

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

TOWARD A LIFELONG DISCIPLESHIP: A MODEL OF CONGREGATIONAL
YOUTH MINISTRY FOR THE SOUTH WEYMOUTH CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

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IN CHANGING CULTURES

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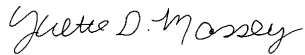
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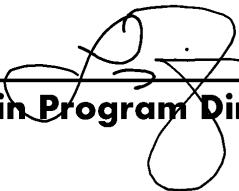
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I am indebted to the many young people I love who call me pastor. Their influence on my life cannot be understated. This dissertation is offered to the church with great affection for them in the hope that together we will create a lasting home of faith exploration and godly encounter for generations to come.

I dedicate this project to my two favorite young people, my incredible son, and my amazing daughter. You both have taught me to see the very best, given me hope when things were at their worst, and inspired me to invest in a better tomorrow. There is no greater honor than the privilege of being your dad. I am so very proud of you both.

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Abstract

This project was developed to assist the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene, of Weymouth, Massachusetts, to embody a congregational approach to ministry that nurtures adolescents into a lifelong journey of sanctification. Generation Z faces a variety of complexities that challenge the church to contextualize its approach to youth ministry in ways that develop sustainable faith in young people. This dissertation offers an intergenerational approach to spiritual formation that nurtures faith in ways that account for some of the uniqueness of Generation Z. The project proposes a congregational campaign that embodies intergenerational ministry. The *Generation to Generation* campaign is designed to lead local congregations through actionable steps toward creating a culture of intergenerational discipleship. In this environment, young people are challenged to develop lifelong Christian faith by rooting their identity in Christ, belonging to the Body of Christ, and discovering their purpose within the mission of God.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM IN CONTEXT

Introduction

The Church of the Nazarene is a global community of Christian faith in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition. The designation "Wesleyan Holiness" is best understood as a movement within the larger Christian Church. It arises from the 18th century Evangelical Revival inspired by the work of God in the lives of Anglican ministers John and Charles Wesley. The Wesley brothers emphasized personal sanctification brought about by the transformation of divine love within an accountable community that compels people to engage in mission. This emphasis was critical in the founding of the Methodist movement. David McEwan explains, "At the heart of John Wesley's theological understanding is the claim that the essential nature of God is love and that this is expressed relationally within the triune Godhead, and then with the creatures God made. A full understanding of sanctification is, therefore, explicitly, and necessarily tied to love."¹ Love is essential to Wesley's doctrine of sanctification, and it cannot be experienced apart from a community. Divine love binds a person in an intimate relationship with The Holy, compelling that person to partner in God's redemptive mission to creation. Sin understood in a Wesleyan-Holiness framework, opposes God's redemptive mission in the world and is overcome by the increasing presence of God's sanctifying love.² Sanctification, therefore, in the words of Tim Crutcher, "is best thought of as that which orients us away from sin and toward God, allowing us to become more like God so that we can be a more effective part of God's work in

¹ David McEwan, "Why is Sanctification so Important," in *Essential Beliefs: A Wesleyan Primer*, ed. Mark A. Maddix and Diane Leclerc (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2016) 104.

² John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection: As Believed and Taught by the Reverend Mr. John Wesley from the year 1725 to the Year 1777* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1966) 45.

the world.”³ Wesley's understanding of sanctification is the distinctive character of Methodism and the compelling factor of its early missional success, particularly among the marginalized.

American Methodism gave rise to the Church of the Nazarene in the early 19th century. In response to the work of the Holy Spirit, early Nazarenes set out to embody the founding principles of Wesleyan holiness by contextualizing them for a new generation with renewed passion. Today the Church of the Nazarene shares its identity with the historic Christian Church in affirming the trinitarian doctrine of God, the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and the intimate fellowship of the community of faith made possible by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Nazarenes value their distinctive Wesleyan-Holiness heritage that informs their faith in ways that are true to Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. This heritage, with its emphasis on sanctification, continues to compel Nazarenes to actively engage in God's redemptive mission by embodying the holy character of divine love and demonstrating the good news of God's kingdom.

I am fortunate to be nurtured in the church of the Nazarene, where I am encouraged to explore my relationship with God among people who seek to become more like him. A local Nazarene congregation supported my childhood faith in the town where I was raised. They invested in my spiritual development and encouraged me in Christ through the turbulent years of my adolescence. The congregation of my youth sent me to our regional Nazarene college in the hope that I would grow in Christ by finding a place of leadership and service among the people of God. There I received a clear calling and was entrusted with influencing young lives along their adolescent journey of sanctification. I have been discipling youth in various capacities for the past 33 years. I have supported students one-on-one and in both small and large groups. I have partnered with youth on foreign and domestic mission fields and directed events to foster

³ Tim Crutcher, "Reclaiming Entire Sanctification," in *Renovating Holiness*, ed. Josh Broward and Thomas Jay Oord (Nampa, ID: SacraSage Press, 2015) 231.

spiritual growth. I have spoken at assemblies, led seminars, and mentored dozens of teenagers, youth pastors, and young ministers. By God's grace, my wife and I have raised two incredible young adults to love Jesus and serve the church.

In 2004 our family was called to minister to a multiethnic, multilingual, urban congregation in an economically depressed area of East Providence, RI. I was a 32-year-old Senior Pastor with a young family in my second church. The congregation trusted me to partner with them in the work of revitalization. A primary concern for this largely immigrant community was reaching young families and strengthening their connection to the local church. My tenure as pastor allowed me to guide a cohort of children from preschool and early elementary into their college years. For sixteen years, we walked with several young families through the early transitions of life, successfully launching our adolescents confidently into young adulthood, only to watch many of them relinquish their faith shortly after leaving home.

In November 2020, during the global COVID-19 pandemic, I answered God's call to become the lead pastor of the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene (SWN) and relocated with our teenage children to the predominately white-collar suburb of Weymouth, Massachusetts, along Boston's South Shore. Our new township is the second oldest settlement within the Commonwealth, established in 1622. The people have a rich 400-year history living together as a community among reminders of every era from colonization to suburbanization. Weymouth is the 23rd largest community in the Commonwealth, comprised of 13 constituent neighborhoods, and is home to just over 57,400 people.⁴ From 2014-2019, the annual population

⁴ Andrew Schiller, "Weymouth, MA Real Estate Market & Demographic Data," NeighborhoodScout, September 19, 2022, <https://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ma/weymouth>.

growth rate for a two-mile radius of our location was .09% which sits above the .065% national average.⁵ Households within this radius closely reflected the makeup of the national average.

Married Couples With Children:	3,657 (19.9%)
Married Couples No Children	5,124 (27.9%)
Male Single Parent:	205 (1.1%)
Female Single Parent:	896 (4.9%)
Other Family, Male Head:	438 (2.4%)
Other Family, Female Head:	1,062 (5.8%)
Non-Family, Alone:	5,851 (31.9%)
Non-Family Not Alone:	1,131 (6.2%)
Total Households:	18,364 ⁶

Although married couples without children make up the most significant percentage of family structures in our neighborhood, our community has a relatively high percentage of children and families as seen the highlighted sections above.

The South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene resembles the demographic of its predominantly white, middle-class community. It has historically been one of the more vital churches of the New England District Church of the Nazarene. In its prime years of numerical growth between 2001-2005, the South Weymouth church averaged over 350 in attendance with a budget between \$450,000-\$500,000 annual income. Although a slow numerical decline followed, SWN continued as one of the district's most robust and vibrant churches for many years. Unfortunately, the last five years have seen this relatively stable congregation through a contentious pastoral transition accompanied by a lengthy two-year pastoral search during a historic global pandemic. Currently, the congregation ministers to an average of 115 people of various ages and family structures. Much of its numerical growth in recent days has been among

⁵ "Church of the Nazarene | Community Demographics," n.d., <https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsNazarene/population.html?y=5187738.696427674>. Accessed June 6, 2022.

⁶ "Church of the Nazarene | Community Demographics," n.d., <https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsNazarene/family.html?y=5187776.480554048>. Accessed June 7, 2022.

people under 35 years old. SWN supports active ministries and programs designed to disciple children, teenagers, college students, adults, and seniors. The last two years have allowed the congregation to reconsider their identity as the missional people of God and embrace this new, post-pandemic, chapter in their story with their new lead pastor.

Over the past 20 years, SWN has placed a high priority on children's and youth ministry. Our congregation has a positive history of assertive outreach and programming to youth and children. For 35 years, SWN has operated a reputable, faith-based preschool for families in our area. Ministry leaders fondly remember summers like those of 2009-2011 when our congregation offered large-scale Vacation Bible Camps hosting 200-250 children from local neighborhoods. Average Sunday worship attendance held steady at around 250. SWN ministered to 20-30 teenagers a week over those good years. However, of the many young people who served as the core participants in our youth and children's programming over the past two decades, ministry leaders, former pastors, and youth workers have identified very few who have continued actively in the Christian faith.⁷ Many of our most promising Christian young people have moved away from the faith exercised in their adolescent years.

In November 2017, SWN filled its first full-time staff position dedicated to discipling youth and families. Since then, our congregation has moved from a heavy programmatic, event-based youth ministry to a more incarnational, relationally based approach. Today SWN has a vibrant and growing ministry to young children, youth, and college-age people. However, if we hope to nurture a Christian faith strong enough to grow with them through the challenges of

⁷ The following ministry leaders are currently serving or have served the youth of the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene. They have agreed to provide their historical and experiential analysis of South Weymouth's ministry to young people, Rev. Jeremy Stanford, October 2021; Samuel Kish, December 7, 2021; Rev. Kayla Kish, February 22, 2022; Rev. Ken Stanford, October 3, 2021, and November 16, 2022; Rev. Keith Spencer November 14, 2022, interviews by author, Weymouth, MA.

today's complex culture, we must adapt our approach to account for the unique peculiarities of Generation Z.

Over the years, I began to observe a developing pattern among the young adults I had invested in as teenagers. An alarming number of emerging adults nurtured under my ministry leave the faith shortly after graduating high school. These youth, who had been nurtured by the church in much the same way I was, are now withdrawing their participation in local congregations. Moreover, many are no longer investing in the mission of God as they transition from adolescence into adulthood. An initial investigation into this disturbing phenomenon revealed that this trend was not localized to my ministry, the congregation at South Weymouth, or The Church of the Nazarene. Various national studies indicate a vast exodus of young people abandoning the faith, disaffiliating from the church, and no longer pursuing active involvement in the kingdom of God shortly after graduation.⁸ Over the years, we have succeeded in keeping youth engaged in meaningful, religious activity but sadly neglected to nurture a faith strong enough to grow through life's challenges after graduation. I wanted to understand this phenomenon and determine if there was a way of discipling young people that develops an active, lifelong Christian faith sufficient to help today's youth navigate the complex challenges of adolescence and grow with them into adulthood.

Generation Z faces a variety of unique complexities that threaten healthy, lifelong discipleship. Frequently, local congregations do not sufficiently adjust approaches to adolescent spiritual formation in ways that account for the particularities of evolving youth culture. This

⁸ Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 15; Michael Lipka, "Why Some Americans Left Religion Behind," Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/>; David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 15.

dissertation will explore some of these particularities and their impact on adolescent faith development to craft a contextual approach to discipleship that accounts for young people living in what Chap Clark identifies as the “world beneath”.⁹ Suppose we neglect to rethink our approach to youth ministry at this critical time. In that case, we risk investing in a generation of students who ultimately find the faith we helped them develop insufficient for the challenges of adolescence and unworthy of a lifelong pursuit. The goal of this dissertation is to provide the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene with a model of youth ministry that nurtures the development of lifelong Christian faith in young people. This project proposes a congregationally centered youth ministry model that broadly distributes the responsibility of discipleship, creating a safe, welcoming environment of belonging where the whole body can journey together in sanctification.

Welcome to the World Beneath

Enter the world of a teenager today, and chances are good that you have entered a strange and foreign realm. Some landmarks are familiar, and the geography has not changed much since you were a kid. The developmental benchmarks are consistent, the search for independence, the shaping of identity, and the establishment of autonomy. If you dare fumble around in their world a little longer, you might be fortunate enough to be escorted deeper into youth culture. There, you can observe strange yet sophisticated language, peculiar mannerisms, and carefully nuanced etiquette. What you could be experiencing are clues that give a glimpse into a more sophisticated cultural expression of what Clark describes in his book *Hurt 2.0*, as the world hidden beneath the

⁹ Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

observable landscape of contemporary American adolescents, “the world beneath.”¹⁰ In this world, Clark discovers a realm where adolescents are generally distraught and powerless, left directionless and without invested adult leadership. As a result, they grow distrustful of grownups, traditional institutions, and systems, becoming increasingly dependent upon the combined wisdom of peers disseminated through various peer-to-peer relationships and social media outlets.

The gospel of Matthew records,

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”¹¹

In this passage, Matthew gives a window into the compassionate heart of God for people too often found along the margins of society, harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. So much of the world has changed since Jesus walked the dusty roads of his homeland traveling through towns and villages. His compassion for the distraught, the powerless, and those left directionless and without caring leadership has not changed. If Jesus were to walk through our towns and villages, he might look out over our schools and athletic fields and be moved with the same compassion over today's developing adolescents.

Ministry that nurtures lifelong discipleship in youth intentionally sets out to engage 'the world beneath,' partnering with God in the spiritual formation of adolescents. Mark Maddix offers a helpful understanding of this kind of spiritual formation when he says, "A definition of

¹⁰ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*.

¹¹ Matthew 9:35-38, NIV.

Christian spiritual formation emphasizes it as a lifelong process that takes place in the context of community."¹² Maddix reminds congregations that investing in the spiritual lives of young people is an intentional, lengthy process requiring community involvement. Local congregations can assist teenagers at this critical point in their development when they become the community that nurtures their identity in Christ, encouraging young people to understand themselves primarily as followers of Jesus. The purpose of youth ministry in a local context must be more comprehensive than safely navigating the struggles of adolescents while teaching them something about Jesus. Formative ministry to youth happens as the church follows the Spirit into the struggles, nurturing faith in Christ amid the chaos of hormones, family pressures, influences of culture, social isolation, growing anxiety, and deep feelings of loneliness. This is what it means to disciple young people beyond the basic knowledge of doctrine, familiarity with the scriptures, and Christian practices into a lifelong pursuit of Christ. Sustainable young discipleship is committed to guiding teenagers through the complexities of youth culture, growing with them through the changes of young adulthood, and equipping them for participation in God's redemptive mission well into their adult years. Congregations should not expect to significantly influence the spiritual lives of adolescents without accounting for the complex challenges regularly confronting them in the 'world beneath'.

This dissertation is the culmination of over thirty years of focused work among adolescents and was birthed from a heart of compassion for young people struggling along the margins to find their identity, belonging, and purpose in the world. The church has an opportunity to use its giftedness and resources to embrace its divine calling by seeing the harvest field of Generation Z. Congregations that are intentional about the lifelong spiritual formation of

¹² Mark A. Maddix and Jay Richard Akkerman, *Missional Discipleship: Partners in God's Redemptive Mission* (Beacon Hill Press, 2013) 57.

young people can disciple teenagers who grow to anchor their identity in Jesus, belong to the Body of Christ, and discover their purpose in the redemptive mission of God. This, however, requires the church to consider the unique challenges present in Generation Z.

Meet Generation Z

The Margins of Age

Generation Z continues to adapt to its relentlessly changing context and grow into its own uniqueness, making it difficult for scholars, social scientists, and researchers to agree upon the set parameters that precisely determine this generation and evaluate its specific impact on our world. For example, not all experts agree on the precise ages that distinguish Generation Z. These boundaries become more challenging to define because this age group is still evolving.

In her seminal work on the subject, Dr. Jean Twenge sets the boundaries of Generation Z between the birth years of 1995-2012, saying, "As time goes on, those boundaries might be adjusted up or down, 1995-2012 is a solid place to start. A lot is going to depend on the technology developed in the next ten years and whether it changes young people's lives as much as the smartphone did."¹³ A collaborative effort of the Barna Research Group and Impact 360 Institute, identify Generation Z as those born between 1999-2015.¹⁴ Whereas James Emery White, in his introductory study on Generation Z sets the boundaries between those born from 1995-2010.¹⁵ In contrast, Tim Elmore and Andrew McPeak argue that significant events during

¹³ Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy -and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 6.

¹⁴ *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2018), 112.

¹⁵ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 38.

the first eighteen years of the new millennium have particularly and uniquely shaped the children born between 2000-2018, arguing that Generation Z falls easily within the first eighteen years of this new millennium.¹⁶ For this dissertation, with respect to the experts in this field, Generation Z will be defined with a reasonable overlap that captures those born between 1995 and 2015, leaving the years to follow for a new generation to determine.¹⁷

The Volume of Size

This generation is poised to have an immediate impact on the unfolding of culture due to its sheer size alone. Currently, Generation Z constitutes over 25% of the U.S. population, more than the millennials and boomers who have come before them.¹⁸ With one out of every four, over 75 million, Americans belonging to this demographic, it is imperative that the church prioritize its efforts to understand them.¹⁹ Jesus' words from Matthew's gospel certainly ring true, "The harvest is plentiful." The church has an opportunity to prioritize its mission to one of the largest demographics in society but reaching this generation will not be easy. These new developments in youth culture call for innovative, forward-thinking and a reorientation around the purpose of youth ministry.

¹⁶ Tim Elmore and Andrew McPeak, *Generation Z Unfiltered: Facing Nine Hidden Challenges of the Most Anxious Population* (Atlanta: Poet Gardener Publishing, 2019), 42-43.

¹⁷ References to young people refer to those born between 1995-2015 between the ages of 7-27. The terms adolescent, youth, and teenagers refer to those who chronologically fall between the ages of 10-19. The designation, 'emerging adult' is reserved for people ages 18-30.

¹⁸ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 37.

¹⁹ Twenge, *iGen*, 10.

The Range of Diversity

One way this generation distinguishes itself from others, in addition to its notable size, can be seen in its diversity. Generation Z is the most ethnically diverse group of any generation in American's history. Publishing in 2017, James White points out that "multicultural children are the fastest-growing youth group in the United States." He accurately predicted that, "When the 2020 census is conducted, it is estimated that more than half of all U.S. children will be part of a minority race or ethnic group."²⁰ This group of young people will grow to understand ethnic diversity as a social norm. As a result, they expect social institutions, like the church to reflect and appreciate diversity. Tim McKnight observes that racial diversity is not only a key characteristic of this generation but also one of its deeply held values.²¹ This generation takes a personal interest in issues of ethnic equality and racial justice. Moreover, they expect the church to match their intensity on such matters.

This became evident late in the spring of 2020. George Floyd was murdered on Monday, May 25. The following Sunday a young college student of Hattian/Cape Verdean descent was noticeably upset about her minister's failure to sufficiently address the injustice that had unfolded during the week concerning the murder of Mr. Floyd. Contrary to the congregation's collective practice of avoiding politically polarizing topics from the pulpit, she had expected her church to address essential matters of ethnic inequality, talk about racial injustice, and engage in conversations about diversity. She could not imagine a valid reason why her congregation remained relatively silent about George Floyd and racial profiling or why the church should

²⁰ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 46.

²¹ Tim McKnight, *Engaging Generation Z: Raising the Bar for Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2021), 42.

refuse to lead the conversation about such issues in the public square. This incident reinforces the notion that to nurture a sustainable faith in young people, congregations must understand Generation Z's deeply held values.²² When the church dismisses these values, it neglects to enter culturally relevant conversations, distances itself from young people and fails to engage the world beneath.

In addition to their ethnic diversity, Generation Z also values cultural diversity. Elmore and McPeak conclude, "They are more inclusive and accepting of different races, sexual orientations, backgrounds, or gender than any U.S. generation before them."²³ Generation Z values inclusiveness and acceptance as an expression of authenticity. Andrew Root points out that Generation Z is coming of age in a culture that places a high value on authenticity. He says that,

for us today, that which is authentic is more important than that which is holy, good, or righteous. What is lame and counterfeit, that which corrupts authenticity and keeps us from being real or genuine, making us a poser or a fraud, is worse than that which is evil, demonic, or perverse. It is better to be bad but authentic than to be good but phony.²⁴

Root argues that authenticity has become a primary cultural value in this secular, post-Christian era. Accepting, including, and affirming a wide range of diverse sexual orientations, cultural backgrounds, and races is a prized virtue esteemed by Generation Z. To deny or restrict such diversity limits a person's ability to be authentic and violates firmly held cultural values and is itself disingenuous, inauthentic, and worse than evil. James White adds to the conversation by pointing out how such a strong emphasis on authenticity encourages a related and almost equally

²² Author's conversation with Soraya Pierre-Louis, East Providence RI, June 1, 2020.

²³ Elmore, *Generation Z Unfiltered*, 30.

²⁴ Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 6.

influential cultural value, individualism. He contends, "... the greatest value for this generation is nothing less than individual freedom."²⁵ I agree with Andrew Root that individual freedom is more of a byproduct of our culture's fixation with authenticity. However, our culture's obsession with authenticity and hyper-individualism, reflects important values intrinsic to Generation Z. Congregations that hope to lead young people in a formative exploration of the Christian faith must seek to build bridges of connection that recognize and account for the strong influence of authenticity and individualism. Coming of age in an era that places such high importance on these values has led Generation Z to perpetuate a deep affinity for a broad cultural diversity that affirms individual expressions of race, sexual orientation, cultural background, and gender. Anything less would be deemed inauthentic. Nonetheless, civil dialogue about important values across generational boundaries are becoming increasingly difficult as age groups become progressively self-contained and disconnected.

As Generation Z moves into a position of more significant cultural influence, the church can easily find itself painfully stretched across a widening generational gap further alienating and isolating generations from each other. Firmly held views about sexual orientation, traditional gender roles, and even racial biases can call for the re-examining of tightly held theological assumptions and practices on the one hand and challenge the primary values of authentic individualism and its various expressions on the other. Culture provides many examples of how opposing worldviews can threaten to divide and even vilify those who challenge longstanding and firmly held religious values. It might be easy to overlook the real gift of this generation's passion for diversity and inclusion and miss the opportunity to grow in faith as longstanding religious presuppositions are challenged. As this young generation stands on the edge of

²⁵ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 48.

American leadership, it invites the established church into a potentially formative dialogue that provides an opportunity to engage in an ongoing conversation that reexamines deeply held faith convictions. Unfortunately, many of our existing models of ministry do not easily allow for intergenerational dialogue. Most congregations generally adhere to a segregated discipleship model that adopts age-appropriate ministries targeted to a specific congregational demographic, for example, children's, youth, young adult, and senior adult ministry. Over the past few decades, youth ministry has advanced an exclusive focus of ministry that often neglects opportunities for formative cross-generational encounters.²⁶

The young people of South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene are looking for their spiritual leaders to gracefully engage them in conversation about a broad range of diverse subjects the church has traditionally been uncomfortable addressing. They long to see the relevancy of an authentic, faithful Christian witness in an age of pornography, identity confusion, racial injustice, high anxiety, loneliness, and social isolation. They look to have their values challenged with respect. At the same time, they wish to have their commitment to ethnic and cultural diversity affirmed.

High Tech Atmosphere

In addition to its cultural and ethnic diversity, this generation distinguishes itself from previous generations in its understanding and use of technology. Previous generations were introduced to a digital world and learned to navigate it over time and with experience, but Generation Z was born into it. That means today's young people are native to a world heavily

²⁶ This point is crucial to the larger argument advanced by this dissertation. The point is addressed in greater detail in chapter two under the section, *The Problem with Silos*, and is illustrated more completely under the section, *Four Common Approaches*.

influenced by highspeed internet, the smartphone, and social media. Much like the air they breathe, fast, intuitive, invisible digital connectivity make up the environment in which they exist.

The smartphone puts the world at their fingertips and keeps the collective knowledge of a global community just a few clicks away. Dr. Jean Twenge introduces her landmark study, *iGen*, by saying, "The complete dominance of the smartphone among teens has had ripple effects across every area of iGen'ers' lives, from their social interactions to their mental health. They are the first generation for whom internet access has been constantly available, right in their hands."²⁷ Many students maintain unrestricted access to the world wide web. Available connectivity 24/7 promises nearly endless answers to immediately satisfy a young and growing curiosity about everything from how to change a flat tire, the latest celebrity gossip, directions to a friend's house, sexuality, or help with homework. Questions that teenagers typically asked adults whose wisdom and experience they had grown to trust are now more likely being answered by an impersonal search engine void of relational presence or accountability. David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock observe that "Young people, especially, use the screens in their pockets as counselors, entertainers, instructors, even sex educators. Why build up the courage to have what will likely be an awkward conversation with a parent, pastor, or teacher when you can just ask your phone and no one else will be the wiser?"²⁸ Today's young people increasingly look to their devices to make sense of their reality and help them navigate the world around them. These super-connected teenagers are growing less apt to seek wisdom from trusted adults

²⁷ Twenge, *iGen*, 2.

