understanding and to understand the heart of God concerning this and other mental health issue. This study will look to answer several key questions that are asked concerning specifically suicide. This study will also challenge believer to be more intentional and proactive in their interaction with those struggling with the issue of suicide or other mental health issues. This subject for this session was chosen so as to bring a consensus about the many facets surround this is subject across generational lines.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ A Rebel's Manifesto: Choosing Truth Real Justice, and Love amid the Noise of Today's World by Sean McDowell was influential in creating this study series.

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 14, 2022

George Strickland
Jacob Dunlow

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-734 Addressing the Intergenerational Disconnect through Small Group Ministry in a Rural Church

Dear George Strickland and Jacob Dunlow,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Evidence-based practice projects are considered quality improvement activities, which are not “designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge” according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

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

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office