²⁸ David Kinnaman, and Mark Matlock. *Faith For Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2019), 21.

and are becoming more independent and disconnected from older generations with help from personal technology.

Today's constantly connected student will spend up to 9 hours a day in front of a screen, not including educational assignments.²⁹ So much screen time, however, comes with a cost. The casualties are often the development of genuine friendships and intergenerational relationships. These are the kind of personal encounters that take time and effort to establish and maintain. In her work, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, Sherry Turkle suggests that Generation Z prefers the ease of virtual relationships to ones that involve face-to-face conflict resolution, a demonstration of loyalty and solidarity. She warns that "human relationships are rich, messy, and demanding. When we clean them up with technology, we move from conversation to the efficiencies of mere connection. I fear we forget the difference."³⁰ Cross-generational conversation is becoming increasingly complex and rare as the generation gap widens. Young people are heavily invested in their online presence at the cost of developing authentic, personal relationships. Consequently, when the true self emerges from adolescence, there are very few deep connections to people with substantial life experience that value, encourage, or affirm the young identity into a place of confident belonging and safety. As a result, many young people feel isolated and vulnerable.

²⁹Elmore, *Generation Z Unfiltered*, 29.

³⁰ Sherry Turkle, *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power to Talk in a Digital Age*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 21.

Not Okay - Mental Health

Clicking through their social media posts, one might find it difficult to imagine teenagers are less hopeful about anything. If all you knew about them was what you saw on their Instagram, you might find it difficult to conclude they ever experienced a negative emotion. The perfectly happy image projected online often masks buried brokenness deep in the developing psyche. Joshua, a 17-year-old high school junior, spoke about what it is like for him to navigate youth culture, family pressures, faith, and his future between sips of a smoothie on a hot autumn afternoon. At one point in the conversation, he was talking about the effect of technology on mental health. He said, "When your Snapchat is blowing up with pics of all your friends at a party you were not invited to, you stop wondering why ain't nobody text you back. Then you start feeling real bad about why you weren't invited. FoMO, you know?"³¹ FoMO is the commonly held expression indicating the onset of anxiety accompanying the Fear of Missing Out. This developing neurosis reflects the tendency to measure the quality of one's life against that of friends and peers. Compared to the glamorous lives they see projected on Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, most teenagers often feel left out and lonely.

In 2017, Dr. Twenge reported that teenagers are "...lonelier than they were just five years ago. A stunning 31% more 8th and 10th graders felt lonely in 2015 than in 2011, along with 22% more 12th graders."³² The steep climb of adolescents reporting increased loneliness coincides with the arrival and proliferation of the defining icon of Generation Z, the smartphone. Twenge convincingly argues that adolescent use of technology, specifically iPhones and social media,

³¹ Joshua Kauffman, high school student, interviewed by author, East Providence RI, September 13, 2019.

³² Twenge, *iGen*, 97.

causes them to spiral deeper and deeper into loneliness.³³ Chap Clark takes a different approach, arguing that adults primarily contribute to increased feelings of profound loneliness among American youth. He specifically highlights parents, whom he claims have essentially abandoned young people who turn to technology to fill the void by those who have left them.³⁴ Both Twenge and Clark identify new developments in youth culture and draw attention to significant societal dysfunctions that contribute to mental health deterioration and further complicate Generation Z's world.

Although they differ in their approach, both agree that technology makes it increasingly challenging to nurture meaningful relationships across generational boundaries. In addition, the social skills required to navigate the difficulties of healthy relationships, like empathy, conflict resolution, and the ability to identify and articulate feelings, remain underdeveloped in many of today's youth. Nevertheless, it is critical that adolescents have adults they can depend upon to challenge and assist them in developing the tools necessary to establish and maintain a strong network of healthy relationships across the generations.

Generation Z is not simply mentally soft, as some adults too quickly assume. Instead, legitimate societal factors contribute to the emotional fragility of young people, which leads them to the brink of despair.

³³ Twenge, *iGen*, 98.

³⁴ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 162.

Dr. Twenge echoes many social analysis and behavioral scientists by issuing this urgent warning,

More young people are experiencing not just symptoms of depression, and not just feelings of anxiety, but clinically diagnosable major depression. With more than one in nine teens and one in eleven young adults suffering from major depression, this is not a small issue. Even more than the data on rising loneliness and depressive symptoms, these gold-standard data suggest that something is seriously wrong in the lives of American teens.³⁵

Churning just below the thin veneer of their online profile, many of today's youth are anxious about the future, unsettled, and unstable in the present. Safety has become a priority for a generation struggling to maintain healthy emotional stability. Unfortunately, the ironic inauthenticity of an insecure, anxious, and lonely teen hiding behind a confident, happy online presence is lost on most adolescents who navigate their digital world like jellyfish in armor.

Generation Z extends the concept of safety beyond securing one's physical well-being to include emotional security. Many teenagers feel threatened by their environment and remain in a constant state of vigilance. This heightened state of alert requires large amounts of energy to maintain and increases anxiety levels. Teyah, a junior in a local high school, admitted to our multigenerational small group one evening, "Whenever I find myself in new or unfamiliar surroundings, my first question is always: am I safe here? I think we have been conditioned by our parents and the world around us to think the world is a dangerous place. I feel like I'm constantly on guard about my physical and emotional safety, and it's EXHAUSTING."³⁶ Young people working to discover their identity, belonging, and purpose in a culture layered with many complexities, fears, and pressures are often left looking for a safe place to be authentic.

³⁵ Twenge, *iGen*, 108.

³⁶ Teyah Wilson, high school student, used with permission, Weymouth MA, September 28, 2020.

A Springtide study on the mental health of Generation Z released in 2022, *Mental Health & Gen Z: What Educators Need to Know*, concluded,

The mental-health crisis among young people has reached epidemic proportions. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the Children's Hospital Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry recently declared this crisis a national emergency. Widely available data confirm high rates of depression, anxiety, violence, and suicide among young people.³⁷

Students struggle with feelings of anger, nervousness, and abandonment. Many suffer loneliness, carrying with them a deep sense of inadequacy. Despite unprecedented availability and almost 24/7 access to innumerable virtual friends, this generation reports significantly high levels of social isolation. However, most of this is masked in a false confidence and a general callousness at the disappointments in their lives.

Anxious About My Anxiety

Anxiety and stress significantly hinder a young person from building relationships and establishing deep emotional connectedness. This makes it difficult for students to feel like they belong. In 2020 Springtide Research released its findings on loneliness in a report called, *Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation* showing that over half of the young people surveyed experienced several significant stressors. Fifty-eight percent said they felt stressed and overwhelmed overall, 66% felt like there is not enough time to complete their responsibilities, 60% experienced constant fatigue or tiredness even after waking up from adequate sleep, and 56% find it difficult to simply relax.³⁸ In a study conducted in 2017, the

³⁷ Springtide Research Institute, *Mental Health & Gen Z: What Educators Need to Know* (Bloomington, MN: Springtide Research Institute, 2022), 8.

³⁸ Springtide Research Institute, *Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation* (Bloomington, MN: Springtide Research Institute, 2020), 30.

National Institute of Mental Health found that just under 30% of girls and just over 20% of boys suffer from an anxiety disorder that impedes their daily function.³⁹ Dr. Twenge sounds the alarm on a generation of students who are constantly combining deep feelings of lonesomeness, seclusion, and disturbing levels of stress, calling it "The worst mental health crisis in decades, with rates of teen depression and suicide skyrocketing since 2011."⁴⁰ Mental health and emotional safety are high priorities for this generation. Therefore, congregations intent on nurturing formative relationships with these young people must consider an approach to youth ministry that intentionally creates and fosters environments that offer students safe places of belonging where they are recognized, welcomed, and accepted.

Mersadies was a senior in high school when she started regularly attending our youth group in November 2020. After several weeks of steady attendance, she demonstrated a noticeable reluctance to engage. When asked about her tentative commitment and slow withdrawal she shared how difficult it was for her to engage with people she did not know or trust. Even though she was confident that people would love and accept her, she continued to distance herself. The problem was that she grew increasingly "anxious about her anxiety" around new people. She never knew when it would sneak up, what effect it might have on her, or how others would respond. It is difficult to imagine a world where your symptoms give you symptoms that prevent you from being recognized, welcomed, and accepted. Nevertheless, this is precisely the kind of imagination required for congregations who wish to build formative relationships with Generation Z in ways that nurtures lifelong Christian faith.⁴¹

³⁹ "Any Anxiety Disorder," National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), n.d., <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/any-anxiety-disorder>, accessed April 30, 2021.

⁴⁰ Twenge, *iGen*, 3.

⁴¹ Author's conversation with Mersadies Crompton, high school student, Weymouth MA, January 15, 2021.

Alone in a Crowd

Loneliness is a constant state of feeling isolated, unsupported, and without close friends. The 2020 Springtide Research study on belonging reveals that one out of every three students feel completely alone much of the time. Approximately 40% of young people have no one to talk to, feeling left out much of the time, and 45% indicate that no one understands them.⁴² In 2018 the Cigna Organization, a global health service company, studied over 20,000 U.S. adults and concluded that not only are adults ages 18-22 the loneliest generation, but it stated that loneliness was reaching epidemic levels among U.S. young people.⁴³ Drawing from the work of Julianne Holt-Lunstad, *Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality*, Kara Powell and Brad Griffin make this important observation in their book, *3 Big Questions that Change Every Teenager* "Loneliness is no small thing. It has the same impact on mortality as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. It is a better predictor of early death than obesity. So yes, loneliness can kill us."⁴⁴ Deep feelings of aloneness often sabotage the adolescent's search for belonging, frustrating the development of intimacy, leaving teenagers to see themselves as invisible, unknown, and discarded.

One might expect congregations that give adequate attention to the spiritual formation of youth are able to counter the general trend of rising loneliness. Youth ministries generally incorporate various group bonding and communal activities like camps, service projects, retreats,

⁴² Springtide, *Belonging*, 17.

⁴³"Loneliness At Epidemic Levels In America," *Cigna Surveys Loneliness in America* | Cigna Newsroom, accessed April 30, 2021, <https://www.cigna.com/about-us/newsroom/studies-and-reports/loneliness-epidemic-america>.

⁴⁴ Kara Powell and Brad Griffin, *3 Big Questions that Change Every Teenager: Making the Most of Your Conversations and Connections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 144; Julianne Holt-Lunstad et al., "Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10, no. 2 (March 2015): 227–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352>.

and creative worship experiences. In addition, much of congregational life often centers around events that call people to gather for a shared experience. Nevertheless, according to the Springtide study on belonging, over 37% of students who regularly attend religious groups still indicate they have no one they can talk to. "Over one in ten (12%) of young people who attend religious gatherings feel left out *all* the time".⁴⁵ One of the most insightful findings of the study was that there was almost no distinguishable difference between the total sample of youth who felt alone and those who regularly attended religious gatherings. These findings conclude that participating in Christian gatherings, such as weekly worship times, discipleship groups, and youth group activities, have virtually no impact on adolescent feelings of loneliness.⁴⁶ Simply showing up and participating in religious events have minimal effect on reducing deep feelings of aloneness in young people. The cure for epidemic levels of loneliness in students is not more activity with more people; it is intimacy.

Social Quarantine

In most cases, loneliness involves a lack of personal connection. Social isolation differs from loneliness because it involves an inability to connect with a corporate gathering in meaningful ways. Social isolation is the condition of having little or no experience of belonging to a collective network, organization, or group. It is the prolonged experience of feeling like an outsider. When addressing the issue of social isolation, the 2020 Springtide study on belonging found 10% of students always felt isolated from others and 12% indicated they always felt left

⁴⁵ Springtide, *Belonging*, 19.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 16-19.

out.⁴⁷ What is even more disheartening, is the shocking responses to questions that measured meaningful daily interactions. According to the study, among Generation Z, almost 10% of respondents indicated they experienced no meaningful interaction in a typical day. The number of young people who reported three or fewer meaningful interactions in a typical day was 66%.⁴⁸ The impact of social isolation on young people calls for innovative approaches to adolescent spiritual development. However, these innovations must account for a generation that largely feels disconnected and unknown by others with whom they share the world and often believe they are unwelcomed as they are and, therefore, not free to be their authentic complicated selves.

COVID-19

Although they are the least likely to suffer significantly from the virus, young people have been greatly impacted by the social responsibilities and restrictions imposed upon them to control the spread of COVID-19. The global pandemic has undoubtedly taken a mental and emotional toll on this developing demographic. Between 2019-2021, much of a young person's physical and social environment shifted to an online platform. Many formative experiences were canceled altogether. One study indicates that 61% felt disconnected from people in a virtual environment, 47% felt like no one heard or listened to them, and 57% felt like they could not ask questions of authority figures in a virtual setting.⁴⁹ The world's response to a global pandemic exacerbated a crisis of a different kind among American young people.

⁴⁷ Springtide, *Belonging*, 23.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁹ Springtide Research Institute, *The State of Religion & Young People: Relational Authority* (Bloomington, MN: Springtide Research Institute, 2020), 94-96. These intense feelings of disconnect are even more pronounced along the younger end of the spectrum. Sixty-five percent of students aged 13-17 say they feel disconnected in the virtual world, whereas 59% of those ages 18-25 indicate the same.

Maddison is a 2020 high school graduate pursuing a pre-med degree from a local college. She reflects on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on her transition from adolescence into young adulthood, “It was definitely rough, not what I expected at all.” Her senior year of public high school was shaping up to be the capstone of her four years of hard work and investment. Maddison’s school band was scheduled to play at Carnegie Hall in New York City, march in the famous NYC St. Patrick’s Day Parade, and travel to Washington DC the next day to march and explore the nation’s capital. The band had been fundraising and rehearsing all school year. She was fully funded, ready to play, and looking forward to the experience. Unfortunately, the trip was canceled the day before the band was to depart. Cancellations began to pile up as unmet expectations turned to frustration. “I remember being really sad and crying a lot, just about every day, as more things got canceled.” Classes and social interaction quickly moved online. Her last year on the crew team never materialized, her church closed its doors, traditional academic and senior awards banquets were canceled. Baccalaureate, graduation, and Sr. Prom were all awkwardly reconfigured to take place in the summer under strict health protocols.

Unfortunately, all that and more was eclipsed by a global pandemic that stole formative moments and valuable experiences that traditionally marked significant moments in time, affirmed accomplishments, and validated developing identities. COVID-19 replaced Maddison’s significant experiences with separation, isolation, and distance that extended into her sophomore year in college. What had promised to be some of the best years and moments of her young life quickly transitioned into a daily struggle to stay positive, find hope, and grieve losses.⁵⁰

Even as the church began to take steps toward understanding the unique and complex lives of today’s youth, any efforts to adjust their approach to spiritual formation during the

⁵⁰ Maddison Rearick, college student, interviewed by author, Weymouth MA, December 12, 2022.

COVID-19 pandemic have often been frustrated by moves to online platforms and social distancing, cancelations, and lockdowns. These threaten to intensify already held feelings of social isolation, thwarting efforts to belong and creating a heightened sense of anxiety among today's young people. It is unlikely that complex experiences of anxiety, deep feelings of loneliness, and social isolation will significantly lessen at the end of the pandemic when the world returns to normal.

Post-Christian Drop Out

Experts in youth ministry have identified a disturbing trend among adolescents and emerging adults for nearly two decades. The church is experiencing a vast exodus among its young participants. Except for a few ministries that are hyper-focused on emerging adults, the trend is almost universally observable in the church. The following chart is a sampling that traces a consistent detachment and disengagement of young people from the faith over nearly twenty years.

Real Teens (2001) ⁵¹	60% dropout rate
Barna Research Group (2006) ⁵²	61% dropout rate
Lifeway Research (2007) ⁵³	70% dropout rate
College Transition Project – Sticky Faith (2010) ⁵⁴	50% dropout rate
You Lost Me (2011) ⁵⁵	59% dropout rate
Pew Research Center (2015) ⁵⁶	78% dropout rate
Faith for Exiles (2019) ⁵⁷	64% dropout rate

Jean Twenge recognizes this disturbing trend, concluding from her independent analysis that members of Generation Z are more likely than any previous generation to be raised by religiously unaffiliated parents.⁵⁸ Our congregation’s inability to nurture a sustainable faith in young people sufficient to navigate the challenges of youth culture and strong enough to grow with them into adulthood parallels the large number of Christian young people and emerging

⁵¹ George Barna, *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2001), 136.

⁵² “Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years,” Barna Group, n.d., <https://www.barna.com/research/most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years/>. Accessed April 30, 2021.

⁵³ Lifeway Research, “Reasons 18- to 22-Year-Olds Drop Out of Church,” Lifeway Research, January 29, 2021, <https://research.lifeway.com/2007/08/07/reasons-18-to-22-year-olds-drop-out-of-church/>.

⁵⁴ Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 15.

⁵⁵ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 23.

⁵⁶ Michael Lipka, “Why Some Americans Left religion Behind,” *Pew Research Center* (Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020), last modified May 30, 2020, accessed April 30, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/24/why-americas-nones-left-religion-behind/>.

⁵⁷ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock. *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 15.

⁵⁸ Twenge, *iGen*, 122.

adults who are missing from congregational engagement and no longer actively pursue the Kingdom. In addition, these young families do not appear to be raising their children in Christ. Although these trends are not solely responsible for the seismic shift we are seeing in the geography of young Christianity in America, they are most certainly an indicator that something new and very different is happening to Christianity in the United States. The impact of this shift is already being felt in the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene and promises to have significant repercussions for the church around the globe.

Andrew Root recognizes a significant societal move that largely impacts this youngest generation and poses what might be the greatest challenge to congregations intent upon discipling them in Christian Faith. In his three-volume trilogy on ministry in a secular age, Root captures America's journey from a society primarily influenced by a Christian ethos to its post-Christian climate. He summarizes this point by saying, "Previously, we had a system that presumed the reality of a personal God. But now other, different layers have been added to people's lives that have reworked the system into one where such belief is contested at every corner."⁵⁹ Earlier generations grew up in a world where the church had social capital, a modicum of faith was expected, and Christian influences substantially shaped culture. Today's teenagers grow up in a predominantly secular age, in a world that appears largely anti-Christian. In their book *Faith for Exiles*, Kinnaman and Matlock describe the environment young people are growing up in today as a digital Babylon where Christianity and the Bible once served as social foundations but are now viewed as dubious at best.

⁵⁹ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 100.

They state,

Hyperrationalism and pop-culture atheism undercut belief. Most non-Christian youth and young adults are jaded to the appeal of following Jesus. ... Many view the Bible as a book of oppression that is harmful to the minds of its devoted readers. In some influential places, young Christians encounter condescension or downright hostility from their peers, their instructors, and social elites.⁶⁰

Perhaps more than any other identifiable component, the fact that Generation Z is the first in the West to be raised in a post-Christian environment poses the greatest challenge of discipleship to the church today.

Conclusion

Youth ministry that endeavors to cooperate with God in the spiritual formation of adolescents will intentionally seek out opportunities to understand Generation Z and engage the 'world beneath'. As the generation gap continues to widen across our nation, the church is becoming steadily disconnected and out of touch with one of its most accessible mission fields. Teenagers face a variety of unique complexities that threaten healthy adolescent spiritual development and challenge the church to contextualize its approach to young discipleship for a new and emerging generation. This first chapter has introduced Generation Z and offered a glimpse into the 'world beneath' while exploring some of the unique particularities that impact students and call congregations to critically evaluate their approach to ministry in ways that account for their unique complexities.

⁶⁰ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon*, 27.

CHAPTER 2

OLD WINESKINS

The Trajectory of Youth Ministry

Youth ministry does not happen in isolation. The current structure of adolescent discipleship at SWN is similar to most ministries I have encountered over 35 years of active youth ministry. Suburban American youth ministry is largely a copycat movement with a broad, connected network of influential leaders, well-circulated publications, interconnected cohorts, and nationally recognized seminars, with regional training opportunities and seemingly innumerable web resources.⁶¹ In this network, ministry concepts, insights into youth culture, and strategic initiatives are shared, recycled, tested, marketed, and published. In addition, this network allows for the free flow of new and creative ideas, distribution of the latest successful programming, and creative solutions.

One result of this interconnectivity has led to the homogenization of youth ministries across most of present day, protestant America. In rare cases when local innovation and creative adaptation have been successful, these practices are often assembled into books or distilled into programs, merchandized on a national tour to be replicated by local congregations across the nation. The fluid flow of communication and the wide distribution of ideas surrounding youth ministry has given rise to a commonly constructed ministry framework erected across the nation.

⁶¹ Andrew Root, Mark Senter III, Kara Powel, and Kenda Creasy Dean are some of the influential youth ministry voices that combine historical and contemporary analysis to map the trajectory of common youth ministry trends in local churches across the nation. The works of these youth ministry practitioners, educators, authors, and speakers combine with others to paint the picture of a movement across mostly white, suburban, protestant America that brings youth ministry together under common expressions of adolescent discipleship. This phenomenon is described here as an active ministry network that shapes the practice of youth ministry by disseminating information and providing access to resources on a national scale. The highly popular work of organizations like *The Youth Cartel* and *The Fuller Youth Institute* demonstrates the broad range impact of this network among local congregations and tends to programmatically replicate itself in various degrees in those faith communities.

This framework weaves together relevant, age-specific curriculum designed to help adolescents explore Christianity in a fun atmosphere where youth can bond with their peers over faith and culture in a self-contained environment. This environment is typically disconnected from the larger congregation. The approach to adolescent discipleship at SWN has been shaped by this phenomenon and influenced by this network of commonly held philosophies and practices.

In November 2017, South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene employed a young associate minister with primary responsibilities for discipling youth and families. Under her leadership, youth ministry has been restructured to reflect a more intentional emphasis on spiritual development. Nevertheless, our ministry to youth has struggled for the last four years to grow beyond a deeply engrained culture of young discipleship built upon this common framework, perpetuated by a national network of professionals, and duplicated by local churches across America.

The dangerous assumption too often adopted by leadership is that the deep work of spiritual formation happens in young people simply because they participate in the youth program. Kenda Creasy Dean, Associate Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary, contends that youth ministry programs run shallow without specific attention to spiritual development. Dean sheds light on this shallowness in her work *Almost Christian* by saying, "American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith-but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate high school."⁶² For several years South Weymouth's youth minister responded to the shallowness discovered among our local teenagers working to overcome a thin spirituality by introducing young people to the deep richness of faith in Christ. Her ministry focused on

⁶² Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 3.

establishing a cohesive trust and nurturing a healthy youth group community. She created a student leadership team and mentored young leaders to develop their giftedness. Bible lessons often challenged teenagers to conform their lives to the pattern of Jesus found in the gospels. As a result of this focus, adolescent spiritual formation has slowly progressed over the past two years into a youth ministry priority.

Currently, members of Generation Z are increasingly engaged in the mission of the church and contributing to our congregation's overall health. In addition, as SWN becomes more intentional about young discipleship, teenagers actively participate in ministry roles such as community service projects, worship, and community life. Nevertheless, youth ministry remains one of many predominantly independent, self-contained expressions of ministry.

Although local churches have been contextualizing ministry to young people since the mid to late 1800s, youth ministry, as we currently understand it, arose to significance in the mid to late 1940s. It grew out of the established youth fellowships of fourteen mainline denominations and the rise of parachurch initiatives like the newly established Youth for Christ organization.⁶³ It evolved in response to a developing youth subculture following World War II as society worked to move teenagers out of the streets and funnel them into Christian environments directed and supported by adult Christian volunteers. In his history of protestant youth ministry in America, Mark Senter III observes that adolescents, following WWII, journeyed at an accelerated rate toward adulthood by exercising progressive independence, experimenting with traditionally held adult activities, and demonstrating a growing disregard for the established faith of their Christian parents.⁶⁴ Andrew Root agrees and suggests that the

⁶³ Mark H. Senter III, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 64.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 63-64.

purpose of youth ministry in this season served as a Christian response to accelerated adolescence. It developed as an attempt to slow the pace toward adulthood and curb adolescent behavior by creating environments of religious socialization with peers that fostered wholesome Christian fun where students might encounter God.⁶⁵ During this time, local churches began to provide more age-specific ministry directed at discipling the children of its members. At the same time, parachurch organizations like Young Life focused their efforts on high school campuses, emphasizing outreach to unchurched students and those at risk of falling away from the faith.

According to Senter, the rise of successful parachurch initiatives led many local congregations to adopt the more structured, programmatic approach modeled by organizations like Young Life while often neglecting to maintain the essential rationale that gave the movement meaning.⁶⁶ These local churches frequently structured young discipleship around popular programmatic initiatives, often neglecting to nurture the essential role of invested, incarnational leadership. The rise of popular youth ministry publications such as *Group* magazine and *Youth Specialties* in the early 1960s made young discipleship programming simple and accessible across the nation. A relevant, age-specific curriculum designed to help adolescents become more Christian in a fun environment where youth can bond with their peers over faith and culture reflects a standard, reproducible framework for youth ministry. Most of my experience ministering to young people over the last three decades is built upon and informed by this common framework.

⁶⁵ Andrew Root, *The End of Youth Ministry?: Why Parents Don't Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 132.

⁶⁶ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 249-250.

Although the accessibility of youth discipleship programming can greatly benefit congregations, especially those struggling to minister to students, it often isolates youth ministry from the broader life of the congregation. In his excellent work, *Worship With Teenagers*, Eric Mathis recognizes that during the 20th century, many local churches relocated teenagers from the sanctuary into their own youth space, where they learned to worship in a more homogenous fashion.⁶⁷ Separating youth from the spiritually formative practices of the congregation, such as corporate worship, small group study, and service, in favor of age-specific, culturally relevant alternatives limits the ability of older generations to pass along faithful expressions, stories, and shared experiences. This disconnect widens the generation gap, reducing the ability to nurture meaningful engagement across age-specific boundaries.

In conversations with people of older generations, an urgency to share faithful expressions and experiences is often communicated. Andrew Root writes about the importance of sharing our story as a spiritually formative exercise that builds deep Christian bonds. He writes, “We enter each other’s lives not through magical voodoo but through the words of our stories, and entering into these stories binds us to one another. Story is the formative experience of relational personhood, and to share our story is to invite others to share in our being.”⁶⁸ Older generations often express the fear that if young people do not welcome their stories of meaningful encounters with God, those faithful expressions will likely be lost, reducing the enduring contribution of one Christian generation to the next.

⁶⁷ Eric Mathis, *Worship with Teenagers: Adolescent Spirituality and Congregational Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 48.

⁶⁸ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 143.

The accessibility and general acceptance of a one-size-adapt-to-fit framework of youth ministry limits creative innovation and avoids the difficult task of intentional contextualization. The temptation to supplant the lengthy and sometimes complicated process of developing spiritually formative relationships across the congregation for a more user-friendly, self-contained, youth-specific program is significant. With the stability of a common framework and the resources of a nationwide youth ministry network, a few relatable individuals can implement a common, readymade youth ministry program apart from any substantial congregational involvement. However, local youth ministries significantly disconnected from the life of the broader worshiping community create an appendage effect or a silo that allows them to function as a self-contained, independent entity holding very loose connections to the broader congregation.

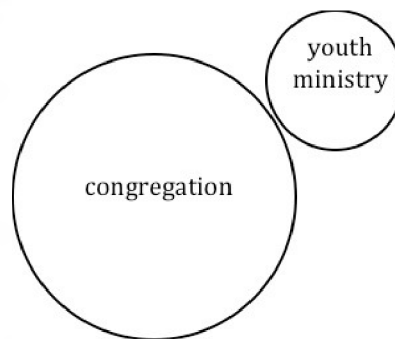
The Problem with Silos

Research indicates that removing young people from the larger context of the worshiping community and containing them in a silo of spiritual exploration among their peers proves detrimental to long-lasting Christian discipleship. Jason Brian Santos observes, "When spiritual formation primarily takes place alongside one's own peers, a broader understanding of the church is distorted. Individuals begin to see themselves at the center of the faith community rather than part of the larger whole. Church becomes one more thing to consume in our culture."⁶⁹ Sam Halverson is a prominent contributor to *The Youth Cartel*, an organization that trains youth ministry leaders through resources and coaching. Addressing youth leaders directly, Halverson

⁶⁹ Jason Brian Santos, "Why Now?," in *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018), 46.

agrees with Santos and a growing number of youth ministry leaders. He suggests, “Your task as youth worker is to help the congregation minister with the youth (not do it yourself). The best way to do that is to get youth involved with members of the church outside youth ministry programming.”⁷⁰ Self-contained, independent youth ministries cut themselves off from the rich and dynamic spiritual resources available to the generations of faithful disciples who have come before. Such ministries risk forming young people into religious consumers who grow to expect congregations to conform to their preferred expressions of faith. When these youth graduate high school and enter the mainstream of community life, they are often at a loss to navigate religious life on the other side of their youth program. Adults communicate their faith in ways unlearned and largely foreign to many teenagers who have grown accustomed to years of self-contained, peer-oriented religious expressions. We should not be shocked to discover so many young people disengaging from the local church shortly after graduation. It may not have ever been theirs, to begin with.

The typical result of this segregated approach becomes what many in youth ministry describe as the one-eared Micky Mouse. Imagine the silhouette of Walt Disney's famous cartoon mouse, but with only one ear. The larger circle that makes up the mouse's head represents a local congregation. At the same



time, the smaller ear is attached as an appendage to the larger whole, representing a siloed, self-contained youth ministry that functions almost independently from the larger faith community.

Silos in ministry are created by those unseen barriers that separate people who might otherwise be worshiping, learning, serving, and growing together. Many times, silos have

⁷⁰ Sam Halverson, “Integration and Community,” in *Youth Ministry in this Season of Disruption*, ed Mark Oestreicher (San Diego: The Youth Cartel, LLC, 2020) 46.

invisible walls, like hidden expectations or assumptions, that keep people from engaging and partnering with each other. Silos naturally resist cross-generational collaboration and limit the free flow of creative ideas. Spiritually formative experiences that could easily be shared among various age groups struggle to find a hearing and often remain unexpressed. This practice is likely to hinder the potential for innovative ministry cooperation and restrict a congregation's ability to imagine ministries that connect to Generation Z.

Nevertheless, age-specific ministry continues to be a valuable component of adolescent spiritual formation. It is important to recognize the need for peer-based formation while avoiding silos as the primary structure for young discipleship. Research suggests that the one-eared Micky Mouse approach to youth ministry continues to be largely unsuccessful in attempts to nurture the quality of enduring faith in young people. Kenda Creasy Dean offers an insightful evaluation,

Neither young people nor youth ministry can be extracted from the church as a whole, any more than the musculature of the Body of Christ can be separated from its circulatory system. We have known for some time that youth groups do important things for teenagers, providing moral formation, learned competencies, and social organizational ties. But they seem less effective as catalysts for consequential faith, which is far more likely to take root in the rich relational soil of families, congregations, and mentor relationships where young people can see what faithful lives look like, and encounter the people who love them enacting a larger story of divine care and hope.⁷¹

Generational segregation is an insufficient medium for developing the practice of lifelong discipleship. In addition, it can easily foster unhealthy perceptions of age-specific cohorts. Too often, people neglect to realize the valuable giftedness dispersed among all age groups available

⁷¹ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) 11. See also works by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and The Barna Group, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, Ca: Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2018); Holly Catterton Allen and Christ Barnett, "Addressing the Two Intergenerational Questions," in *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches Through Intergenerational Ministry*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018)19; Eric Mathis, *Worship with Teenagers: Adolescent Spirituality and Congregational Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 48.

to us in the Body of Christ. Congregations can leverage Christian wisdom, experience, and perspective to enhance spiritual maturity and advance ministry partnerships when they are free to share across generational boundaries. Jason Brian Santos voices his concern with the growing number of students who graduate from the church and fail to continue in the faith upon aging out of youth group. He points to a crucial corrective,

"Peer-oriented ministry cannot be, and never should have been, the primary way [youth] are formed in the faith. There is no magic bullet or pre-packaged solution to correcting the malaise we're witnessing among our younger generations toward the church, but there are things we can do to help reverse this trend. And, I believe those things begin *intergenerationally*."⁷²

The trajectory of youth ministry over the past four decades suggests that sustainable adolescent faith formation is nurtured best while maintaining multiple connections to the Body of Christ. Local churches that hope to nurture young people in a lasting faith will need an approach to adolescent spiritual development that centers the nurture of young souls deep within the broader congregational life. Intergenerational ministry offers a hopeful corrective to the problem of silos. Chapter three of this dissertation details a more complete understanding of intergenerational ministry.

Mile Wide – Inch Deep

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism – MTD

Traditional frameworks of youth ministry that disengage from the corporate Body of Christ struggle to develop sustainable faith in young people and risk theological malformation. Unfortunately, these approaches have too easily supplanted sound theological practice for what critics have labeled Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD for short). Kenda Creasy Dean offers a

⁷² Santos, "Why Now?," in *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*, 48.

sobering analysis of the lack of spiritual depth evident in the lives of Christian youth. Dean's research identifies "...a theological fault line running underneath American churches: an adherence to a do-good, feel-good spirituality that has little to do with the Triune God of Christian tradition and even less to do with loving Jesus Christ enough to follow him into the world."⁷³ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin join Dean in addressing the theological malformation of MTD in their work with the *Fuller Youth Institute*. According to their first book in a series, *Growing Young*, this pseudo-Christian construct is *moralistic* because it equates faith with being a lovely person with good morals. It is *therapeutic* because it offers a way to feel positive about themselves. It is *deistic* by accounting for the existence of a god who is primarily uninvolved in the detailed lives of people.⁷⁴ Five key principles can summarize the concept of MTD:

- 1) A god exists who created and orders the world and watches over life on earth.
- 2) This god wants people to be good, nice, and fair, as taught in the Bible and most world religions.
- 3) The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
- 4) God is not involved in my life except when I need God to resolve a problem.
- 5) Good people go to heaven when they die.⁷⁵

The research and analysis of *Fuller Youth Institute*, Kenda Dean, Andrew Root, Sam Halverson and others stand as a stark contrast of the one-eared Micky Mouse model of siloed youth ministry commonly adopted across much of the white, middle-class American church that struggles to nurture authentic, lifelong Christian faith in students.⁷⁶ "American young people are

⁷³ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 21.

⁷⁴ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016) 130.

⁷⁵ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 14.

⁷⁶ See also works by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and The Barna Group, *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs, and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, Ca: Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2018).

unwittingly being formed into an imposter faith that poses as Christianity, but that in fact lacks the holy desire and missional clarity necessary for Christian discipleship ...” says Dean.⁷⁷ Moralistic Therapeutic Deism can easily disguise itself as authentic Christian faith. However, it fails to challenge young believers to a cruciform life of self-surrender, suffering with Christ in favor of a life of self-actualization, self-affirmation, and self-discovery.⁷⁸ Moralistic Therapeutic Deism dresses religion in institutional loyalty and programmatic participation, then calls it Christian. However, the faith that transforms young people into lifelong disciples of Jesus requires sharing his death and resurrection. "The process of faith formation," Andrew Root affirms, "can be nothing other than the way into Jesus himself, who comes to us in and through negation."⁷⁹ Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."⁸⁰ Discipleship that does not sufficiently challenge youth to identify with the crucified Christ will struggle to participate in his Body and is likely to see little value in the sacrifice required for full participation in the mission of God. Faith in Christ flows from a life rooted so deeply in Christ that it finds identity in his death and draws life from his resurrection.

Broad but Shallow

⁷⁷ Dean, *Almost Christian*, 6.

⁷⁸ See Romans 6:11-14, Colossians 3:1-10 and Galatians 2:20. In these passages, the Apostle Paul calls the followers of Jesus to ground their identity in the death of Jesus so that the life of Christ might be lived through them.

⁷⁹ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 157. "Negation" is the term Andrew Root uses for the death/crucifixion of Jesus.

⁸⁰ Matthew, 16:24, NIV.

Mark Senter concludes his history of protestant youth ministry in America with a rather crass observation, revealing that too much of 20th-century youth ministry focused on what he describes as "fun and games," commenting that "youth ministries were no longer places to meet God or for that matter even to gain any substantially Christian knowledge or experience. Youth ministries had become a church-based babysitting service for teenagers."⁸¹ A critical look at the trajectory of youth ministry in America shows that initiatives designed to nurture the spiritual lives of adolescents too easily get preoccupied with programming, are reduced to simple entertainment, suffer a malformed theology, and often confuse faith formation with indoctrination, morality, and behavior modification. Moreover, the exciting activities used to capture an audience of young people for spiritual formation routinely eclipsed the primary goal of the ministry: to nurture lifelong followers of Jesus.

At the close of the 20th century and for the first decade of the 21st century, four prominent models of youth ministry become noteworthy. This section briefly describes them and offers examples of why youth ministry struggles to develop lasting faith in young people. This is not to suggest that each example is ineffective and cannot assist adolescent faith development. However, I agree with Eric Mathis, who observes that history has taught us "once-innovative approach to doing ministry will eventually proliferate its own set of problems." He illustrates this by saying that "youth ministries in the twentieth century met a specific need, but when teenagers who had completed youth ministries became bored with church as their parents once knew it, the church was ill-equipped for the mass exodus of young adults from their parents' churches."⁸²

⁸¹ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 306-307.

⁸² Mathis, *Worship with Teenagers*, 124.

This dissertation is suggesting faith communities evaluate the current efficacy of common models of ministry designed to serve previous generations. Generation Z's complex challenges call for local congregations like SWN to consider the need for a more innovative approach to adolescent spiritual formation.

Four Common Approaches to Youth Ministry

The Big Event – A Look at Programming

A program-driven youth ministry uses much of its resources to develop, promote, and execute various method-based initiatives to capture, then disciple teenagers. For example, a mother of two teenage boys in our youth group observed, “It is easy to think that if our kids are doing Christian things with Christian people, they must be becoming more Christian.”⁸³ A big event, program-driven youth ministry reasons that Christianizing activity keeps students from engaging in harmful behavior and helps them become more faithful. A calendar typically loaded with activity propels youth ministry from one exciting event to the next. It is expected that something about Jesus will be offered in the process.

Success in most program-driven youth ministries appears to be measured in attendance. Effectiveness is largely determined by the number of teenagers attending youth programs, the number of adolescents that make distinctively Christian commitments, or the number of young people served by the program. Event-driven youth ministries are often compelled to compete for the attention of students whose schedules are already at capacity with various activities, adventures, and responsibilities.⁸⁴ This leads many ministries to institute increasingly creative,

⁸³ Jessica Shaw, parent, interview by author, East Providence, RI, October 7, 2020.

⁸⁴ Root, *The End of Youth Ministry?*, 16.

intense, and captivating experiences designed to hold adolescents' attention, engage their imagination, and create positive memories. Big event-driven programs are becoming increasingly more difficult in the virtual age of digital technology and immediate gratification. This model is nearly impossible for small churches struggling with limited budgeting constraints to maintain with regularity.

Although it is sorely tempting to sacrifice deep, spiritual content for cheap, Christianized entertainment in a futile attempt to capture the insatiable attention of the TikTok generation, the difficulty with big-event-driven youth ministry is not necessarily its propensity for shock and awe.⁸⁵ The most dangerous outcome of a programmatic approach is that it almost always sacrifices being Christian on the altar of doing Christian things. The Christian life requires a person to engage in specific activities, worship, justice, service, and evangelism, but what makes those activities Christian is the reason for which they are done. Event-driven youth ministries are especially susceptible to providing teenagers with opportunities for doing the right things without slowing down, providing space, and offering the spiritual direction necessary to develop the right reasons. Engaging in Christian activity while neglecting to nurture the soul denies the purpose of youth ministry and easily allows it to be reduced to bringing more students to more Christian events in hopes they behave more Christianly.

Knowledge is Power – An Educational Approach

The educational model of youth ministry sets out to impress Christian knowledge upon young minds, using traditional teaching methods and techniques like you might discover with

⁸⁵ Jessica Bursztynsky, "TikTok Says 1 Billion People Use the App Each Month," CNBC, September 27, 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/27/tiktok-reaches-1-billion-monthly-users.html>., With over a billion global users, TikTok is quickly becoming the most prolific social media application used by Generation Z. It mainly consists of 15-second video clips shared among virtual friends.

some Bible memorization programs or a formal catechesis. This usually involves a recognized expert or some adult authority in matters of faith who works a curriculum to inform students properly. Groups of students are often gathered before a leader for Bible classes, small group study, or theological instruction to learn about scripture, doctrine, virtue, and culture. The underlying premise governing this approach is that if we can get young people to think more Christianly, they will become more Christian. James K. A. Smith makes a compelling argument against this approach in his book; *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. In this work, he opposes treating people as if they were ‘brains on a stick’ saying, “Such an intellectualist model of the human person - one that reduces us to mere intellect - assumes that learning and hence discipleship is primarily a matter of depositing ideas and beliefs into mind - containers.”⁸⁶ Spiritual formation, in this model, focuses on convincing young people to adopt a standard thought process with which behavior can be aligned. Unfortunately, discipleship then becomes a matter of renewing the mind. It appears to do little to address some of the developing complexities that prove problematic to nurturing lifelong Christian faith in young people.

Solid religious instruction does play a valuable role in the spiritual development of young students. With advancements in technology and the availability of information, American teenagers have access to more information about God than they have experienced. Simply depositing information into the minds of adolescents is not an ineffective way to nurture them in the Christian faith, because knowledge alone does not bring about transformation.

⁸⁶ James K. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 3.

Smith argues that our passions direct our habits and that knowledge alone is an insufficient motivator.⁸⁷ Human beings, according to Smith, are directed by what they love. The process of spiritual formation involves the work of the Holy Spirit as God directs young passions to align with godly pursuits. One result of this transformation is that young people begin to love the things God loves. Wesley agrees with Smith on this point but quickly adds that transformation comes as young people discover their identity in Christ. Randy Maddox points out that for John Wesley, "...love, joy and peace are not *mere* emotions. They are the holy tempers from which flow holy thoughts, words, and actions. That is why he repeatedly insisted that the essence of sanctification was not mere outward conformity to law, but the renewal of our affections (heart) through participation in the Divine nature."⁸⁸ Sustainable adolescent faith, therefore, involves the sanctification of youthful passions as teenagers are encouraged to participate in the transforming life of Christ.⁸⁹

Discipleship involves much more than correct answers to all the God questions. It requires sanctification. The educational approach to youth ministry wrestles with the tendency to reduce the Christian life to religious problems that need solving and spiritual arguments to be won. Jesus and doctrine, however, are not the same. Knowledge of God does not equate to a relationship with God, and students who can properly speak of the movements of the Spirit may not yet have sufficient experience to identify the Spirit's activity in their lives. Youth ministries that hold education as the primary approach for discipleship often struggle to lead their students

⁸⁷ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 7. Smith questions the assumption that human beings are primarily thinking things. Instead, he asserts that humans are primarily lovers with specific passions. He does not argue for less knowledge but for developing authentically Christian passions.

⁸⁸ Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingwood Books, 1994), 132.

⁸⁹ This chapter will further address the formative significance of adolescent identity in relation to Wesley's understanding of participation in the divine nature in the section titled, *The Root of Identity*.

to understand that God is intimately involved in the complexities of their world and that faith is lived out in the simple practices, choices, and behaviors of everyday life. Christian education is valuable to spiritual formation but proves inadequate as a primary model to nurture a developing teenager through the suicide of a friend or the complex issues that arise from their sibling's sexual identity crisis.

Family Based – Generational

In the late 1990s, Mark DeVries published *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, where he advocated for a family-centered approach to young discipleship that gained momentum in response to the rise of youth ministry professionals. In *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, DeVries was able to construct a family-centered framework of young discipleship that became the foundation of this approach to youth ministry. Since then, two more influential proponents have continued championing family-based youth ministry. First, Ron Hunter is the founder of the D6 (Deuteronomy 6) movement, an organization that offers practical resources to help families and ministries disciple students. The second is an organization called *Orange* that derives its name from the combination of two colors; red, which represents the home/family, and yellow, which represents the local congregation.⁹⁰

Ron Hunter describes the rise of the professional youth minister as one more layer that further complicates the problem of generational segregation. He observes,

⁹⁰ To learn more about *Orange*, visit thinkorange.com. The mission of *Orange* is to influence those who influence the next generation's faith. *D6* derives its name from the Shema passage in Deuteronomy 6:4-7. Its mission is to equip families to live out the directives of that Scripture as God's design for generational discipleship. Learn more about the movement by visiting www.d6family.com.

The church, over time, has “siloed” the age groups by hiring gifted leaders over each ministry. The unintended consequences of such silos caused parents to leave most spiritual instruction to the church. ... In current terms, silos describe a different phenomenon, that of an organization that completely segregates each department, creating barriers in communication and purpose.⁹¹

Hunter's solution to siloed youth ministry is to move the center of adolescent spiritual formation from the church to the home. The Family-Based approach to ministry advocates for shifting the role of professionally trained youth ministers away from the primary spiritual influencers of youth to a more supportive role geared to equipping parents and families as they set out to nurture strong Christian faith in their children. A family approach to youth ministry has the potential to address many of the developing complexities experienced by Generation Z by strengthening close familial relationships in a supportive and safe environment.

In his groundbreaking work, *Hurt 2.0*, Chap Clark points out, “Overwhelming data regarding the influence of parents on child and adolescent development reveal the most important place of safety for a young person is a supportive dual-parent setting.”⁹² The safety of a supportive dual-parent setting minimizes stress and lowers the anxiety of those who are fortunate enough to experience such a blessing. However, a local high school adjustment counselor shared that “Many students who lack an ideal family structure endure high levels of stress and anxiety related to family struggles that regularly manifest themselves in destructive and harmful behavior.”⁹³ Although a family-based approach to young discipleship adds a vital dynamic of cross-generational ministry, I agree with Chap Clark who questions “While this may

⁹¹ Ron Hunter, “The D6 View of Youth Ministry,” *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 147.

⁹² Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 93.

⁹³ Mrs. Mello, Adjustment Counselor: Seekonk High School, interview by author, Seekonk, MA, October 21, 2019.

work well in those congregations with greater resources and possibly a greater percentage of intact families or even those with greater parental involvement, what would this look like in poorer congregations?"⁹⁴ The presupposition in this model assumes that homes are situated, motivated, and capable of nurturing sustainable faith in family members. As Clark and others have indicated, family-centered youth ministries generally have few additional resources to support underprivileged, struggling, or overwhelmed families. The complicated and fragile state of the family makes adopting this approach unsuitable for the long term. Furthermore, as previously noted, young families are progressively withdrawing from congregational engagement. More students are increasingly raised in alternative family structures that fail to create the environment of stability needed for healthy, spiritual nurture.

Today's teenagers operate with a broad and fluid understanding of family that is not limited to the stable, long-term dependability of two parents committed to the healthy spiritual development of their children. Their own experiences, and those of their close friends, have led them to see multiple live-in boyfriends/girlfriends as non-biological parents, as well as married stepparents, single parents, foster parents, and grandparents, all as potential parts of the general makeup of an immediate family. As a result, many of today's adolescents live under the added stress of familial insecurities.⁹⁵ Lurking in the back of the teenage mind is the haunting possibility that the whole structure of their family could easily change with a single phone call. Unfortunately, all this tends to heighten many students' insecurities and anxieties, threaten their sense of belonging, and limit their desire to do the complex emotional and relational work necessary to invest in family life.

⁹⁴ Ron Hunter, "Responses to the D6 View," *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century: Five Views*, ed. Chap Clark (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 174.

⁹⁵ Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 94-95.

Relational Youth Ministry – Incarnational Connection

The relational approach to youth ministry seeks to guide students through youth culture's moral pitfalls and entanglements by cultivating meaningful connections and establishing trust. Taking the incarnation as a model of Christian discipleship, the relational youth minister seeks to be present in the 'world beneath' to earn the gospel a public hearing among adolescents. Over time and with consistency, the minister exhibits enough authenticity and cultural relevance to demonstrate integrity and earn the respect of students. In some regard, family-based youth ministry arose in reaction to an overdependency upon the Relational Youth Ministry model.

Relational youth ministers operate with an understanding of youth culture, including its nuanced language, heroes, rituals, and symbols. They can leverage this knowledge and experience to gain access and build emotional connections with young people. Youth leaders often prioritize 'hanging out' with students, attending their events, sharing their interests, and getting to know their family and friends. Students are generally more open to spiritual formation after establishing a sense of trust that stems from being recognized, understood, and valued by those they view as leaders and peers.⁹⁶

This approach appears to have promising potential for nurturing sustainable Christian faith in young people. However, it also comes with potential downfalls. Let us consider two significant ones. First, the relational youth leader tends to be an approachable, relevant, likable adult whose primary concern is young people's holistic health and well-being. This approach can inconspicuously go awry if one of the congregation's greatest assets becomes a liability. An asset devolves into a liability when an adult youth leader assumes the role of messiah. A problem develops when ministry becomes localized around a single adult leader operating independently

⁹⁶ Springtide, *Belonging*.

from the community, taking on the responsibility of saving or fixing youth. These ministers appear most fulfilled when people come to them for counsel, direction, and solutions. At points, it becomes difficult to tell if the leader has the holistic health of teenagers in mind or is attempting to address some personally unfulfilled need. Such ministers tend to bristle under accountability and find it challenging to develop their staff of volunteers, choosing instead to create an atmosphere of dependency centered upon the professional youth minister who appears to hold all the answers.

The second downfall occurs when the relational approach fails to sufficiently answer the question, what is youth ministry for? This happens when a youth leader loses sight of the responsibility to nurture students into a life of sanctification. Young people need more than relatable adults who can comprehend their world, listen to understand their problems, and play video games. Generation Z needs to encounter mature Christian women and men as healthy models and mentors who lead them to find their identity, belonging, and purpose in Christ.

Youth ministries adopting this relational approach must employ the services of many mature adults who seek to embark on a journey of discipleship and spiritual discovery with a young person. It is quite possible to befriend a student without discipling them. An overemphasis on relationship, to the exclusion of ministry, is not incarnational and could tragically lead a less mature adult to neglect some of the essential, but more messy, responsibilities of youth ministry, such as engaging the student in the difficult work of accountability, offering spiritual direction, and opposing otherwise unchallenged cultural influences. If this approach to youth ministry will nurture sustainable faith in young people, it must avoid mistaking friendship for ministry.

Healthy relationships are vital to this approach. Teenagers who wish to engage in the intentional process of discipleship must first understand themselves as valued members of a safe,

supportive community where they are seen, known, and accepted across generational boundaries. Relational youth ministry stumbles when it fails to prioritize the development of multiple supportive relationships. However, it also stumbles when the ministry loses sight of its purpose, to nurture young people to find their identity in Christ, their belonging to the community of faith, and their purpose in the mission of God. One way to avoid both downfalls is to anchor discipleship deeply in the broader life and mission of the congregation.

What's It All For?

Each of these four common approaches offers valuable contributions to the practice of youth ministry. Together they provide components vital to the overall health and sustainability of adolescent faith. Nevertheless, these and other less common models of youth ministry illustrate a trajectory that, if left to stand alone, too easily becomes preoccupied with programming, is quickly reduced to simple entertainment, and suffers from malformed theology. In addition, authentic faith formation is often assumed by participation and confused with indoctrination, morality, and behavior modification.

Andrew Root agrees. His book, *The End of Youth Ministry?* begins with the assessment that “American Protestant congregation-based youth ministry is in crisis, not sure of what it is really for, feeling at this moment somewhat directionless.”⁹⁷ His assessment, however, goes a bit too far. The research and analyses of *Fuller Youth Institute*, the *Barna Research Group*, and the practical work of organizations like *The Youth Cartel* heavily influence American youth ministry. These organizations, along with well-known authors and thinkers, contribute to the youth ministry network that continues to direct the trajectory of young discipleship in ways that

⁹⁷ Root, *The End of Youth Ministry?*, xii.

address issues like generational segregation, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), and reflect more incarnational methods of discipleship. Andrew Root overstated his case by referring to national youth ministry as directionless.

One of the cultural particularities of life in this context is the rapid rate at which change occurs.⁹⁸ Youth ministry trends take effect in local congregations over time and with consistency. Adapting to cultural changes that spread across the nation likely involves a lengthy process. Therefore, it may be more accurate to suggest that national youth ministry has been unable to keep up with the significance and rate of social change experienced by Generation Z. The inability of middle-class Protestant youth ministry to keep pace with the rapid shifts in youth culture may give the impression that it is directionless, feeding the pessimism of crisis pointed out by experts like Andrew Root. However, it is probable that the crisis experienced by Protestant American youth ministry is the natural result of the slow transition of local churches in a society of accelerated cultural evolution. Although Root's statement appears overly pessimistic, his concern for the future of youth ministry in America is legitimate. Failure to keep pace with and neglecting to adjust ministry models that account for critical social shifts will significantly inhibit the church's ability to disciple Generation Z.

The Root of Identity

Andrew Root writes from a place of concern, and his work impacts the direction of youth ministry across the United States. In *The End of Youth Ministry?*, Root documents his personal

⁹⁸ Scott Cormode, *The Innovative Church: How Leaders and Their Congregations Can Adapt in an Ever-Changing World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 1-2. Cormode opens his book by showing how advancements in culture leave the church behind. He addresses basic assumptions about time, money, and community, concluding that the church, generally speaking, is not keeping pace and does not understand the changes. According to Cormode, the rate of rapid and successive change has placed most congregations in a constant reactive state.

search for the answer to the question, what is youth ministry for? The book concludes with a thought-provoking declaration: Youth ministry is for joy. He writes, "Joy is a description of our experience of transformation!"⁹⁹ He goes on, in his work, to connect this joyous transformation to the patristic understanding of *theosis*, which depicts a life that fully participates in the being of God.¹⁰⁰ For Andrew Root, joy is the "aura of the inner life of the triune God."¹⁰¹ Joy flows from an identity deeply grounded in Christ. "Theosis," Root says, "is a full humanization in the likeness of Jesus Christ."¹⁰² Young people realize their authentic humanity as they participate in the life of Christ. For Root, the goal of youth ministry is to lead young people to anchor their identity in Christ so deeply that they participate in the very being of God.

Andrew Root's understanding of transformation is influenced by the Cappadocian Fathers and involves a mystical synergism of the divine/human relationship in a hypostatic union of mutual intimacy.¹⁰³ For Root, faith cannot be reduced, as so often is the case, to loyalty to a sacred institution like the church or participation in religious programming like youth groups. This is where Root departs from Kara Powell, Brad Griffin, and other leaders of the *Fuller Youth Institute* (FYI). Recognizing FYI's success in identifying youth ministries' historic inability to nurture sustaining faith, Root is critical of solutions proposed by the *Sticky Faith* and *Growing Young* projects, along with other similar initiatives that focus on instilling virtue and institutional commitment to the neglect of authentic conversion into the cruciform life of death and

⁹⁹ Root, *The End of Youth Ministry?*, 109.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 169.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 158.

¹⁰² Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 175.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 138.

resurrection.¹⁰⁴ Youth ministry is not about getting students to discover and love the church, as the full title of *Growing Young* suggests.¹⁰⁵ Neither is young discipleship about addressing the crisis of American Christianity and the rise of the “nones,” as often implied by the Barna Group.¹⁰⁶ Youth ministry is about nurturing young people to becoming fully human by a mystical synergism of the divine/human relationship in a hypostatic union of mutual intimacy. The goal of adolescent faith formation is to lead teenagers to fully participate in the life of God by assisting them in locating their identity fully in Christ. Andrew Root says,

Faith itself is to have your being *in* the person of Jesus Christ. Faith is the experience of sharing in the person of Christ. ... To be “in Christ” is not to be in a religious or clairvoyant state, but it is to be in the person of Jesus, given back your own person in a communion of other persons who are loved and therefore love one another through the ministry of Jesus’s humanity.¹⁰⁷

This is what he means by transformation and the joy that gives youth ministry purpose. The joy of youth ministry is experienced as young people sink their identity deeper and deeper into the crucified life of Christ. When teenagers identify themselves by participating in the crucified Christ, they draw life from his resurrection, and *theosis* gives shape to identity.

¹⁰⁴ Root, *The End of Youth Ministry?*, 134 & 145.

¹⁰⁵ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Pew Research, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, November 18, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>; David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 139.

Andrew Root and John Wesley

Andrew Root's emphasis on the essential role of transformation in adolescent spiritual development is consistent with the Wesleyan/Holiness tradition. The Eastern Patristic Fathers that inform Root's concept of *theosis* significantly influenced John Wesley's theology. Root's understanding of transformation is held firmly within the Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification. For Andrew Root and John Wesley, transformation/sanctification is the result of deepening participation in the life of Christ through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This deepening participation empowers youth to live out the holy life they draw from Christ by having their identity deeply rooted in him. Randy Maddox explains Wesley's doctrine of sanctification as it might relate to the character formation of young Christians. "It was a process of character-formation that is made possible by a restored participation of fallen humanity in the Divine life and power. This understanding of sanctification has significant parallels with the Eastern Orthodox theme of deification (*theosis*)."¹⁰⁸ Sanctification is brought about by this intimate, synergistic participation of the divine and the human. For Wesley and Root, authentic human identity is experienced in the restoration of the image of God.

Both Root and Wesley speak of transformation as the process of becoming more authentically human. For Wesley, this specifically means a renewal of the *imago Dei*.¹⁰⁹ David McEwan draws on these themes to show how transformation is essential to proper theological practice. He writes,

¹⁰⁸ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 122.

¹⁰⁹ Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith & Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1988). See chapter 15, "Sanctification: Renewal in the Image of God." On page 486 Dunning specifically addresses God's sanctifying process that recreates the human into the person he intends for him/her to be.

Human beings are created in the image of God, and the interrelationship between God and his creation is characterized by a relationship of love. ... God's plan of salvation has to do with the restoration of a relationship of love based on trust, rather than the intellectual command of doctrines and conformity to rules and regulations. This makes personal and community transformation the critical test of correct theological reflection, formulation and application.¹¹⁰

For adolescent spiritual formation in a Wesleyan/Holiness context to have theological integrity, it must maintain sight of the goal: the sanctification of students. Sanctification addresses a critical component of adolescent development – the search for authentic identity. Therefore, a congregation's ministry to youth is to cooperate with God in the spiritual formation of adolescents, directing young people to root their identity in Christ, locate their belonging within the Body of Christ, and discover their purpose in the mission of God. This lifelong process of discipleship is nurtured within the community of faith.

Conclusion

Youth Ministry underwent a critical evaluation in the first decade of this century. The prevailing landscape of young discipleship near the end of the 20th century to just beyond the first decade of the 21st century depicts a generationally segregated, self-contained ministry to youth that proved to be a mile wide but only an inch deep.¹¹¹ The rise of the professional youth minister in the 1980s and 1990s gave legitimacy to the movement and helped establish youth ministry as a valid discipline under the study of practical theology.¹¹² Youth ministry

¹¹⁰ David McEwan, *Wesley as a Pastoral Theologian, Theological Methodology in John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection: Studies in Evangelical History and Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Pub., 2012), 218.

¹¹¹ Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 306-307.

¹¹² Mark H. Senter III, "A History of Youth Ministry Education in the USA," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 11, no. 1 (May 2014): 46–60.

experienced success in reaching large numbers of students, publishing resource material, and significantly influencing contemporary worship style.

However, common approaches to adolescent spiritual formation, like the programmatic, educational, familial, and relational, proved insufficient as primary means to nurture faith in young people sufficient to help them navigate the challenges of adolescence and sustain them into adulthood. These approaches traditionally build on a common framework of relevant, age-specific curriculum designed to help adolescents become more Christian in a fun environment where youth can bond with their peers over faith and culture and is frequently supported by a national resource network. Critical evaluation forced the movement to wrestle with the question: What is youth ministry for?

Generation Z faces a variety of complexities that challenge the church to pivot away from these traditional expressions of youth ministry and contextualize its approach to adolescent faith development. A growing number of experts are calling the American church to reexamine shallow, generationally segregated models of ministry. Research suggests that an intergenerational approach to ministry can provide an optimum context for the sanctification of adolescents in ways that account for some of the unique peculiarities of Generation Z.

CHAPTER 3

INTERGENERATIONAL

Introduction

Chapter one outlined some of the unique complexities of Generation Z and introduced an alarming trend of young people who disengage from the Christian faith, disaffiliate from the church, and no longer pursue active participation in the Kingdom of God shortly after high school. Chapter two critically explored several standard approaches to youth ministry. This chapter proposes a shift in congregational thinking about adolescent spiritual formation to ways that more accurately account for some of the unique peculiarities of Generation Z. This shift challenges South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene (SWN) to explore more innovative ways to journey with adolescents along the path to sanctification.

This section advocates for an incarnational approach to youth ministry that distributes the responsibility for spiritual transformation more directly among the several generations who constitute the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene. This chapter asserts that a more congregationally centered youth ministry reduces generational segregation and adds depth to adolescent discipleship by providing an environment where students are free to explore their identity in Christ, are welcomed to belong to the Body of Christ, and encouraged to discover their purpose in the mission of God. In contrast to many of the common youth ministry models, an intergenerational approach leverages multiple, safe relationships in ways that are conducive to spiritual transformation in an environment that also accounts for deep feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and high anxiety levels experienced by Generation Z.

However, a commitment to pivot away from standard models of youth ministry, as a primary means of discipleship, in favor of this more incarnational approach is a risky, long-term

investment that will involve rethinking the congregation's role in adolescent spiritual formation. Cory Seibel builds on the exceptional intergenerational work of Allen and Ross. He encourages the church to engage in an intentional process of transformation, saying,

Holly Allen and Christine Ross caution that helping churches become flourishing intergenerational communities requires more than a new method; it calls for a new mindset. Our values, assumptions, and priorities must undergo transformation. This is an adaptive challenge – one that necessitates culture change within the church.¹¹³

Youth ministry committed to developing young people who exercise dynamic, sustainable faith, contribute to the health of their local congregation, and discover their place in the redemptive mission of God involves a willingness to depart from ineffective models and experiment with constructing new frameworks. An intentional shift to a congregationally centered youth ministry challenges local churches to adopt new practices, shift attitudes, and set new priorities that, over time and with consistency, will establish a new culture of ministry.

Adaptive Change

Some congregations may be unwilling to experiment with new frameworks. Local churches may also lack the innovative capacity to rethink their primary youth ministry model and become reluctant to risk the high cost of such a dramatic change. In his book, *The Innovative Church*, Scott Cormode offers a sobering assessment. He concludes that American Christianity is critically slow to adapt and needs to sufficiently adjust to the changing cultural landscape. Cormode contends, “The church as we know it is calibrated for a world that no longer exists.”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Cory Seibel, “From Multigenerational to Intergenerational,” in *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Abilene TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018), 90.

¹¹⁴ Cormode, *The Innovative Church*, 1.

Youth ministry that endeavors to disciple Generation Z using ministry models designed for previous generations will struggle to account for the dynamic changes in today's youth culture. Such models need to be reimagined to address the unique complexities of this generation. New ways of thinking about adolescent faith formation can help congregations avoid the spiritual malformation of MTD and generational segregation. New frameworks, however, require a reorientation. With time and consistency, this reorientation can help establish a healthy congregational approach to youth ministry.

Change theorists Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky have done substantial work in distinguishing two kinds of problems facing organizations. Each problem requires different tactics and aptitudes to overcome. The first is technical problems that call for technical solutions, and the second is adaptive challenges that require adaptive leadership.¹¹⁵ Building on their work, Tod Bolsinger helps church leaders see that "*Technical problems* are those where the solutions are available to and 'within the repertoire' of the community. These solutions come from best practices or are known and offered by an expert or implemented by a capable practitioner, professional, or manager."¹¹⁶ Effective communication, dynamic Bible study, and efficient bookkeeping are examples of things that might be considered technical problems which may require development. However, the solution is likely to exist within the current makeup of the larger community. Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, represent systemic difficulties that

¹¹⁵ "Becoming an Adaptive Leader: Based on the Work of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky," *Lifelong Faith Journal* 5.1, (Spring 2011): https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/becoming_an_adaptive_leader.pdf.

¹¹⁶ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 41.

demand a new orientation or focus and involve adopting alternative values and priorities.¹¹⁷

Adaptive changes typically lead to a shift in institutional culture. More than half the young people in our youth ministry will likely abandon the faith, disaffiliate from the church, and withdraw from active participation in the Kingdom of God shortly after high school. This is an example of an adaptive challenge.

Adaptive challenges require solutions not yet present within the given resources of an organization. Long-term solutions often involve innovation, imagination, and risk that potentially bring about new thinking patterns, leading to a shift in organizational culture. Therefore, it is vital that congregations begin to experiment with innovative methods of adolescent spiritual formation. When congregations adapt, manipulate, or combine traditional, established models of youth ministry, like the educational, programmatic, family-based, or relational methods, they attempt to address adaptive challenges using technical solutions. However helpful those models may be, they will not solve the larger problem. Scott Cormode emphatically states, “*you cannot use technical means to reach adaptive ends.*”¹¹⁸ Adaptive problems need adaptive leadership to guide through a process that leads to a change in organizational culture. The artifact proposed by this dissertation is intended to encourage the adaptive thinking necessary to establish a viable congregationally centered youth ministry that guides our adolescents along the journey of sanctification.

¹¹⁷ “Becoming an Adaptive Leader: Based on the Work of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky,” *Lifelong Faith Journal* 5.1, (Spring 2011): https://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/becoming_an_adaptive_leader.pdf.

¹¹⁸ Cormode, *The Innovative Church*, 180.

Intergenerational

To nurture young people in a lasting faith, South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene will need to enter an adaptive process that moves away from shallow, silo-based ministry toward a more comprehensive, incarnational practice of discipleship. Familiar models like the educational, programmatic, family-based, and relational models continue to have limited value and, therefore, should not be entirely abandoned. However, an intergenerational approach to youth ministry as a primary framework for adolescent spiritual development provides the optimum context for youth to actively engage in a sanctifying pursuit of God.

Intergenerational ministry involves more than the interplay of several people interacting about spiritual matters across the age spectrum. For ministry to be authentically intergenerational it must intentionally place two or more identifiable age groups in substantive dialogue or active partnership. One misunderstanding held in common by many congregations is thinking they are moving toward intergenerational ministry when they are simply becoming more *multigenerational*. Eric Mathis distinguishes the difference when he writes,

“*Multigenerational* congregations include the church of all ages but have not pursued the arduous task of moving from independent, siloed forms of ministry by age to collaborative, integrated forms of ministry organized by other frameworks. To truly move toward intergenerational ministry, congregations will need to change their behavior, values, and attitudes through processes of experimentation and learning.”¹¹⁹

Behavioral changes may include inviting youth to play a more visible role in corporate worship, such as reading the scriptures, collecting offerings, or assisting at the table of the Lord. Value changes may be reflected in a worship leader's decision to rearrange a long-standing rehearsal time to accommodate a high school sport's schedule that would allow young people to use their giftedness. A broad base change of attitude can indicate that culture is beginning to shift and

¹¹⁹ Mathis, *Worship with Teenagers*, 127.

might be observed as older adults make efforts to host, supervise, or be more personally engaged in youth-related activities.

Over the past ten months, SWN staff and administration have coordinated opportunities for people to interact and serve across generational lines. These experiments in corporate worship, Vacation Bible School, outdoor family activities, and service have generated some positive responses. It appears the congregation is growing more comfortable and advancing in their ability to function as a *multigenerational* community. Nevertheless, SWN has not yet undergone the necessary changes to establish a new intergenerational ethos. *Multigenerational* congregations take a solid initial step in the process of becoming intergenerational. However, becoming intergenerational requires adaptive thinking that, with consistency, over time, shift the culture of a local congregation. One way to recognize that an authentic shift in culture is occurring is to discover opportunities for intergenerational experiences that are no longer being orchestrated from the top down, created by staff and administration, but rather emerging organically as a natural expression of community life.

Intergenerational congregations purposefully cultivate life-giving and meaningful relationships across generational boundaries for mutual transformation. Chris Barnett emphasizes that an intergenerational environment intentionally demonstrates a “comprehensive *mutuality*, *equality*, and *reciprocity* that makes individual or collective transformation more likely.”¹²⁰ In this model, youth are not only being disciplined across generational boundaries, but they are also actively contributing to the spiritual development of others along the age spectrum. An intergenerational approach to youth ministry intentionally seeks the faith formation of children,

¹²⁰ Holly Catterton Allen and Chris Barnett, “Addressing the Two Intergenerational Questions,” *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018) 18.

youth, and adults as authentic faith is nurtured among disciples at every life stage. Adolescents nurtured in this environment are not only being intentionally discipled by multiple spiritual mentors but are also, to various degrees, actively discipling others, both older and younger. Young people are encouraged to engage in formative dialogue across generational boundaries where their contribution can be affirmed and valued. In this environment, they discover opportunities to pursue passions, develop giftedness, and test their aptitudes for various leadership involvement as they explore their purpose in the mission of God.

Allen and Ross state that “intergenerational ministry occurs when a congregation intentionally brings the generations together in mutual serving, sharing, or learning within the core activities of the church in order to live out being the Body of Christ to each other and the greater community.”¹²¹ This approach gathers the congregation to experience a shared life while engaging in three core activities of the church: ministry, spiritual formation, and worship. As young people are nurtured in a supportive intergenerational environment, they discover the freedom to share their spiritual struggles and insights, verbalize scriptural connections, and challenge the established moral practices of the community.

When students are encouraged to share in meaningful dialogue across the generations, their value as contributing members of the faith community is reinforced, and a strong sense of belonging is nurtured. Occasions for shared service across the age spectrum also provide invaluable opportunities for young people to establish belonging and explore their purpose within the mission of God. Belonging and purpose are critical elements for the comprehensive mutuality, equality, and reciprocity that develop sustainable spiritual transformation. Ministry

¹²¹ 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 Academic, 2012), 17.

models that understand the essential values of belonging and purpose can minister to Generation Z in ways that address significant particularities like loneliness, social isolation, and high anxiety levels.

Belonging to the Church

In their work, *Belong: Retracing the Way of God's Embracing Love*, Gustavo Crocker, Jerry Kester, and Stephanie Lobdell argue for a reorientation of the four traditional 'B's' of discipleship: believing, behaving, becoming, and belonging. Their work challenges the commonly held progression of these four B's. For example, the traditional evolution of a seeker from believing to belonging generally looks as follows:

Believing - Orthodoxy (right believing) requires a person to affirm and commit to doctrines held in common by a faith community.

Behaving – The seeker understands Christian behavior as habitual actions measured against a standard, communal way of being.¹²²

Becoming - Becoming a member involves affirming doctrines and conforming to a specific way of being in the world and is usually signified by entering into public covenant or agreement before God and witnesses. For the youth at SWN, this usually involves participation in the sacrament of Baptism (or the reaffirmation of their baptismal vows) and/or entrance into the covenant of local church membership.

¹²² James K. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016). A common misconception is that orthodoxy (right belief) naturally leads to orthopraxy (right behavior). If behavior, in this sense, deviates significantly from communal practices, it is likely to be determined that a faulty belief structure is in play. However, in his book, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, James Smith argues that discipleship cannot be reduced to simply depositing the right ideas and beliefs (orthodoxy) into young minds as if people could properly think their way into sanctification (orthopraxis). Instead, discipleship is ultimately about the transformation of the whole person. Thus, Smith argues against the idea that people believe their way into proper behavior and advocates for an approach to spiritual formation where people habitually behave (orthopraxis) their way into right believing (orthodoxy). In this section, I argue for a prominent place of belonging as a necessary first step toward transformation and the most conducive context from which Generation Z can explore orthopraxis and orthodoxy.

Belonging - In this traditional way of discipling, belonging is usually contingent upon consistent conformity of believing and behavior in harmony with the community standards, accompanied by some public affirmation of membership. Only after which does one genuinely belong.¹²³

According to Mario Weyers and Willem Saayman, the rapid growth of Christianity in the first century steered the early church away from the more intimate, incarnational model of discipleship embodied by Jesus. The expansive success of Christianity moved leadership to institute a formalized framework of catechesis by which seekers were integrated into the life of the newly formed church. This new integration process moved a candidate through a progression of authorized education for membership. Baptism was withheld from those who had not been sufficiently indoctrinated into the prescribed teaching. Catechesis moved seekers through an evolution of believing and behaving before allowing them to become members and finally belong. This formal system was designed to prepare believers to become members of the expanding church.¹²⁴ Crocker, Kester and Lobdell conclude,

So the expectation is that if you believe, you have to behave in a certain way, and if you don't behave this way, then you're not a believer. Just as with the catechism model of the early church, your right behaviors then allow you to become part of the community of believers – who, of course, also behave accordingly. At the end - and only at the end - you finally belong. This is, in summary, the existing paradigm of most churches in modern Christianity. First, you **believe**. Then, you show that you are a believer by the way you **behave**. Once you behave, you can **become** an official member of the congregation After you become a member, then, and only then, you **belong**.¹²⁵

¹²³ Gustavo Crocker, Jerry Kester, and Stephanie Lobdell, *Belonging: Retracing the Way of God's Embracing Love* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2021).

¹²⁴ Mario Weyers and Willem Saayman, "'Belonging before Believing': Some Missiological Implications of Membership and Belonging in a Christian Community," *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 134, no. 1 (February 28, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v34i1.834>.

¹²⁵ Crocker, Kester, and Lobdell, *Belonging*, 36-37.

The middle school, high school, and college students at SWN are often repelled by an educational approach to ministry designed to shape their beliefs into standard conformity. Before these students are open to experimenting with Christian orthodoxy, they must first be noticed and affirmed as persons. Next, they need to be named and valued as individuals. Lastly, they need to feel known and respected as contributors. Before considering official membership, adopting common behavioral standards, or adjusting their beliefs, adolescents need to belong. These young people often demonstrate resolute resistance when their belief structures are challenged without first nurturing a safe sense of belonging and acceptance.

Crocker, Kester, and Lobdell question the long-standing notion that young disciples must demonstrate a proper orthodoxy and satisfactory orthopraxis before they can belong. "The question is, in a post-Christian society where the church culture of past generations is not even a memory for most Gen Z and Millennials, and where Christianity is held in suspect in the minds of many, is believing the place to start a conversation that leads to faith?"¹²⁶ Progression, from believing first, moving to behaving, then becoming, and finally belonging, is the normal evolution of discipleship throughout the early church and is firmly established as the normative progression of Christian faith in many American congregations today. However, Crocker, Kester, and Lobdell challenge the efficacy of this approach and argue for a change in orientation.

This shift represents a more incarnational approach and can be observed in how Jesus addressed his disciples' spiritual formation. In Jesus, we see that "everybody **belongs** first. Then ideally, everybody **believes**. Next, everybody **behaves** because everyone's lives have been transformed. Because everybody behaves, everybody **becomes** a member of the community –

¹²⁶ Crocker, Kester, and Lobdell, *Belonging*, 61.

that's the ideal scenario."¹²⁷ The major shift proposed by Crocker, Kester, and Lobdell involves prioritizing belonging by moving it from the end goal and making it the first component in the discipleship process. By shifting it to the beginning of the process, the authors avoid confusing belonging as the *telos* of discipleship and allow room for transformation to remain in focus. With this shift, belonging becomes the environment where young disciples are nurtured in sanctification.

In the Gospel of Matthew 4:18-22 and 9:9, Jesus simply calls disciples and welcomes them to follow in fellowship with him. There is no prerequisite to belonging. As the disciples follow Jesus, they grow in their understanding, deepen their faith, and strengthen their commitment simply because they belong to him. There is no hint that their belonging is contingent upon their right belief, behavior, or the depth of their commitment.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus offers himself to the multitudes without limiting access to those who believe rightly, behave justly, and become members of his movement. Some of the most powerful and moving stories in the New Testament involve Jesus deliberately welcoming outsiders to a place of belonging. For example, in John 4, Jesus purposefully journeys into a Samaritan town where, despite religious restrictions and cultural taboos, he engages a woman in a dialogue that blurs the line between those who belong (Jews/men) and those who do not (Samaritans/women) saying, "But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth...."¹²⁸ While Jesus ministered among the crowds, some believed and followed, and others considered but did not follow. In no instance did Jesus reject those who considered him but refused to believe.

¹²⁷ Crocker, Kester, and Lobdell, *Belonging*, 44.

¹²⁸ John 4:23, NRSV.

This shift to a more incarnational practice welcomes everyone just as they are, with all their hang-ups, baggage, agendas, and trauma. Prioritizing belonging is an essential first move in the adaptive change necessary to effectively disciple students. Cultivating an intergenerational ethos of belonging welcomes youth into a process of transformation and mitigates deep feelings of lonesomeness, social seclusion, and high stress.

Belonging is a reality that grows in young people as they are noticed, named, and known across generational lines.¹²⁹ Adolescent faith formation must prioritize students by cultivating a hospitable environment where teenagers are readily noticed and affirmed as persons, named, and valued as individuals, known, and respected as contributors. It is the responsibility of mature members to welcome the next generation, encouraging them to take their place as young disciples by cultivating relationships that foster a safe sense of belonging.

Connecting Purpose to the Mission of God

Young disciples begin to explore their purpose within the mission of God as they take accountability for the congregation's health as well as the development and execution of its mission. Congregations that provide adequate oversight and mentoring can set young people free to explore their unique giftedness and discover their purpose in an appropriately structured, frequently awkward, mutually beneficial environment where success is celebrated, and failure becomes a learning experience. Young people who are trusted with the health and mission of the congregation often respond by taking ownership in and responsibility for the community that invests in them. This has been the case with Micah and others.

¹²⁹ Springtide, *Belonging*, 62.

Micah was only 12 years old when the sanctuary remodel was completed. For two months, the congregation worshiped in the basement of the building while construction was underway. Finally, the people reentered the newly renovated space on Easter Sunday with a glad celebration. After service, he observed that despite the excitement, the drums sat unoccupied on the newly renovated platform. Although the congregation had four people who could play 'the kit', no one would. The drums sat silent for five weeks while Micah wondered why.

Then, one fateful Sunday, the worship leader invited the congregation to stand while the first hymn of the morning was introduced. As the worship leader stood to cue the first note, a terrible sound emanated from where the drums usually sat quiet. The instrument clamored horribly as if someone had kicked it down a stairwell. The 12-year-old boy sat at the drums with a face of sheer concentration, banging away at whatever the sticks would touch.

This went on for the next three weeks. Surely one of the four drummers in the congregation would step up and take his place. Perhaps the worship director would have mercy on the congregation and break Micah's little heart by politely asking him to step down. Finally, after three weeks of ear-bleeding Sunday services, the pastor put his arm around the boy as they walked out of the sanctuary and asked, "So, ... about the drums ... what's your plan?"

"I don't know," Micah said, "I think I'm getting better." The pastor nodded in silent disagreement.

Having determined that Micah had no intention of voluntarily stepping down, the pastor asked, "You think, maybe, you want to take lessons?"

"CAN I?" he asked.

Because the church had a long-standing practice of setting aside funds to help aspiring young instrumentalists afford music lessons, the boy had his first lesson that week.

The worship director gave Micah a key to the church so that he could practice. After a few years of mentoring, the director eventually stepped aside so that Micah and other young, aspiring leaders could step up under his coaching and regularly lead Sunday morning worship. When retirement called that worship director to a warmer climate, the music team assembled to fill the leadership void. Then, 17-year-old Micah and a 16-year-old counterpart, both committed leaders of the music team, were appointed co-music directors responsible for music selection, scheduling, rehearsals, leadership, and program development. They served their congregation as co-worship directors for over two years before leaving to attend their regional Nazarene college.

Micah now plays on multiple music teams and Christian events throughout the Northeast. Today he is a 20-year-old worship arts and Christian ministries minor at his college. He serves as a principal leader in our developing youth band at the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene, teaching middle and high school students drums, acoustic, bass, and electric guitar. One of his most significant contributions is mentoring our youth in the theology and practice of worship. The 13-year-old boy Micah has been mentoring for over a year now serves as the primary drummer on the SWN music team. Micah will tell you that he is pursuing his purpose, partly because the local church gave him support and responsibility for its mission and welcomed him to develop his passion while taking ownership of the ministry. Congregations that empower adolescents to take responsibility for the health and mission of the church provide young people with significant opportunities to develop their giftedness and explore their purpose in the grand mission of God.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Author's personal experience, with Micah Abrams, used with permission, 2014-2022. Unidentified participants in this illustration not essential to the point have their names withheld to maintain anonymity.

Powell, Mulder, and Griffin advocate empowering young people with leadership responsibility as an essential strategy for adolescent faith formation. They contend,

When young people in your church and community know they are needed and invited into participation just like everyone else, they sense that they play a *load-bearing role* in the congregation. They become purposeful co-participants in the life of the body rather than junior participants or future members. Their voices, hands, and hearts matter *now* for the ongoing life and work of the congregation, and they know it.¹³¹

Empowering young people to influence the congregation's health and mission does not abrogate older generations' responsibility. On the contrary, it is imperative that adult leadership model a posture of mutuality, equality, and reciprocity across generational boundaries to nurture authentic intergenerational transformation. Making room for our young disciples to take ownership allows them to move from spectators in the religious activity of adults to active participants that share responsibility for congregational health.

Occasions to explore and participate in the mission of God become available to young people as they demonstrate ownership and responsibility for the congregation. When congregations make resources and opportunities available to adequately supported students, prospects for creative ministry suddenly become real possibilities. Adolescents get excited about their ability to contribute and become open to the unique ways God can work through them. Teenagers need trusted adult mentors, guides, and supporters to minister alongside them, willing to invest in their growth and development as they discover their purpose in the mission of God.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks of the local congregation as a body that works together with many different parts. He concludes with the declarative statement in verse 27, "Now you are the Body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it."¹³² The image of a healthy congregation

¹³¹ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 209.

¹³² 1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV.

working together as the Body of Christ challenges the church to innovate approaches to adolescent spiritual formation that avoid generational segregation and invite full participation from all its diverse parts. An intergenerational approach to youth ministry that fosters relationships of mutuality, equality and reciprocity provides opportunity for the free flow of spiritual influence reflective of Paul's body image in 1 Corinthians 12.

As SWN adopts a more intergenerational model, adults are maximizing their opportunities to pass along wisdom, insight, and experience while young disciples feel free to share their perspectives and experiment with ministry. Springtide Research found "that increasing the number of trusted adults in a young person's life is a critical response to severe loneliness, social isolation, and stress. The more trusted adults in a young person's life, the greater the experience of belonging for that young person."¹³³ With its various parts all functioning together, the Body of Christ provides a safe, hospitable environment of belonging and discovery where students are encouraged to experiment with their purpose while investing in the health and mission of the congregation. Developing close, spiritual friendships across the age spectrum increases personal contact and enhances discipleship by leveraging multiple relationships across the generation gap. The intimate connections that constitute this environment account for some of the significant complexities experienced by Generation Z. Increasing the number of supportive people also serves to create a network of security and support that helps youth to thrive.

A growing volume of research suggests that Christian youth who interact with a network of intergenerational friends guiding them along the journey of sanctification are more likely to

¹³³ Springtide, *Belonging*, 57. The study found that a relationship with even just one trusted adult resulted in a 16% decrease in feelings of loneliness.

develop an identity rooted in Christ than those confined to generational silos.¹³⁴ Kara Powell, for example, led Fuller Youth Institute in a study that found "high school and college students who experienced more intergenerational worship tend to have higher faith maturity."¹³⁵ These teenagers are prone to continue in Christian faith through the complexities of adolescence and into adulthood. Young people who develop a strong sense of belonging to their congregation tend to invest in the health and mission of the church. They develop a deep connectedness to the Body of Christ and are less likely to disaffiliate shortly after high school. Allen and Barnett contend that "intergenerational experiences contribute uniquely to sustainable, long-term faith formation across all ages."¹³⁶ Adolescents who are free to explore ministry options that are provided, supported, and encouraged by their congregation are more likely to find significance in a lifelong discovery of their purpose within the mission of God.

No youth ministry model can guarantee a faithful spiritual outcome. Young people are complex, life is messy, and there are too many variables, such as social context, family dynamic, congregational demographics, ministerial capacity, and organizational priorities at play to search for silver bullets. Nevertheless, an intergenerational model that serves as the primary approach to youth ministry can provide an optimal context for authentic spiritual transformation. In addition, by cultivating a culture where young people are routinely noticed, named, and known,

¹³⁴ Authors and researchers highlighting the value of intergenerational discipleship include Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving the Church ... And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011); Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2011); Kathie Amidei, Jim Merhaut, and John Roberto, *Generations Together: Caring, Praying, Learning, Celebrating, & Serving Faithfully* (Naugatuck, CT: Lifelong Faith Associates, 2014).

¹³⁵ Kara Powell, Brand M. Griffin and Cheryl A. Crawford, *sticky Faith: Youth Worker Edition: Practical Ideas to Nurturing Long-Term Faith in Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011) 75.

¹³⁶ Holly Catterton Allen and Christ Barnett, "Addressing the Two Intergenerational Questions," in *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*, 17.

congregations can directly address common hindrances to adolescent spiritual formation while accounting for some of the unique complexities of Generation Z.

Making the shift from multigenerational to intergenerational requires an adaptive change that impacts the very culture of the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene. The first shift calls for SWN to reexamine how we understand youth ministry. We can no longer assume that our responsibility to the next generation can be met by staffing relevant, youth events designed to help adolescents become more Christian in a fun environment where teenagers can bond with their peers over faith and culture. The proposed shift will require more incarnational, long-term, broad-based, personal investments from the congregation as it partners together in the sanctification of young people.

A second change is necessary to reach this goal. We must adjust our thinking in ways that prioritize belonging over believing. By locating belonging at the beginning of the discipleship process, we avoid confusing it as the *telos* of spiritual discipleship and allow sanctification to remain the goal. With this shift, belonging becomes the environment where young disciples are encouraged and supported as they discover their identity in Christ and experiment with their purpose in the mission of God.

The third change requires SWN to imagine itself as a community that nurtures, equips and launches youth to discover their purpose in the mission of God. Such a shift seeks to establish an ethos where youth have the opportunity, encouragement, and support to explore their giftedness and experiment with leadership. This third shift creates a safe environment where adolescents are encouraged to try out various ministries with the freedom to fail. This change invites adult leaders to make room at the table of influence for younger voices. It welcomes their perspective, respects their opinions, and acknowledges their contribution. The intergenerational

feature of this change moves trusted adults to partner with teenagers in a mentoring capacity as they experiment and explore their purpose in the grand mission of God.

Artifact Analysis

The goal of SWN's youth ministry is to partner with God in the sanctification of adolescents, resulting in lifelong discipleship. In this environment, students are welcomed to belong to the Body of Christ, challenged to root their identity in Christ, and encouraged to find their purpose within the mission of God. A congregationally centered, intergenerational approach to young discipleship provides an optimum context for this transformation. This project is designed to demonstrate and embody the comprehensive mutuality, equality, and reciprocity that characterizes intergenerational youth ministry.

The artifact proposed by this dissertation consists of a four-week sermon series set within a carefully designed service of worship intentionally structured by two aspiring young liturgists under qualified adult supervision. The sermon series is intended to gather SWN around select scriptures in a corporate exercise of discernment and discovery. The sermons address biblical themes of intergenerational ministry, discipleship, and ecclesiology with a culturally specific focus on Generation Z. The preaching series coincides with a four-week discipleship group study based on the scriptures, theme, and sermon from that Sunday. Groups are specifically designed to facilitate dialogue across generational lines and enable authentic relationships as group members partner together along a journey of sanctification. A weekly follow-up correspondence will go out via email to remind participants of essential content and encouragement to follow through with commitments. The follow-up gives opportunity to solicit stories of intergenerational experiences that can be used for evaluative purposes and appropriately

incorporated into the next worship gathering. The four-week experience concludes with a gathering of leaders represented across generations for evaluation and future planning.

The Context

Our people assemble in our building for a single weekly gathering of all ages on Sunday morning for worship and small group discipleship. The Sunday morning worship service represents the largest corporate expression of our shared faith, making it the ideal context to demonstrate intergenerational ministry. Our community naturally turns its attention toward young people as summer winds down, and schools get ready to re-open. Early fall usually brings additional energy and excitement to our congregation as families return from vacation and settle into a familiar routine. Before Labor Day, SWN welcomes an influx of college students signaling a natural shift in ministry. We can harness some of that added excitement by leveraging the four weeks of September to introduce a more congregationally centered approach to youth ministry.

For a service of worship to be authentically intergenerational young people must be offered a seat at the table of influence where their voice is heard, and their perspective is valued. In addition, intergenerational experiences necessarily involve opportunities for faithful expressions to be passed down from an older generation and passed up from a younger generation. For these reasons, I have elicited the assistance of two young people to partner in designing worship services for our community that embody the intergenerational theme for each of the four Sundays in September. We meet weekly to discuss the given theme and creatively explore both the essential and nonessential elements of worship that best demonstrate and support the given theme. See worksheets in appendix C. We carefully consider every element of our service, from ushers and song selections to musicians and scripture readers. An intentionally

ordered service provides broad participation across generational boundaries by using significant variations of ages on the platform. These aspiring liturgists understand their role in providing a meaningful context for intergenerational worship. The collaborative effort across generations allows these students to exercise responsibility for the health and mission of their congregation. It also demonstrates a partnership that recognizes the largely untapped creative contribution young people have to offer the community at worship.

The Sermon

The preaching series addresses foundational elements of intergenerational ministry from a biblical perspective drawing support from cultural contexts and missional ecclesiology. The first sermon in the series from Deuteronomy 6:1-9 demonstrates God's concern for the next generation and challenges the congregation to be engaged in passing the faith along. The second sermon considers Paul's image of the body from 1 Corinthians 13:12-31. This sermon celebrates the unity of diversity that invites us to become a necessary part of something larger than ourselves. The emphasis of this second week challenges the congregation to root its identity in Christ, who is the head of the body. The third sermon in the series invites people to practice the radical hospitality of the kingdom by making room for the other, as demonstrated by Jesus in Mark 10:13-16. This sermon addresses the need for belonging and the church's unique opportunity to address this need. The last sermon in the series from Matthew 9:35-10:1 explores our participation in the mission of God. The sermon challenges SWN to see Generation Z as a mission field ripe for harvest and our congregation as a missionary movement sent to cross cultural boundaries and extend the welcome of the kingdom. See sermon outlines in appendix D.

The sermon series draws attention to an often undervalued and overlooked demographic. It reorients the congregation to respond in ways that recognize their importance to God. It acknowledges their value as productive members of the community uniquely gifted to contribute to the health and mission of the congregation. The series gives people an opportunity to rethink their role in adolescent spiritual formation in ways that welcome teenagers to a place of belonging. The series also provides opportunities for them to explore their giftedness and discover their passions while engaging in various ministerial endeavors.

The Discipleship Group

South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene has a standard practice of weekly small group discipleship meetings attended by approximately 65% of our congregation. The artifact leverages this practice to demonstrate the intergenerational nature of a more congregationally centered approach to youth ministry. The small group content is derived from the Sunday sermon, allowing participants to process concepts by dialoguing among group members. Although members may not be in the same discipleship group, a thematic consistency remains because all groups engage the same material as the week progresses.

Each discipleship group is co-led by a young person and an experienced adult. Groups are intentionally made up of multiple generations assembled to cultivate intergenerational relationships. Discipleship groups meet in a host family home, allowing for the practices of hospitality and welcoming, which help foster a sense of belonging.

Groups follow a suggested curriculum for the designated week, beginning with an exercise designed to help members get to know each other. Each lesson contains a story to help illustrate the main idea for that week. Next, participants read the allotted scriptures together.

Discussion questions are then raised to encourage participatory dialogue. Finally, the discipleship group closes with an active challenge for the week and a prayer. See appendix B.

Discipleship groups become a laboratory where intergenerational relationships can be developed in a controlled, structured environment. Generations are encouraged to share appropriate vulnerabilities and support accompanied by opportunities to get to know members of the congregation more deeply in a secure, relaxed atmosphere. One indicator of a successful discipleship group will be the number of transgenerational relationships that continue to develop beyond the small group experience.

Weekly Follow-Up

A weekly follow-up email goes out to all group members, reminding them of the material and encouraging them to follow through on commitments. The primary purpose of this email is to solicit stories of intergenerational experiences which can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the artifact.¹³⁷ A select number of stories can be incorporated into the following Sunday service to highlight positive experiences and encourage the congregation to adopt an intergenerational shift. See appendix A.

In addition to the weekly email exchange, congregational leaders are encouraged to plan a debrief gathering at the conclusion of the series. The purpose of the gathering is to share and celebrate successes, evaluate the impact of the experience, and strategize about the next steps the congregation can take as it moves forward. A suggested structure to assist in this exercise could be adapted to fit the unique needs of local congregations and can be found at the end of appendix A.

¹³⁷ Appropriate personal contact information such as approximate age and email address can be collected during the Discipleship Group registration process.

Conclusion

This section advocates for an incarnational approach to youth ministry that distributes the responsibility of adolescent spiritual formation among the congregation. Reconstituting models of ministry designed for previous generations do not sufficiently address the problem of young post-Christian drop out. A congregationally centered youth ministry is better designed to reduce the potential malformation generated by the silo effect and the proliferation of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Intergenerational youth ministry provides a primary framework where students are free to explore their identity in Christ, welcomed to belong to the Body of Christ, and encouraged to discover their purpose in the mission of God. This approach maximizes multiple, safe relationships in ways conducive to spiritual transformation in an atmosphere that also accounts for some of the particularities of Generation Z.

The artifact proposed by this dissertation embodies the intergenerational emphasis of this proposal. The contextual element leverages generational gatherings and encourages participation from a broad range of age groups. The sermon series challenges the congregation to reexamine its involvement in adolescent spiritual formation, challenging people to a more relational investment in the sanctification of young people. The discipleship groups provide an applied, practical application of intergenerational theory. Finally, a weekly follow-up supplies a feedback loop to encourage and evaluate weekly progress.

The artifact demonstrates the kind of intergenerational ministry to youth that holds the most effective potential for lifelong discipleship in SWN's adolescents. It is an experiential example of the adaptive shifts we expect to make. The combined elements of the artifact address the problem of post-Christian drop out in ways that are biblically faithful, theologically sound, and practically feasible for our context.

CHAPTER 4

GENERATION TO GENERATION

Introduction

Chapter one introduces the ‘world beneath.’ There, we discovered some of the peculiarities that confront Generation Z and challenge congregations to contextualize their approach to adolescent faith development. Of the many complexities facing today’s young people, four stand out as a matter of significance for the church, deep feelings of loneliness, social isolation, high levels of anxiety, and post-Christian dropout. Chapter two examines the implications of rooting teenage identity in Christ as essential to adolescent sanctification. Chapter three explores the concept of intergenerational ministry and its effects on teenage spiritual formation by emphasizing the importance of finding belonging within the Body of Christ and discovering purpose within God’s redemptive mission. This dissertation contends that an intergenerational youth ministry model has the most significant potential to curb post-Christian drop out by nurturing lifelong Christian faith in young people in ways that account for these complex challenges while simultaneously addressing fundamental issues of identity, belonging, and purpose.

Chapter four introduces a congregational campaign designed to embody an intergenerational approach to discipleship that partners with God in the ministry of adolescent sanctification. This practical tool draws generations together into a mutually supportive environment where participants grow with one another in Christ and labor together in a common mission. In addition, this project provides actionable steps that demonstrate the results of a congregationally centered youth ministry.

Furthermore, this chapter introduces the project and outlines governing assumptions that illustrate its potential effectiveness for the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene. It will then explain the four main components of the artifact and show how they flow together in support of an intergenerational approach to adolescent spiritual formation. The scope and sequence of the project is presented in harmony with stated goals and objectives. This section also projects anticipated outcomes and offers evaluative feedback loops. All these features combine to help craft a viable artifact that embodies the essential elements of this dissertation in ways that demonstrate a contextual expression of intergenerational youth ministry.

*Generation to Generation
Governing Assumptions, Goals, and Objectives*

A congregationally centered ministry provides an optimum context for SWN to partner with God in the sanctification of adolescents while providing the greatest potential for developing lifelong disciples. Intergenerational youth ministry enriches the spiritual vitality of the broader congregation. This approach also directly addresses four significant peculiarities of Generation Z, loneliness, social isolation, high levels of anxiety, and post-Christian dropout. The health of the congregation is greatly enhanced as members actively participate in the sanctification of young people. This artifact is designed to assist congregations to embody the mutuality, equality, and reciprocity that characterizes a congregationally centered, intergenerational approach to adolescent spiritual formation that enriches the larger body.

The project envisions a concentrated, four-week, comprehensive experience that cultivates relationships across age groups for shared spiritual growth. This project aims to lead a congregation through actionable steps that reflect an intergenerational ministry model. In addition, the artifact intends to gather generations together along the journey of sanctification in

an atmosphere of mutually supportive relationships. For this reason, the title: *Generation to Generation* seems most appropriate. *Generation to Generation* sets out to inspire a cultural shift that distributes the responsibility of discipleship among the congregation by creating a safe, welcoming environment of belonging where people of all ages can journey together in sanctification.

A four-week congregational campaign alone is insufficient to effect significant change in congregational culture. Cultural changes happen over time and with consistency. *Generation to Generation* encourages leadership to reexamine approaches to adolescent spiritual formation that do not nurture lifelong Christian faith. It proposes a primary model of youth ministry that is congregationally centered by introducing concepts vital to intergenerational ministry. The project sets out to guide people through interactive, cross-generational discipleship experiences, offering a concentrated emphasis that allows congregations to embody and experiment with an intergenerational approach to spiritual formation.

Generation to Generation functions as a catalyst to inspire local churches to embark upon the lengthy process of shifting culture in ways that will reflect a more congregationally centered approach to youth ministry. It is not a one-time, four-week solution to the complexities of adolescent spiritual formation. On the contrary, this project proposes a practical, long-term approach to discipling young people that nurtures lifelong faith while contributing to the health of the larger body. A four-week immersion does offer congregations a sufficient intergenerational experience that allows them to envision what a shift in ministry would look like if they moved to adopt an intergenerational approach as a primary model of youth ministry.

In Defense – Why it Will Work

The four components of this artifact take advantage of established communal habits that contribute to the healthy rhythm of SWN's congregational life. Sunday morning worship holds the largest multigenerational potential to reach the active members of our fellowship. The majority of our Sunday morning gathering consists of committed regular participants who have carved out time in their busy lives to make corporate worship a priority. On an average Sunday, when college is in session, people under 29 years old are likely to outnumber people 30 and older, 70/40. After corporate worship, people are routinely segregated into their respective age-specific designations for small group discipleship classes.

In addition to Sunday morning discipleship groups, SWN holds a series of Life Groups that meet throughout the week. Life Groups gather around a commonly agreed upon curriculum and typically meet in participants' homes. They are almost entirely siloed by age. Nevertheless, over 65% of our active congregation is engaged in some small group discipleship ministry.

Leveraging existing structures of corporate worship and small group discipleship is the most effective and least disruptive process for SWN to reimagine its role in adolescent spiritual formation. This approach maximizes exposure to content and allows for the most significant amount of corporate participation across age groups. Introducing intergenerational concepts through alternative mediums, such as a series of service projects, mission trips, retreats, or fellowship meals, requires the coordination of schedules and establishing new corporate rhythms that will preclude many of our active people from full participation. Furthermore, an additional program would cause leadership to redirect resources from existing ministries to meet the need for expanding capacity. Utilizing organizational structures already in place, like Sunday worship

and discipleship groups, circumvents a period of communal disorientation and avoids setting multiple ministries in competition for attention, significance, and resources.

Worship and discipleship are foundational practices that gather and shape our faith community. Incorporating intergenerational discipleship into these core practices demonstrates how central this adaptive shift can become to our corporate self-understanding. By leveraging these core practices, we communicate that a congregationally centered approach to adolescent spiritual formation is not simply a onetime program that concludes after a special series has run its course. Instead, it potentially becomes a crucial component of our communal culture.

For an experience to be authentically intergenerational, it must intentionally practice the mutuality, equality, and reciprocity found as age-groups gather to learn from one another and grow together. Creating an environment that draws people from across the age spectrum into a face-to-face partnership for spiritual development is essential to intergenerational discipleship. Intergenerational discipleship is multi-directional. In this model, faith is not simply passed from an older generation down to the next it is also passed up from a younger generation to an older one. *Multigenerational* groups may gather around a common spiritual focus and still fail to learn from one another, grow together, and be shaped in relationship with each other. In that case, the groups have not yet become *intergenerational*. Therefore, alternative methods for inclusive discipleship, such as book study, digital apps, and seminars, can be adapted to include intergenerational components and may be of some tangential benefit. However, *Generation to Generation* offers clear communication of intergenerational concepts challenging SWN to reexamine previous discipleship methods and adopt practices more conducive to adolescent sanctification and congregational health.

Furthermore, *Generation to Generation* is structured to demonstrate an experiential approach to adolescent spiritual formation. Participants will be able to see what this new model looks like by observing the activity on the platform. People will hear the stories of intergenerational experiences while gathered for worship. They will sense what this new approach feels like as they journey with teenagers along the path of sanctification. By fully participating, the congregation will be able to embody a practice of discipleship as members strengthen their identity in Christ, locate their belonging within the Body of Christ, and live more profoundly into the mission of God together.

The 4 Components

Generation to Generation employs an intentional fourfold approach that engages the highest percentage of our congregation in a comprehensive, four-week intergenerational experience. This project uses four intentionally structured worship services to support a sermon series that provides a biblical/theological foundation for intergenerational discipleship. In addition, discipleship group studies allow members to interact with the material, build upon the concepts presented in the sermon, and apply principles in creative ways. These studies encourage participants to explore the implications of adopting an intergenerational approach to adolescent spiritual formation. The small group element allows participants to experiment with applications in a safe environment where members celebrate success and learn from failure. The last component involves simple feedback loops that welcome leaders and participants to share experiences, communicate insights or challenges, and imagine future possibilities.

Flow

The worship services are specifically planned to reflect and encourage intergenerational participation. They also support the governing theme for the week in ways that invite the congregation to worship in the presence of God. The services provide corporate consistency as the weeks progress. The sermons and the discipleship group lessons are designed to flow together, building toward the goal of becoming an intergenerational community where people are nurtured along the journey of sanctification.

The first week introduces intergenerational concepts that will take time and space to process. Week one anticipates a period of disequilibrium and gives space to name discomfort, identify resistance, and begin cultivating new relationships. The second week helps members to locate themselves as significant members of the Body of Christ while recognizing others as valuable contributors to the health and mission of the whole. Week two invites people to affirm the need for diversity and celebrate the uniqueness of others. Having recognized and celebrated the diverse contribution to the Body of Christ, week three challenges the congregation to practice radical hospitality that creates safe spaces, making room for others to belong. The series concludes by directing people to commit to the mission of God by overcoming cultural obstacles and personal fears, taking the initiative to engage Generation Z, by welcoming young people to a place of belonging and support in the Body of Christ.

#1 Worship

Worship is a contextualized event. Each congregation practices a liturgy specifically nuanced to express its unique essence. This expression speaks *to* the people in that it becomes meaningful for them and *for* the people in that it is somehow formative. *Generation to*

Generation elicits the assistance of young people in partnership with an experienced worship leader to create four consecutive worship experiences that consider multiple age groups and accounts for the common liturgy of a local congregation. This partnership aims to disciple young people in ways that develop their giftedness, allowing them to have a growing impact on congregational health. Partnering with youth to structure worship for the whole congregation is a spiritually formative exercise. Members of Generation Z are often eager to take responsibility for the health and mission of the church when they are given influence over matters of importance. Advanced planning gives time and space for young liturgists to consider the place of worship as they explore their purpose in the mission of God. The giftedness of young people can be recognized, developed, and affirmed while partnering together in ministry. Young people often bring creative insight and challenge long-standing practices that may have diminished in meaning over time. Older generations learn theological forms of expression meaningful to Generation Z and are challenged to discover significance outside their preferred norms. The collaborative effort produces an intergenerational expression of worship offered to God that enriches the faith community.

#2 Sermon Series with Scope and Sequence

The four sermons in the series provide content for small group interaction around intergenerational themes. The sermons in this series provide biblical and theological foundations from which the congregation is challenged to rethink its participation in the spiritual development of teenagers. The series is designed to gently guide the congregation along the journey of sanctification by addressing identity in the Body of Christ, belonging in the hospitality of God, and purpose as partners in God's redemptive mission.

The first sermon in the series introduces the intergenerational theme and will challenge the congregation to the hard work of actively passing the faith along. The second sermon will encourage people to locate themselves as active members of the Body of Christ and to recognize others as indispensable parts of the whole. The third sermon considers how Jesus perpetuates the radical hospitality of the kingdom by receiving the stranger and welcoming ‘the other’ to a place of belonging. Finally, the last sermon in the series specifically identifies Generation Z as a local mission field and calls the people to follow the Lord of the Harvest into that mission field.

Anticipated Sermon Series Outcomes

Throughout the series, members will be challenged to commit to a weekly intergenerational discipleship group. Participants are expected to respond to the sermon series by investing in healthy cross-generational relationships that pass Christian faith forward. It is anticipated that the congregation will grow to value young people, seek to nurture their creativity, and appreciate their unique contribution to the Body of Christ. It is also expected that members of the congregation will consider an active role in Christian hospitality by fostering an atmosphere of welcome and belonging. It is further anticipated that the congregation will begin to consider Generation Z as a unique and accessible mission field.

#3 Discipleship Group

Weekly discipleship groups meet to explore the content of Sunday’s sermon and experiment with application. Advanced planning allows groups to be purposefully organized to include a balanced number of participants aged 13 - 70+. In addition, advanced preparation equips young leaders to be paired with experienced adult group leaders to serve as co-facilitators.

This mentoring relationship demonstrates the mutuality, equality, and reciprocity characteristic of intergenerational ministry. Groups are hosted in a warm, inviting space and run from 75-90 minutes. Facilitators plan to cover approximately 65 minutes of material and discussion, leaving 10-30 minutes for informal social interaction.

In the first lesson, participants will explore the practice of advancing the faith forward. This lesson provides direction and helps orient participants so that the subsequent three sessions can develop progressively deeper. The group is challenged to experiment with ways they can actively transmit faith across generational boundaries. Participants in the second lesson are encouraged to discover their identity in Christ as essential members of his body. Group members are motivated to recognize and affirm others as necessary components of the whole. The third lesson investigates the concept of radical, Christian hospitality. This theme invites small group members to experiment with opportunities to create an atmosphere of welcoming and belonging. The small group series concludes with an exploration of purpose that encourages members to join God in his redemptive mission to Generation Z. Participants are asked to explore ways they can take initiative, cross cultural boundaries, and welcome young people into the kingdom.

Method

Discipleship groups will follow a simple fourfold engagement, exploration, examination, and exercise method. After prayer, the formal lesson will begin with facilitators introducing the central theme for the given week. Each lesson is tied to a short story shared from the sermon on Sunday. The story helps to illustrate the concept while providing a starting point where people can begin to *engage* with the central concept. Facilitators then lead the group to *explore* designated scripture passages through a series of dialogical practices suggested in the

Facilitator's guide. Exploring the biblical passages gives the central theme a biblical/theological shape. Next, participants are encouraged to *examine* the relevancy of the content by discovering where the theme for that week intersects and influences their lives directly. Lastly, the group is encouraged to devise and *exercise* practices that demonstrate and embody the themes discussed.

Anticipated Discipleship Group Outcomes

Members who engage in weekly discipleship groups are expected to develop and deepen relationships of safety and trust across generational boundaries. Group members will foster responsibility for the spiritual health and wellbeing of others. Participants will nurture their own identity in Christ as vital members of his body and affirm the valuable contribution of others. They will discover and practice creative ways to extend radical Christian hospitality that creates an environment of welcome and belonging, especially for those, like Generation Z and others identified along the margins. It is further expected that participants will wrestle with God's calling in their lives and experiment with their purpose in the mission of God. It is finally anticipated that spiritually formative relationships developed across generations will continue to grow after the *Generation to Generation* campaign concludes. Discipleship Groups will be encouraged to continue beyond the campaign to engage in various ministries from an intergenerational standpoint. As the congregational ethos begins to shift intergenerationally, additional discipleship groups will develop. Feedback loops are in place to help measure intergenerational engagement and progress toward these anticipated outcomes.

#4 Feedback Loops

Feedback loops are a method of support that open lines of communication for evaluation, providing opportunities to encourage and a chance to make necessary adjustments. The leadership team or pastoral staff oversees the process of initiating, collecting, and assessing feedback. A weekly email will go out to all small group participants. Examples can be found in appendix A. The weekly communication is intended to remind small group members of content focusing on the theme for the week and encourage people to follow through with commitments. Each email allows participants to report observations, concerns or share personal stories of their experiences. Some of the feedback might be used to make necessary mid-course adjustments. With permission, stories of experiences can be used during corporate worship gatherings to illustrate a concept or share excitement with the broader congregation. An individual weekly check-in should also be planned for small group leaders, providing an opportunity for encouragement, problem-solving, and support.

The second feedback loop is scheduled for the campaign's conclusion as the leadership team, including small group facilitators and worship leaders, gather with the pastoral staff for a meal to honor their investment and debrief the experience. This meeting will measure observations and evaluations against stated goals and objectives. Finally, the meeting will conclude with a discussion about the next steps that can be taken as the congregation moves forward toward shifting their primary approach to adolescent spiritual formation.¹³⁸ Suggested questions that can be used or adapted to direct the conversation are available in the Leader's Guide in appendix A.

¹³⁸ Every faith community possess a variety of unique factors that will impact the implementation of intergenerational practices, such as, demographics, history, and leadership. Local congregations should work to contextualize their approach to intergenerational youth ministry according to their unique capacity.

Conclusion

This dissertation project seeks to embody a congregationally centered, intergenerational approach to youth ministry. The artifact consists of a four-week congregational campaign that challenges the Body of Christ to reexamine their role in youth ministry in ways that distribute the responsibility of discipleship among the congregation by creating a safe, welcoming environment of belonging where generations journey together in sanctification. *Generation to Generation* serves the church as a practical tool that invites congregations to partner with God in the sanctification of adolescents to nurture lifelong faith in young people. The primary objective is to lead a congregation through actionable steps toward creating a congregational ethos of intergenerational discipleship. In this environment, young people are challenged to root their identity in Christ, are welcomed to belong to the Body of Christ, and encouraged to find their purpose within the mission of God.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMATION

Summary of Artifact Development

Generation to Generation evolved from a growing personal, pastoral concern over the many young people who abandon their faith, disaffiliate from the church, and disengage from active participation in the kingdom of God shortly after high school. Research into the problem of disengagement and withdrawal revealed a growing national trend that coincides with my experience discipling young people over time and in various contexts. Further study into this phenomenon exposed the inability of common models of ministry to develop sustainable Christian faith in young people sufficient for the challenges of adolescence and robust enough to grow with them into adulthood.

Moreover, research also suggests that the problem of disengagement and withdrawal becomes increasingly advanced and complicated when considering the unique challenges facing Generation Z. In addition to the tendency toward post-Christian dropout, Generation Z struggles with disturbing levels of loneliness, social isolation, and high anxiety. These specific peculiarities negatively influence adolescent spiritual development and limit opportunities for authentic, lifelong discipleship.

In response to these challenges, I pursued the problem with a simple assumption informed by my Wesleyan-Holiness tradition: the goal of youth ministry is to partner with God in the sanctification of adolescents, resulting in sustainable, lifelong faith. With this goal in mind, alternative ways to disciple young people that also limit post-Christian dropout and account for the particularities of today's young people were investigated. Research led to the conclusion that a congregationally centered, intergenerational approach to youth ministry provides optimum

potential for the sanctification of adolescents in ways that account for the peculiarities of Generation Z.

This project divides the sanctification of young people into three manageable emphases. Each area of focus requires the congregation to cooperate with God by investing in the spiritual development of youth. First, members actively encourage teenagers to respond to the movements of the Holy Spirit by nurturing an identity rooted in Christ. Secondly, the congregation takes responsibility for cultivating a safe, hospitable environment that welcomes young people to a place of belonging among the people of God. Thirdly, the congregation seeks to provide opportunities for teenagers to discover, develop, and explore their purpose within God's redemptive mission. Although the emphases are presented as specific components of the sanctification process, they are not chronologically linear. For example, a young person could develop a deep sense of belonging and purpose before a discernable Christian identity takes shape.

This approach to adolescent spiritual formation reduces the likelihood of post-Christian dropout by securely anchoring a young person's identity in Christ. It is imperative that congregations nurture a Christian identity in young people strong enough to sustain them through the challenges of youth culture and fluid enough to grow with them into their adult years. When the roots of adolescent identity descend deep into Christ, teenagers draw life and strength from him. In this case, young people are not set adrift on a vast cultural sea of identity discovery in an adolescent search to define themselves. Instead, they already have an identity in Christ that defines them. As young people grow into their emerging identity in Christ, the character of Jesus begins to be lived out through them. This inward and outward transformation begins to shape the essence of the young disciple both privately and publicly. Among all the tempting ways youth

culture works to define Generation Z, a congregationally centered youth ministry helps young people to understand themselves primarily as beloved disciples of Christ.

The sanctification of young people also addresses the epidemic of loneliness experienced by Generation Z. The antidote to severe loneliness is not access to more people; the cure is intimacy. However, intimacy cannot develop where young people feel unwelcomed, undervalued, and insecure. A congregationally centered youth ministry accounts for intense loneliness by nurturing a safe, welcoming environment where teenagers are noticed, named, and known by the congregation to whom they belong. However, an intergenerational ministry contends that it is insufficient for a young person to belong to a congregation. That young person must also be confident that the congregation belongs to them.

Authentic belonging makes room for the unique contribution and perspectives of young people. Teenagers need freedom and safety to experiment with opportunities to discover, develop, and explore their purpose within the mission of God. Local churches that provide multiple opportunities for young people to engage in ministry allow them to creatively develop their giftedness and calling in ways that advance the health and mission of the congregation. Cooperating with the Holy Spirit in the sanctification of young people by addressing these three components of adolescent spiritual formation: identity, belonging, and purpose, will develop a safe, affirming environment that significantly reduces high levels of anxiety.

Generation to Generation emerged as a practical, incarnational response to the problem of post-Christian dropout. It serves to embody a demonstration of intergenerational youth ministry that partners in the sanctification of young people. This embodiment mitigates some of the unique complexities facing Generation Z. The project provides South Weymouth Church of

the Nazarene with actionable steps in the process of initiating a cultural shift toward a congregationally centered approach to adolescent spiritual development.

Implications in Context

This dissertation advocates for the adoption of an intergenerational framework of ministry that will serve as the primary model for adolescent spiritual formation. However, an exclusively intergenerational method of youth ministry that neglects to leverage the best from available resources can quickly devolve into a myopic practice of teenage malformation. This project does not intend to disregard the value of age-specific, peer-focused ministry. Nor does it hope to diminish the contribution of other approaches to the spiritual health of youth. This work argues for intergenerational to become the governing principle by which the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene cooperates with God in the sanctification of young people.

It is expected that youth will continue to gather with peers for study, social development, missional encounters, and faith formation. However, an adaptive, intergenerational shift will encourage periodic times of intentional generational integration. This might occur when a few adults of various ages are welcome to participate in youth group discussions and activities. Young people may be invited to share their thoughts during an adult bible study. A short-term mission trip intentionally scheduled over spring break provides an occasion for generations to partner together in service while exploring opportunities to experiment with purpose. Naturally occurring events like these, void of a lingering sense of awkward intrusion, may be evidence that an adaptive change in culture is taking place.

An adaptive progress can threaten many existing organizational systems. An intentional shift away from understanding young people as future leaders in waiting in favor of one that

provides young leaders opportunities to develop their giftedness by providing appropriately supervised experiences will take time and consistency before it becomes the norm. Adopting an intergenerational model for youth ministry requires an intentional shift away from established operational procedures. Providing young people opportunities to exercise influence over critical organizational decisions such as budgeting, communication, organizational health, and mission will require a shift in thinking and a reorientation of priorities. Moreover, before young people are given influence over important decisions, special attention must be given to the development of young leaders. This is not to suggest that a council of teenagers needs to be convened every time a decision is to be made. It is to suggest, however, that before decisions are made, leaders pause to consider how the outcomes will positively or negatively effect a congregation's youth.

Not every member of the faith community is positioned to nurture young people's spiritual health. Nevertheless, there are many who can positively support, encourage, love, and guide teenagers along their spiritual journey in Christ. In addition, people across the spectrum of ages can benefit from the insight, creativity, and perspective offered by young disciples. Some intergenerational relationships have a strong potential to evolve into a more formal mentorship bond. Every intergenerational relationship holds the potential to exchange mutual encouragement and support along the journey of faith. A healthy congregation can foster a safe environment of belonging and support that extends across the age continuum. To encourage and support healthy relationships, leadership will need to take special care to identify positive influences by providing a measure of oversight, keeping in mind that not all positive spiritual influences are easily recognizable.

A significant foreseeable challenge arises with the implementation of *Generation to Generation* in a local context regarding the safety of minors. One of the benefits of segregated

youth ministry is the ability to control access to minors under the age of 18. A more congregationally centered youth ministry reduces leadership's ability to control this access and increases potential vulnerability. In a culture where it is estimated that one out of every ten children under the age of eighteen will be assaulted, it would be naïve to think congregations are exempt from such ghastly occurrences.¹³⁹ Sadly, we live in a world where the spiritual development of young people also increases their potential risk.

An essential component of *Generation to Generation* is its ability to cultivate a safe environment conducive to spiritual growth and the reduction of high levels of anxiety. Implementing a congregationally centered youth ministry must be accompanied by a robust youth protection policy that includes, but is not limited to, broad quality training, criminal background checks, and clearly communicated channels of reporting. Policy alone, however, is insufficient to guard against vulnerability. One of the best ways to help safeguard against potential abuse is for *Generation to Generation* to progress beyond the implementation of a program until a cultural shift allows intergenerational ministry to take root in the congregation's collective consciousness. Discipling adolescents involves attention to the physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of youth. When the concepts of intergenerational ministry become part of the faith community's ethos, members naturally take responsibility for the safety and nurture of minors. This general concern among the congregation for the wellbeing of the vulnerable may be the most significant deterrent to those intent on violence.

¹³⁹ According to the CDC's website 1-4 girls and 1-7 boys will be sexually assaulted before the age of 18; 1-7 girls and 1-25 boys 18 and under are likely to be assaulted. Catherine Townsend and Alyssa A. Rheingold, "Estimating a Child Sexual Abuse Prevalence Rate for Practitioners: A Review of Child Sexual Abuse Prevalence Studies," D2l.org., 2013, <https://www.d2l.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/PREVALENCE-RATE-WHITE-PAPER-D2L.pdf>. last reviewed April 6, 2022.

A second challenge involves the inability of congregations to assess progress against stated goals in a quantifiable and timely manner. Nurturing sanctification in the life of adolescents sufficient to sustain them through the complexities of youth culture and viable enough to grow with them into adulthood could take more than a decade to determine in most cases. There is no standard way to measure sanctification in the life of a developing adolescent. Discipling young people is an exercise in faithfulness, consistency, and patience.

Many congregations are reluctant to undergo the adaptive change required to shift the primary model of youth ministry away from familiar, albeit ineffective, frameworks to a model that offers little immediate, measurable results. It is common to address the problem of post-Christian dropout with technical solutions that may offer short-term results but miss the larger objective. Intergenerational ministry is a long-term commitment. The risks are high. Church leaders who consider the *Generation to Generation* project often express a common fear. Fellow ministers are concerned about leading their people through the lengthy process of adaptive change only to discover they made a poor choice a decade later and were unable to disciple the next generation well.¹⁴⁰ Until leadership refrains from adjusting traditional ministry frameworks and is convinced of the need for adaptive change, it will not be easy to shift the primary model of youth ministry in ways that reflect a more congregationally centered approach.

Implications for Further Study

An intergenerational method of youth ministry has implications that extend beyond the positive impact on adolescent spiritual formation. Although this dissertation focuses explicitly on ministry to youth, it is easy to see how *Generation to Generation* nurtures the spiritual health of

¹⁴⁰ Author's conversation with Rev. Douglas Milne ThD. candidate, October 16, 2022.

the local church. Healthy congregations intentionally pursue spiritual growth. Communities of faith that cooperate with God are held accountable by committed relationships, and the structure of small group involvement becomes places where participants develop spiritually. Here, people in various life stages are supported as they evaluate their identity in Christ, test the boundaries of their belonging, and experiment with their purpose.

Generation to Generation actively encourages members to engage in personal spiritual formation while investing in the sanctification of others. As people from various ages explore their purpose in the mission of God together, new and creative ideas flow across the generation gap opening innovative possibilities for participation in the Body of Christ. It is quite possible that a teenager struggling with their identity in small group gives an older person pause to consider their own standing in Christ. When a new couple reluctantly accepts the invitation to attend a small group for the first time, they might be gladly welcomed to a place of belonging. Intergenerational ministry has potential implications for the healthy spiritual formation of the larger congregation. The impact of this approach to ministry on the spiritual formation of children, middle-aged adults, and seniors remain topics that warrant future research and exploration. Others who might be inclined to build upon this project will discover ample room to adapt and expand the influence of intergenerational ministry in the lives of people at various stages of life.

In addition to a substantial number of young families with adolescents, South Weymouth also contains a considerable number of aging senior adults. A demographic study in our area showed that over 32% of our town's population, more than 10,500 people, were over 55 years of age.¹⁴¹ As I learn more about my context, the spiritual longings and losses experienced by our

¹⁴¹ "Church of the Nazarene | Community Demographics," n.d., Accessed October 15, 2022, <https://maps.nazarene.org/DemographicsNazarene/age.html?y=5187661.333196945>.

senior adults are becoming more apparent. Their stories reflect a shared experience that draws attention to the aging process as one that questions identity, limits belonging, and slowly diminishes purpose. With more research and focus, the *Generation to Generation* project can be intentionally adapted to address the longings and losses of our aging demographic in ways that reinforce identity, reconfigure belonging and affirm purpose. Although these categories do not encompass the entirety of the Wesleyan-Holiness doctrine of sanctification, they provide solid starting points to nurture lifelong faith.

The work begun on this project can be particularly beneficial to the spiritual growth of emerging adult singles. The term *emerging adult* is a designation used in reference to people 18-30 years old. Their chronological proximity to Generation Z involves some overlap and permits the two groups to share many similar characteristics. The *Generation to Generation* campaign could be expanded to include implications for this demographic. For example, unlike generations who have come before, emerging adults typically wait until later in life to enter marriage. One implication of this trend could be an increasing number of young singles residing in the community of Weymouth over the next few years. In my experience as a Christian leader, I have observed that singles often hold an undervalued place in the community of faith. *Generation to Generation* could significantly contribute to ministry among emerging adult singles in the church by intentionally connecting them to people who could serve as spiritual nephews, grandmothers, siblings, cousins, and close spiritual friends.

Creating an alternative congregational ethos involves consistency over time. *Generation to Generation* can be enhanced with a broader understanding of how organizations successfully navigate the long progression of adaptive change. The practical process of caring for people through change requires more attention than allowed by the focus of this dissertation. Volumes

of dedicated research in Christian leadership provide an excellent place to take the next steps forward. Building on the project might involve a more focused and detailed action plan to facilitate change in the collective congregational culture.

In Summary

This dissertation challenges congregations to develop a contextualized approach to adolescent spiritual formation that considers the uniqueness of Generation Z. *Generation to Generation* was designed to assist the South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene reimagine its ministry to young people in ways that nurture lifelong discipleship while addressing some of these peculiarities. This project proposes an intergenerational approach to youth ministry as the primary model by which the congregation creates a safe, welcoming environment where generations can journey together in sanctification.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was moved with compassion because the people were distraught and without hope and direction. "Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'"¹⁴² The next thing Jesus does in Matthew's gospel is commission the disciples, sending them into the harvest field in response to their prayer for workers.¹⁴³ One of the lessons that can be learned from this account is that those who pray with Jesus for workers should expect to be equipped and sent to join him in the harvest fields. *Generation to Generation* identifies a large, troubled demographic who are losing hope and without direction. This project was created

¹⁴² Matthew 9:37-38, NIV.

¹⁴³ Matthew 10.

to help equip SWN follow Jesus into the harvest field of the world beneath, joining him there to make lifelong disciples of young people.

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APPENDIX A
LEADER'S GUIDE

Generation To Generation

A church-wide campaign that leads congregations through actionable steps toward creating a collective culture of intergenerational discipleship

Generation

To

Generation

Leader's Guide

Generation to Generation: A Leader's Guide

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A Word of Welcome

Welcome to *Generation to Generation*. I'm delighted you've chosen to journey with us along the path of intergenerational discipleship. Research indicates an alarming number of young people are abandoning the Christian faith, disaffiliating from the church, and disengaging from participation in the Kingdom of God after high school. Perhaps you have seen or experienced a similar trend among the youth of your community. This project was birthed out of concern for the many young people I have served, mentored, and discipled for nearly three decades, who have found the Christian faith of their youth to be insufficient for the challenges of young adulthood and unworthy of a lifelong pursuit. I developed this campaign to offer my local congregation, The South Weymouth Church of the Nazarene, a way to partner with God in the sanctification of adolescents that results in a life of discipleship. I hope you'll find this project to be a resourceful companion as we partner together in the spiritual formation of young people.

Generation to Generation presents a model of ministry designed to help congregations cultivate sustainable Christian faith sufficient to navigate the challenges of youth culture and robust enough to grow into adulthood. This project aims to establish a congregationally centered approach to ministry where teenagers are encouraged to root their identity in Christ, discover their belonging in the Body of Christ, and explore their purpose within the mission of God. *Generation to Generation* is a church-wide campaign that leads congregations through actionable steps toward creating a collective culture of intergenerational discipleship. Congregations intent on pursuing intergenerational ministry will find *Generation to Generation* to be a helpful starting point and a valuable tool for growing healthy, lifelong disciples of Jesus.

This campaign consists of a four-week emersion into generational ministry that leverages a congregation's established service of worship in collaboration with smaller, weekly discipleship groups. Thematic, corporate worship services work in tandem with the sermon series to provide the content for small group exploration and implementation. Weekly intergenerational discipleship groups demonstrate the given themes as they build from week to week.

Generation to Generation will lead the congregation to take an active role in passing Christian faith across generational boundaries. Members will be encouraged to locate their identity in the Body of Christ while valuing the contribution of others. Participants will explore the practice of radical Christian hospitality that welcomes outsiders and strangers to belong.

Lastly, the congregation will be challenged to engage young people as a unique and accessible mission field.

Today's young people face a variety of challenges that threaten healthy spiritual development. The church has an opportunity to partner with God in innovative ways that nurture a new generation of disciples. I pray that *Generation to Generation* will assist you and your congregation as you explore new ways to disciple young people that cultivate lasting healthy relationships, sustainable Christian faith, and full participation in the Kingdom of God.

Leader's Guide

This Leader's Guide contains the necessary resources to launch your congregation's successful *Generation to Generation* campaign. Use this guide to help you become more familiar with the project's various components. The elements of this campaign are intended to coincide with each other to provide a full intergenerational experience.

In this leader's guide, you will find:

- A Suggested Timeline
- Discipleship Group Guidelines
- A Facilitator's Instruction Guide
- Group Guidelines
- A Host/Hostess Instruction Guide
- A Worship Project
- A Suggested Sermon Series
- Suggested Weekly Email Correspondence
- Suggested Celebration and Conversation Debrief Event

Suggested Timeline

Generation to Generation is designed to assist congregations reimagine their approach to adolescent spiritual formation. For most established churches, this will involve a shift in corporate culture that will involve consistency over time. This timeline is given to help guide leaders in their advanced preparation and planning. Leadership should feel free to adapt the preparation process to fit their unique context.

1. Establish a launch date. Consider four Sundays late in the summer or early in the fall when communities are preparing for school to resume from summer vacation.
2. Six months before launch, leadership should begin monthly discussions evaluating current models of discipleship and the need for a cultural shift to a more intergenerational approach. See the following resources for a helpful place to begin.

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

Allen, Holly Catterton, and Jason Brian Santos. *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*. Edited by Holly Catterton Allen. Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018.

3. At least three months before launch, the congregation can experiment with multigenerational opportunities for worship, leadership, and service. In addition, leadership should identify potential intergenerational small group leaders of adults and mature high school or college students.
4. Six weeks before launch, small group facilitators are identified, paired up one adult with one young person in a mentoring capacity, and trained on the basics of effective small group leadership (see facilitator's instruction guide). In addition, two or three young people are selected to meet weekly with an experienced worship director. These young people work closely with the worship leader to give oversight, providing input for the order and components of worship for the series. See worksheets in appendix C.
5. Five weeks before the launch, leadership announces and promotes the upcoming series, and small group registration opens. Host family homes are identified, expectations are communicated (see host/hostess instruction guide), and discipleship group locations are secured.
6. Two weeks before launch, small group facilitators are introduced to the congregation, locations are publicized, and registered group participants are intentionally assembled intergenerationally.
7. Two weeks prior to the conclusion of the campaign, invite multigenerational leadership to join pastoral staff for a debrief event to celebrate successes and discuss future implementation of intergenerational practices.

Discipleship Groups

Weekly discipleship groups meet to explore the content of Sunday's sermon and experiment with applications. Ideally, groups should be purposefully organized to include a balanced number of participants aged 13-70+. In addition, advanced preparation equips young leaders to be paired with experienced adult small group leaders to serve as co-facilitators in a mentoring relationship, demonstrating the mutuality, equality, and reciprocity characteristic of intergenerational ministry. Groups are hosted in a warm, inviting space and run from 75-90 minutes. Facilitators plan to cover 60-75 minutes of material and discussion, leaving 15-30 minutes for informal social interaction.

In the first lesson, the group is challenged to experiment with ways they can actively pass the faith forward. Participants in the second lesson are encouraged to discover their identity in

Christ as critical components of his body. The third lesson investigates the concept of radical Christian hospitality and invites members to experiment with opportunities to create an atmosphere of welcoming and belonging. The small group series concludes with an exploration of purpose that encourages members to join in God's redemptive mission to young people. Participants are asked to experiment with ways they can take initiative, cross cultural boundaries, and welcome young people into the Kingdom. Discipleship group discussion guides could be distributed to all participants, and can be found in appendix B.

A Facilitator's Instruction Guide

We are delighted to partner with you as we explore intergenerational youth ministry together. Intergenerational is a model of ministry that engages the broader congregation in the practice of discipleship as we learn, grow, worship, and serve together. Intergenerational congregations purposefully cultivate life-giving and meaningful relationships across generational boundaries for mutual transformation.

Chris Barnett emphasizes that an intergenerational environment intentionally demonstrates a “comprehensive *mutuality*, *equality*, and *reciprocity* that makes individual or collective transformation more likely.”¹⁴⁴ In this model, youth are not only being discipled across generational boundaries, but they are also actively contributing to the spiritual development of others along the age spectrum. An intergenerational approach to youth ministry intentionally seeks the faith formation of children, youth, and adults as authentic faith is nurtured among disciples at every life stage. Adolescents nurtured in this environment are not only being intentionally discipled by multiple spiritual mentors but are also, to various degrees, actively discipling others, both older and younger. Young people are encouraged to engage in formative dialogue across generational boundaries where their contribution can be affirmed and valued. In this environment, they discover opportunities to pursue passions, develop giftedness, and test their aptitudes for various Kingdom involvement as they explore their purpose in the mission of God.

¹⁴⁴ Holly Catterton Allan and Chris Barnett, “Addressing the Two Intergenerational Questions,” *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches through Intergenerational Ministry*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018) 18.

Allen and Ross state that “intergenerational ministry occurs when a congregation intentionally brings the generations together in mutual serving, sharing, or learning within the core activities of the church in order to live out being the Body of Christ to each other and the greater community.”¹⁴⁵ This approach gathers the congregation to experience a shared life while engaging in three core activities of the church: ministry, spiritual formation, and worship. We believe intergenerational youth ministry is an effective approach to spiritual formation that is biblically faithful, theologically sound, and practically viable. We are happy to partner with you and your congregation as you grow from *Generation to Generation*.

Each small group is designed to be facilitated by a team of one adult and one young person. Groups are intentionally made up of 7-10 participants with a mixture of ages that range between 13-70+. Care should be taken to avoid a large representation by any singular generation. Ideally, groups are hosted in a warm, welcoming environment such as a home and should last between 75-90 minutes. Facilitators should follow the layout and flow of the small group study provided, with the freedom to adapt, reword, and adjust material in ways that enhance the dialogical process and maintain the integrity of the study.

Facilitators should review the lesson together before the presentation and plan the best way to divide the responsibilities between them. Arrive early to assist with any last-minute setup and ensure all necessary copies, supplies, and materials are available. Welcome participants as they enter and remember to thank the host/hostess. Facilitators are responsible for starting and ending at the agreed-upon times. Reading through *Group Guidelines* before the lesson begins is strongly encouraged. Provide copies to group members, if so desired.

Objectives

- *To foster strong, healthy, intergenerational relationships
- *To cultivate a sustained, intergenerational investment in the spiritual health and well being of young people
- *To mentor, disciple, and support each other as we explore our relationship in Christ, discover our belonging in the church, and experiment with our purpose in the mission of God.

¹⁴⁵ 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 Academic, 2012), 17.

Group Guidelines

Maintain confidentiality

Anyone is free to pass if they wish not to speak

Listen without interruption

Listen to understand

Withhold judgment

Affirm and encourage

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure each person has
an equal opportunity to share

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure this space is filled
with grace

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Maintain Confidentiality

Anyone is free to pass if they wish not to speak

Listen without interruption

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Withhold judgment

Affirm and encourage

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure each person has an equal opportunity to share

It is everyone's responsibility to ensure this space is filled with grace

Host/Hostess Instruction Guide

Thank you for hosting a *Generation to Generation* disciple group! The welcoming, safe space that you provide becomes the atmosphere for spiritual transformation. Your hospitality is a gift to the church and essential to this ministry. The main objective for our host/hostess is to invite group members into a warm, comfortable space to grow together in Christ.

Please be prepared to open your home to 7-10 guests each week for four weeks. Guests may begin arriving 10-15 minutes before the set start time. Greeting participants at the door enthusiastically sets a warm, expectant tone for the meeting, and can help put your visitors at ease. Although light refreshments are not required, they can often add to a growing sense of welcome. Including participants in set up, clean up, and snack responsibilities can allow others to contribute and take ownership. Feel free to share the joy of hospitality. Remember, you are not simply the host/hostess, but also a valuable participant in the group. Be sure to fully engage in the small group discipleship.

Worship Project

Generation to Generation elicits the assistance of young people to work with the worship director/planner to help create four consecutive intergenerational worship experiences that consider the multiple age groups and account for the existing worship expressions of the congregation. Experienced worship leaders who partner with young people to structure worship for the whole assembly engage in intergenerational discipleship. Young Christians are often eager to take responsibility for the health and mission of the church when they are given influence over matters of importance. Advanced planning provides time and space for young liturgists to consider the role of worship as they explore their purpose in the mission of God.

The giftedness of young people can be recognized, developed, and affirmed while partnering with a mentor in ministry. Adolescents often bring creative insight and challenge long-standing practices that might have diminished in meaning over time. Older generations learn theological forms of expression meaningful to young people and are challenged to discover significance outside their preferred norms. The collaborative effort produces an intergenerational expression of worship offered to God that enriches the faith community. It is important to encourage representation of multiple generations in various elements of public worship as much and as often as possible. Worksheets to help facilitate this worship project can be found in appendix C.

Sermon Series

The four sermons in the series provide content for small group interaction around intergenerational themes. The sermons in this series provide biblical and theological foundations from which the congregation is challenged to rethink its participation in the spiritual development of teenagers. The series is designed to gently guide the faith community along the journey of sanctification by addressing three key themes of identity, belonging, and purpose. The first sermon in the series introduces the intergenerational theme and will challenge the congregation to the hard work of actively passing the faith along. The second sermon will encourage people to locate themselves as active members in the Body of Christ and recognize others as indispensable parts of the whole. The third sermon considers how Jesus perpetuates the radical hospitality of the Kingdom by receiving the stranger and welcoming 'the other' to a place

of belonging. Finally, the fourth sermon challenges the congregation to engage young people as a unique and accessible mission field. Sermon outlines can be found in appendix D.

Weekly Email

The weekly communication is intended to remind small group members of content, focusing on the theme for the week and encouraging people to follow through with commitments. Each email allows participants to report observations and concerns or share personal stories of their experiences. With permission, stories of experiences can be used during corporate worship to illustrate a concept or share excitement with the broader congregation.

Week #1

Congratulations,

You're making a valuable contribution to the health and mission of our local congregation. Your active participation in *the Generation to Generation* discipleship group is supporting the spiritual growth of our members and encouraging the formation of our community. I hope you are having as much fun getting to know your group as we are.

In Psalm 78:4, the songwriter encourages us not to hide the praiseworthy actions of the LORD, his power, or the miracles he has done from the next generation. Instead, he urges us to be diligent in passing faith forward. Over the next few days, our discipleship groups will explore ways to transmit faith across generational boundaries. This week, we are challenged to create opportunities to encourage and support the growing faith of people who are older and younger than us.

We'd love to hear about your experiences. Maybe someone encouraged you this week. Were you blessed by the words or actions of a young person? Perhaps you were able to share a story about how God made a way through a difficult time in your life. Feel free to drop us a note or give us a call. We'd be delighted to hear how God is working.

Be sure to join us next week as we turn out attention to how God gives life to every part of the body and arranges us together to fit into a masterful reflection of himself. We can hardly wait!

In Christ,

email _____
phone _____

Week #2

Greetings Friends,

As we wrap up week two of *Generation to Generation*, we hope that you have been able to locate your identity in Christ, who gives life to the body and arranges us all to fit in mutual dependence and support of each other. Of all the identities we could assume, it is Jesus who defines us. The more we draw life from him, the more his life is lived through us into the world. Together, we are the Body of Christ. We need you and your unique contribution. There's no other way to say it. We are deficient without you. Please reach out to let us know how Jesus is shaping your identity.

Luciano De Crescenzo reminds us:

“We are, each of us angels
Each with one wing.
We can only fly
Embracing each other”

Only together are we the Body of Christ. That means I belong to you, and you belong to me – we can't be the Body of Christ without each other. I'm so glad we belong together.

We continue next week to discover how Jesus extends the radical hospitality of the Kingdom by welcoming the stranger and making room for others to belong. It might be an excellent opportunity for you to invite a guest to our worship gathering.

In Christ,

email _____
phone _____

Week #3

Sisters and Brothers,

Don't you love how Jesus opens the doors to God's Kingdom, giving access to anyone who will come? This is excellent news for the stranger, the marginalized, and the wanderer. The radical hospitality of the Kingdom treats strangers as family and welcomes the 'other' to a place of belonging.

“When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.”

- Leviticus 19:33-34

This week our discipleship groups are experimenting with ways to help people who might not yet belong, realize that they do! Please tell us all about it. We would love to assist you in that experiment. Be sure to join us next week as we follow Jesus to a familiar town and into a unique and unlikely mission field.

In Christ,

email _____
phone _____

Week #4

Greetings Missionaries!

Thank you for joining us for these four intense weeks of *Generation to Generation*. We pray that God has used our time together to stir a deep passion for intergenerational ministry in you. We hope that your investment in the lives of people will continue to grow. You play a vital role in the spiritual growth and wellbeing of the people you've built relationships with over these four weeks. Let's keep growing together!

I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:4-6

This week our groups are planning ways to engage and support young people in our community. We are very excited to learn about innovative ways we can open the doors of God's Kingdom and invite young people to belong. Please take a moment this week to tell us all about your plans. We'd love to find ways to encourage and support you in this valuable mission.

May the zealous love of God the Father inspire you to be good news to young people.
May the overwhelming compassion of God the Son compel you to invest in young people.

May the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit of God cause you to be a winsome and welcoming friend that escorts youth into the Kingdom.

In Christ,

email _____
phone _____

Celebration Conversation

Upon the conclusion of your *Generation to Generation* campaign consider hosting a meal to celebrate your successes and thank leadership for their investment. This celebration can provide an ideal opportunity to debrief and evaluate your congregation's experience in a welcoming atmosphere. Involving as many leaders from across generations as possible to join the conversation demonstrates a continued commitment to intergenerational practices. The dialogue and feedback provided by a directed conversation is an important mechanism with which to evaluate progress, encourage leadership, and plan for the future. An intentionally structured dialogue can assist the process of gathering valuable insight when assessing an experience and planning the next steps. The following suggested questions can serve as an adaptable structure for a directed conversation. The questions are offered to help leadership evaluate the efficacy of the campaign and the potential implications for ministry in the future.

Debrief Questions:

- What goals/objectives did we set out to accomplish with this campaign?
 - How did we accomplish our stated goals/objectives?
 - In what ways might we have fallen short?
 - Did you have any additional personal goals you wished to accomplish?
 - Were you able to achieve them?
 - How/Why?
- What is your overall assessment of the *Generation to Generation* experience?
- What went well?
- What are some things you learned or discovered?
 - About yourself
 - About your discipleship group
 - About our congregation
- What challenges did you encounter?
- In what ways might you still be struggling with intergenerational concepts?

Moving Forward Questions:

- What possibilities excite you as you consider future intergenerational ministry?
 - How might our congregation be uniquely equipped to continue moving forward intergenerationally?
 - What potential opportunities can you envision?
 - What are the possible obstacles that might prevent us from shifting to a more congregationally centered youth ministry?
 - What fears/reservations do you have about shifting congregational culture in this direction?
 - What are some important next steps to identify as we consider intergenerational ministry?
- Should we meet again to evaluate our progress? If so, when?

APPENDIX B

DISCIPLESHIP GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Generation

To

Generation

Discipleship Group
Discussion Guide



Passing Faith Forward

Central Theme:

Passing the Faith

Objective:

Create an environment where faith is freely and intentionally passed among generations.

Connect (15 minutes)

*Review Group Guidelines.

*Interrogation Activity – pair up with someone of a different generation (as much as possible) spend 5 mins getting to know each other. Next, go around the room and have each person introduce their partner (name, age, if they are Christian for how long, one favorite thing). Then share something interesting you learned about them and something you appreciate about them.

Open in Prayer (2 minutes)

Scripture (4 minutes)

Deuteronomy 6:1-8, Psalm 78:1-8, 1 Timothy 4:12-15

Engage (10 minutes)

It was one of those nasty New England afternoons in early March. We had just finished up our practice at about 4:30 pm. The weather couldn't decide on rain or snow, and small amounts of slush were falling from the sky. The temperatures hovered above the freezing mark on its way south. Three friends and I circled the football field in single file on that hard, wet, slippery track. Our feet were cold and pruned. Our sweatsuits were soaked and heavy, and our fingers were icy and blue. Our muscles were sore, tight, and tired. We watched our breath mingle with the steam rising from the sweaty head of the runner in front of us as we matched pace.

We passed the tennis courts, glanced over, and shook our heads in quiet disgust. Except for a thin layer of ice that had formed, the courts were empty. Men's tennis had practice in the gym today.

“This is the worst!” my friend panted from the head of the line.

“I say next year, we all go out for tennis.” Came the response from the back.

At the moment, we all agreed.

We never did go out for tennis. On the contrary, I was privileged to be a part of our high school track and field team that won two consecutive State Championships and started a track dynasty that, in total, won six consecutive state titles.

I admit track and field has to be one of the most boring athletic competitions high schools have to offer. Honestly, the only reason I ran was to stay in shape for summer football. Every March, we vowed to play tennis, but as the weather broke and the track thawed out, we caught a sense of excitement and anticipation that grew as together we became an essential part of something much bigger than our individual events. I was not the fastest kid on the team, but I could keep pace with almost anyone for 800 meters or less. I was the third fastest kid in the school at 400 meters, putting me on the 4x400 relay team with my three friends, soaking wet and freezing as we circled the track after practice.

The 4x400 involves four runners taking turns in a controlled sprint for the full distance of the track, at which time you pass a light aluminum baton to the next runner until all 4 members of your team complete a single orbit around the football field. In the two years, I ran the 4x400, my team had never lost – not once in two years. Every time we carried a baton, we were expected to win. Every time we carried a baton, we knew there was more at stake than the points between first and second place.

Now there are many things that can go wrong with the 4X400. You trip and fall, you could pull a muscle, you could step out of your lane, you could twist an ankle, you could false start, you could get struck by lightning. All these unfortunate events could cause you to lose the race and let your school down, blemishing your team's perfect reputation. All of these disastrous events are redeemable, fixable, and forgivable. One transgression, however, is especially heinous and unforgivable. One dreadful offense would get you immediately removed from the 4x400 team. You could not, under any circumstances, mishandle, drop, or fail to complete a pass of the baton.

So, there we were, staying late, freezing, putting in extra work on our passes while tennis practiced in the gym. We never fumbled or dropped the baton. We always made the pass so the next runner could take us closer to the finish line and our team closer to victory. We always made clean, sharp, secure passes because we knew there was so much more at stake than the points between first and second place.

**Share an experience you've had working in a team (work, band, theater). What contribution did you make to the health of the team?*

**What is this 'faith' we are being called to pass along?*

Spend some time exploring what we mean by the term Christian Faith.

**Why is it important that we successfully pass it along?*

*We will not hide them from
their descendants; we will
tell the next generation
that praiseworthy deeds of
the LORD, his power, and
the wonder he has done.*

-Psalm 78:4

Explore (15 minutes)

The books of Deuteronomy and 1 Timothy are concerned with the transmission of faith from one generation to the next. In Deuteronomy, Moses directs the people to be intentional about living out God's instruction in the everyday activities of life: talking with the family, walking along the path, and getting up in the morning. The ancient people of God often used visible symbols to mark homes, yards, and worship spaces as reminders to live out God's instructions in ways that transmit faith from one generation to the next. These reminders sometimes served as talking points that led to transformative moments as one generation shared with another.

*Spend some time identifying meaningful religious symbols. How do these symbols encourage you in your spiritual journey?

In 1 Timothy, Paul coaches his young disciple not to let his youthfulness prevent him from becoming an example of faithfulness. Timothy is encouraged to pass along the faith by the consistent pattern of his life. In so doing, he becomes a living illustration of faithfulness for the believers to pattern their lives after. We often think of the Christian faith being passed down from an older generation to a younger generation. 1 Timothy moves us to consider what it might look like for faith to be passed up from a younger generation to an older one.

*Spend some time discussing ways you have observed the example of young people demonstrating authentic Christian faith.

Examine (15 minutes)

*How have you been encouraged or challenged by the faithful example of a young person?

* Can you share an experience when faith was simply passed to you through the normal activity of everyday life?

*What might be some challenges that prevent the successful passing of faith?

*What are some indicators that suggest that the baton of faith has been successfully passed forward? Conversely, what are some indicators it is not successfully passed forward?

*How can someone from outside your generation best encourage and support you in your faith development?

Exercise (10 minutes)

Spend some time identifying and discussing ways you can pass the baton of faith forward this week. Take time to discuss ways your small group can better demonstrate authentic Christian faith as a living example to the believers. What ways can you cross generational boundaries this week to encourage and support the faith of someone older/younger than you?

Close in Prayer (3 minutes)



The Body Needs Its Parts

Central Theme:

*You all,
together, are
the body of
Christ, every
one of you is a
vital part of it.*

Objective:

*To assist group
members in
locating their
identity in
Christ, finding
their belonging
in his Body,
and valuing the
contribution of
other members.*

Connect (10 minutes)

*Review Group Guidelines.

*Highs and Lows Activity. Go around the room and spend some time sharing about your week. What were some high points? What were some low points? Were you able to be involved in passing faith forward?

Open in Prayer (2 minutes)

Scripture (5 minutes)

Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 12:3-13, 1 Corinthians 12:12-30

Engage (10 minutes)

Sitting around a campfire late one autumn evening with the harvest moon tucked behind the clouds, my marshmallow securely impaled on a maple stick turning golden brown, the fire suddenly POPPED and shot a flaming coal at my feet. I watched as the flame died, and the coal glowed red for a bit. By the time I slid my perfectly melted marshmallow between dark chocolate bars resting on graham crackers, the coal was blinking yellow to black. As I finished the last sticky bite of my s'more, the coal was reduced to smoking gray ash. I picked it up with my fingers to find it warm but not hot. Placing it close to the other red coals of the fire, I was surprised to see it recapture its warm glow. It quickly changed from yellow to orange to red. I dared not touch it again, but teased it

away from the other coals with my maple stick. Away from the fire, the coal was reduced to ash and smoke. Placing it a second time near the red coals of the fire once again restored its hot red glow. That night before bed, I spread the red-hot coals along the outer edge of the fire until they all went out and the smoke died down.

*How is the Body of Christ similar (or dissimilar) to the hot coals of the campfire?
Is there an important lesson for the church hidden by the smoke under the flame of a campfire?

Explore (15 minutes)

In the first chapter of the book of Genesis, we discover that God creates humankind in his own image and then pronounces his work of creating, "very good!" However, in Genesis 2:18, God sees the human by himself and determines, "It is not good for the man to be alone." Human beings were created to be like God in community.

God discloses himself to us throughout the scriptures as a community of persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To be made in God's image is to be created to live in close personal relationships. Human beings do not thrive in isolation.

*We are, each of us angels
each with one wing. We
can only fly embracing
each other.*

-Luciano De Crescenzo

*In a world full of creatures, how is it that the human was alone?

*Why do you suppose God determined that it is 'not good' for humans to be alone?

*Do you agree or disagree with this statement: *The answer to human loneliness is more people?*

Spend some time discussing the implications of your agreement/disagreement. If the answer to loneliness is not more people, what is the answer?

*In the 12th chapters of Romans and 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is careful to locate our identities within the diverse Body of Christ.

How is the image of the human body a helpful way to understand The Church?

Where might you describe your place in the Body of Christ?

Our Culture Imposes an Individual Identity that Says:	Belonging to the Body of Christ Invites us to Draw our Identity from Him.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am an individual • I am distinguishable from you • I have a social security number that is different from yours • I exist in this identifiable sack of skin • I make choices in line with my ruling desires • I enter relationships that are meaningful to me • I seek out experiences that are relevant to me • I have limited time and do not want to waste it on uninteresting people • I choose my politics • I decide whether women can preach • I decide my sexual ethics, my opinion about homosexuality, my theory of creation • I am responsible for myself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am a child of God • I belong to the people of God by baptism • I exist as a body within a body • I take interest in the lives of my sisters and brothers, some are energizing, some are draining • I am obligated. People have the right to expect certain things of me in light of the covenant that we share • I seek to be faithful to them • I cannot think of myself apart from the Body of Christ • I am given the mind of Christ regarding women in ministry, sexual practices, concern for the effect of alcohol on the neighbor, homosexuality, differing theories of creation, and abortion • I learn to think about these things at the table as Trinity guides the body in conversation • I am a new creation¹⁴⁶

Examine (10 minutes)

Our culture works to identify people according to their uniqueness and separate them as individuals. In contrast, the Bible does not identify a person by their separateness, but rather by their belonging. A biblical understanding of personhood says that we only understand ourselves in relationship to others. Therefore, a Christian is someone whose identity is grounded in their relationship with Jesus.

*The chart above highlights some contrasts between a cultural understanding of identity and a biblical one. Which of these examples do you most struggle with? Why?

¹⁴⁶ Dan Boone. *A Charitable Discourse: Talking About the Things that Divide Us* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2010) 144-145.

*Think about the many ways you are defined. How many can you list?

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

*Now place them in order of priority with 1 being the *MOST* important.

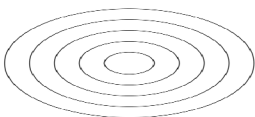
Exercise (20 minutes)

In what ways can your uniqueness contribute to the health of the Body of Christ?

In chronological order, from youngest to oldest, have each person choose another member of the group (choosing a different person every time) and share one way they contribute to the health of the body.

Spend some time considering ways your group can affirm the belonging and contribution of other members in the body. Then, choose an idea and develop a simple action plan to accomplish it.

Close in Prayer (3 minutes)



Make Room

Central Theme:

Receiving the stranger and welcoming the other to belong

Objective:

Introduce the practice of Christian hospitality as a means of grace and a practical way to pass authentic Christian faith along by moving people from the margins to a place of belonging.

Connect (10 minutes)

- *Review Group Guidelines.
- *Read Job 42:5-6 out loud. Then spend some time sharing around the room about where you saw God at work this week. Be sure everyone gets an opportunity to share or pass.

Open in Prayer (2 minutes)

Scripture (5 minutes)

Genesis 18:1-13, Mark 10:13-16, Leviticus 19:33-34

Engage (15 minutes)

- *What thoughts come to mind when you think about hospitality?
- *Spend some time considering the necessary dynamics of hospitality.

What is the goal of hospitality?

What are the minimum requirements?

Picture Jesus on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem. He has taken this opportunity to teach those who are following him about the Kingdom of God. We see him drinking from a sheepskin container while sitting on that stone wall running parallel to the busy road as he pauses for a break.

As people travel that dirt road about their daily business, Jesus is teaching his disciples. Soon a large crowd gathers and some busy travelers who don't have time for Jesus have to go around them to get to Jericho. Jesus is engaging the public, asking, and answering questions about the Kingdom of God. Something

interesting begins to happen as he is teaching.

A single mother squeezes unnoticed, from the back to the front of the crowd, with her disabled young toddler closely pressed and protected by her hands and legs as she maneuvers her way through the dense crowd toward the teacher. Finally, she gets to the front, where she can

look right into Jesus' face. Her eyes are welling up with tears, and her arms are shaking with nerves. This is the moment she has been anticipating; this is the moment she's been dreading since she heard the Rabbi was passing by.

She waits in search of a break in the conversation where she can politely interrupt and plead her little boy's case. It is socially unacceptable that she moves to the front of the crowd. It is also socially unacceptable for her to interrupt the teacher or speak up while he is teaching the men about the kingdom of God.

She has been to the doctors and knows that unless God does something, her boy will never have a chance for a normal life. She also knows that without a husband to speak for her in the presence of all those men, it would be a serious offence to interrupt the teacher. The result would bring harsh consequences upon her and her disabled little boy.

Nevertheless, this is her child's only chance. She catches Jesus' eye, he pauses, and they exchange glances. She takes a deep breath, and then he looks away into the back of the crowd to hear another question. That was her chance; she had his attention and said nothing. Something in their exchange had left her dumbfounded and frazzled. She couldn't find her tongue. Her shoulders slump, and the tears begin to re-emerge. She had failed her son and lost her chance.

I imagine that with a smile on his face, still answering a gentleman's question from the back, Jesus leans forward, reaches out, and touches that little boy tussling his hair. Somehow, in a way that only Jesus can, without a formal exchange of words, he heard that mother's prayer. In a way that only mothers can, she knew that God had touched her boy.

Except for a select few, the crowd doesn't notice. An older woman recognized the mom and her desperate situation. She also knew a silent prayer had been answered. Moving through the back of the crowd, she scoops a six-month-old child out of her mothers' arms and quietly makes her way to Jesus.

At the same time, a dad who saw Jesus tussle the disabled boy's hair, unconsciously takes steps forward with his silent, cross-eyed, pigeon-toed, 5-year-old. A mom and a dad wrestling twins are now stepping toward Jesus. Some bring kids who aren't even sick in hopes of having the Lord bless them.

With each moving forward, the crowd presses in, and the people get irritated. In charge of crowd control, the disciples try to keep order and a healthy distance. They start turning the children away. "Step back," they demand.

The crying of children and the crowd's murmuring, keep people from following the conversation. Then, suddenly amid the chaos, Jesus jumps up on that stone wall and says, "Quiet, please! Make way. Bring the children to me."

He sits back down, gathering the little ones around. He has the attention of the entire crowd. Even those traveling down to Jericho pause to see what he's doing. He brings the children

When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

-Leviticus 19:33-34

close and whispers something to them, and they all laugh, giggle, and smile. He looks at the bewildered crowd as he blesses each one and says, “Let me tell you something about the Kingdom of God. Unless you become like one of these . . . poor, helpless, innocent, pure, invisible, broken, taken for granted, misunderstood. Unless you become dependent, desperate, and needy, you don't enter my Father's Kingdom. Listen, you come into the Kingdom of my Father like this Or you don't come at all.”

***How does Jesus extend the radical hospitality of the kingdom in this story?**

The gospels record that Jesus took risks and crossed significant cultural barriers to extend God's generous hospitality by eating with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners, blessing the children, touching the diseased, and spending significant time with Samaritans. It's clear that part of his mission included extending a welcoming sense of belonging to the marginalized, the insignificant, and the outcast.

***Can you think of other examples of how Jesus extended the hospitality of the kingdom?**

Explore (15 minutes)

***In Genesis 18, how does Abraham extend the grace of hospitality to strangers?**
Do you think you would have behaved similarly? Why/why not?

***Abraham was able to extend hospitality from the abundance of his home. In Mark 10:13-16, Jesus was able to extend hospitality without offering material comfort. What can we learn from this observation?**

One of the words for hospitality in the New Testament, *philoxenia*, combines the word love (*philo*) with the word for stranger (*xenos*). Hospitality, therefore, is understood as the act of loving the stranger. In Leviticus 19:33-34, the practice of loving strangers is directly connected to both our own experience (“*you were strangers once...*”) and the character of God (“*I am the LORD*”).

***Can you remember a time when you were welcomed as a stranger?**

***Can you think of a time when you extended hospitality to a stranger?**

***How has that experience shaped you?**

Examine (10 minutes)

Belonging happens as strangers move through a process where they are increasingly:

- Noticed - to have your existence recognized and affirmed
- Named - using a person's name validates their identity and distinguishes them as a person belonging to the human race, and yet unique at the same time
- Known - is a process of understanding that reaches increasing levels of acceptance

*Spend some time considering the barriers that prevent us from welcoming the marginalized through a process of being noticed, named, and known.

*Are there some people who are easier to welcome than others? What makes some more difficult?

*How can the practice of hospitality assist us as we endeavor to pass the baton of faith forward?

*In what ways can you improve your practice of hospitality and extend God's grace of belonging to those along the margins?

Exercise (15 minutes)

Think about a Sunday morning. What are some ways you can welcome the stranger?

Spend a moment considering ways our small group can help those who might not belong feel like they do. Then choose an idea and develop a simple action plan.

Close in Prayer (3 minutes)



The Mission is Here

Central Theme:

The church is a missionary movement and Generation Z is a mission field

Objective:

Explore opportunities to partner with the Trinity in God's redemptive mission to young people.

Connect (10 minutes)

*Review Group Guidelines.

*Activity: In chronological order, starting with the oldest, go around the room and have each person complete this thought: *I'll never forget _____ because it changed my _____.*

Open in Prayer (2 minutes)

Scripture (3 minutes)

Matthew 9:35-10:8 and Genesis 12:1-3

Engage (15 minutes)

In Matthew 9, Jesus takes his disciples on a missionary tour beginning in his hometown. Throughout the chapter, he teaches, heals, drives out demons, and demonstrates the inbreaking Kingdom of God. As disciples and followers of Jesus, you and I are privileged to have these firsthand experiences.

On Friday night, Jesus enters our town, and we stand in line at the ticket booth for the homecoming game. After stopping by the concession stand for a hotdog and beverage, we ascend the

bleachers all the way to the top and take our seats just to the left of the announcer's booth behind the band. It's Jesus' first football game, and we are curious about his opinion. We look up to see him standing on the last bench scanning the crowd: shoulders slightly slumped, lips hard pressed together, and his brow furrowed with concern ... or is it pain?

"Master, are you alright? You need to sit down?"

Jesus pans the crowd: Parents with eyes glued to their cell phones, coaches yelling at players, and fans booing the referees. Three cheerleaders make a TikTok as two band members slip out from under the bleachers. Two police officers pat down a student as they question him. A single mom checks the bench to see if her son will play this game. The homecoming queen has thick mascara running down her cheeks. Three teachers are reliving the latest high school drama. Finally, the punting unit comes on the field as the defense makes plans for the after-party. Jesus, moved with compassion, looks us all in the eyes and says, "See, the harvest is plentiful – but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his field."

*What thoughts or experiences come to mind when you consider the mission field?

*What are some elements that make up culture?

*Spend a few moments considering whether Generation Z has an identifiable culture

Explore (10 minutes)

The word compassion here means being physically moved by a deep concern for others. It is the result of two cognates, the first word meaning together and the second meaning to suffer. To have compassion is to suffer with another. Emotions often express themselves in physical responses.

*Have you ever been so happy you started to cry? Have you ever felt so in love that you thought your feet would never touch the ground? Have you ever gotten news that made you so anxious you felt like you would pass out or vomit?

Have one or two people briefly share a time they experienced a bodily response to intense emotion.

*In Genesis 12:1-3 God sends Abraham to cross cultures - Why?
What does this say about God?

*In Matthew 9:35-10:8, Jesus sends disciples into a fruitful mission field - Why?
What does this say about God?

Here in 10:2 Matthew, the gospel writer, introduces a new word - *apostolos*. The word apostle means delegate, messenger, representative, one who is sent on behalf of and with the authority of another. An apostle is someone who has been charged and equipped to continue the work of Jesus. Apostles participate in the redemptive ministry of Christ in their world. Matthew makes a list of the first apostles of his day. That list of apostles has grown and reads very differently today.

*What might have been some of the typical tasks of an early Apostle?
(2 Tim. 4:5 & Matthew 10:5-11)

*What might be some of the typical tasks of the 21st-century Apostle?

We in the church often wrongly assume that the primary activity of God is in the church, rather than recognizing that God's primary activity is in the world, and the church is God's instrument sent into the world to participate in his redemptive mission.¹

¹ Brad Brisco, and Lance Ford, *Missional Essentials: A guide for experiencing God's Mission in Your Life* (Kansas City, The House Studio, 2012) 24.

Examine (10 minutes)

*Think about the people and places you encounter weekly. Can you identify people harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd?

*Could Jesus be sending you to them? If so, how? If not, why not?

Disciples of Jesus are sent to cross boundaries and overcome obstacles to partner with Jesus in his mission, making the Kingdom of God available to those with limited access.

*In what ways do you need to adjust to fulfill the missionary call of God?

*In light of our present context, what are ways our church may need to adjust to become the sent people of God?

Exercise (20 minutes)

What are some ways our group can participate with God in his redemptive mission to young people?

Spend some time developing an action plan to assist your group (your church) in engaging youth in ways that welcome them into the Kingdom of God.

Consider some of the following questions:

How does this idea engage younger generations?

How invested are we in the project?

What personal resources will you need?

What financial support be necessary?

When will the group meet again to discuss progress, and who else should be invited?

Close with a word of Prayer and Blessing (5 minutes)

*The zealous love of God the Father inspire you to be good news to young people
The overwhelming compassion of God the Son compel you to invest in the lives of young people
The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit of God cause you to be a winsome, welcoming friend that escorts youth into the Kingdom of God.*

APPENDIX C

WORSHIP PROJECT WORKSHEETS

Generation

To

Generation

Worship Project

WEEK #1

Generation to Generation Worship Project

Assignment: Structure a viable service of worship given the following information. Be prepared to explain your choices and be open to the input and viewpoints of others.

Preaching Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Church Season:

Context:

Special Emphasis: Intergenerational Community

Service Theme: Passing the Faith Along

As we start a series about the essential practice of intergenerational ministry, it will be important that the service of worship incarnate/demonstrate/reflect the intergenerational practices we'll be emphasizing.

What are the essential elements you'd include in worship for this Sunday and why?

Are there any nonessential elements you think would be helpful (explain)?

Please develop a preliminary Order of Service

WEEK #2

Generation to Generation Worship Project

Assignment: Structure a viable service of worship given the following information. Be prepared to explain your choices and be open to the input and viewpoints of others.

Preaching Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Church Season:

Context:

Special Emphasis: Intergenerational Community

Service Theme: The Body Needs All Its Parts

We continue with our intergenerational emphasis by understanding the church as a body made up of all its parts. Every part is necessary. Some need special attention while others do not. The body is the sum of ALL its parts. Individual members must work together in harmony with the collective.

What are the essential elements you'd include in worship for this Sunday and why?

Are there any nonessential elements you think would be helpful (explain)?

Please develop a preliminary Order of Service

WEEK #3

Generation to Generation Worship Project

Assignment: Structure a viable service of worship given the following information. Be prepared to explain your choices and be open to the input and viewpoints of others.

Preaching Scripture: Matthew 9:10-13 & Mark 10:13-16

Church Season:

Context:

Special Emphasis: Intergenerational Community

Service Theme: Making Room: Practicing Hospitality

We continue in our intergenerational emphasis to look at how Jesus invites and elevates 'the other'. He challenges us to take initiative and welcome the stranger to a place of belonging. Tie into last week's service: How do we make room for the next generation?

What are the essential elements you'd include in worship for this Sunday and why?

Are there any nonessential elements you think would be helpful (explain)?

Please develop a preliminary Order of Service

WEEK #4

Generation to Generation Worship Project

Assignment: Structure a viable service of worship given the following information. Be prepared to explain your choices and be open to the input and viewpoints of others.

Preaching Scripture: Matthew 9:35-10:8

Church Season:

Context:

Special Emphasis: Intergenerational Community

Service Theme: The Mission is Here

We conclude our intergenerational series with the challenge to understand Generation Z as an accessible, plentiful, culturally unique mission field. Our congregation is challenged to do the hard missionary work of identifying and crossing boundaries to make the Kingdom of God accessible to young people.

What are the essential elements you'd include in worship for this Sunday and why?

Are there any nonessential elements you think would be helpful (explain)?

Please develop a preliminary Order of Service

APPENDIX D
SERMON OUTLINES

Generation
To
Generation

Sermon Outline

WEEK #1

PASSING THE FAITH IN FOUR MOVEMENTS

Guiding Theme: Passing the Faith Along

Opening Illustration: 4X400

It was one of those nasty New England afternoons in early March. We had just finished up our practice at about 4:30 pm. The weather couldn't decide on rain or snow, and small amounts of slush were falling from the sky. The temperatures hovered above the freezing mark on its way south. Three friends and I circled the football field in single file on that hard, wet, slippery track. Our feet were cold and pruned. Our sweatsuits were soaked and heavy, and our fingers were icy and blue. Our muscles were sore, tight, and tired. We watched our breath mingle with the steam rising from the sweaty head of the runner in front of us as we matched pace.

We passed the tennis courts, glanced over, and shook our heads in quiet disgust. Except for a thin layer of ice that had formed, the courts were empty. Men's tennis had practice in the gym today.

“This is the worst!” my friend panted from the head of the line.

“I say next year, we all go out for tennis.” Came the response from the back.

At the moment, we all agreed.

We never did go out for tennis. On the contrary, I was privileged to be a part of our high school track and field team that won two consecutive State Championships and started a track dynasty that, in total, won six consecutive state titles.

I admit track and field has to be one of the most boring athletic competitions high schools have to offer. Honestly, the only reason I ran was to stay in shape for summer football. Every March, we vowed to play tennis, but as the weather broke and the track thawed out, we caught a sense of excitement and anticipation that grew as together we became an essential part of something much bigger than our individual events. I was not the fastest kid on the team, but I could keep pace with almost anyone for 800 meters or less. I was the third fastest kid in the school at 400 meters, putting me on the 4x400 relay team with my three friends, soaking wet and freezing as we circled the track after practice.

The 4x400 involves four runners taking turns in a controlled sprint for the full distance of the track, at which time you pass a light aluminum baton to the next runner until all 4 members of your team complete a single orbit around the football field. In the two years, I ran the 4x400, my team had never lost – not once in two years. Every time we carried a baton, we were expected to win. Every time we carried a baton, we knew there was more at stake than the points between first and second place.

Now there are many things that can go wrong with the 4X400. You trip and fall, you could pull a muscle, you could step out of your lane, you could twist an ankle, you could false start, you could get struck by lightning. All these unfortunate events could cause you to lose the race and let your school down, blemishing your team's perfect reputation. All of these disastrous events are redeemable, fixable, and forgivable. One transgression, however, is especially heinous and unforgivable. One dreadful offense would get you immediately removed from the 4x400 team. You could not, under any circumstances, mishandle, drop, or fail to complete a pass of the baton.

So there we were, staying late, freezing, putting in extra work on our passes while tennis practiced in the gym. We never fumbled or dropped the baton. We always made the pass so the next runner could take us closer to the finish line and our team closer to victory. We always made clean, sharp, secure passes because we knew there was so much more at stake than the points between first and second place.

Someone once remarked to me that, “Christianity is just one generation away from extinction.” It is critical that we make a clean, secure pass of faith so that the next generation can take us closer to the finish. In the next few weeks, we will be intently focused on what it might mean for us to successfully transmit a vibrant, living, sustainable faith to the next generation. We begin our journey together in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Movement #1

Generation Next - Deuteronomy shares the story of God, who is very concerned with the next Generation. It is a precarious time for the young nation. Forty years of desert wandering have taken its toll. An entire generation has passed away there in the wilderness, and a new generation is assuming their place. Moses himself has been barred from finishing the mission and leading the people into the Promised Land. In a peaceful exchange of power and support, Moses passes the burden of leadership to young Joshua, commissioning him to lead ‘Generation Next’ faithfully to confront the opposition and challenges accompanying the occupation of the Promised Land.

God's people are about to settle into an environment that opposes their faith in Yahweh, the One God.

- Polytheistic
- Worship practices
- Culture and Customs
- Business and Government

Moses instructs the people in the use of symbols that will help anchor their identity as Yahweh’s chosen people. Deuteronomy is very concerned that cultural influences and societal structures will cause the baby nation to forget its distinctiveness and embrace the customs, religion, and worldview of the people in the land. Symbols, consequently, become helpful reminders of our distinction as the people of God. They are not simply visual prompts to help us remember, but they invite us to physically participate in a peculiar way of being in the world.

Generation Z:

God is very concerned with this generation. Like your ancient counterparts, you are coming of age in an environment that actively opposes authentic faith in the One God. The environment our youth are growing up in is unlike we have seen in modern history.

Loneliness: Young people experiences epidemic levels of loneliness.

Social Isolation: Cuts young people off from community, support and engagement

High Anxiety: Threatens to nullify their unique contribution to the world

Post-Christian Drop out: Research shows that up to 60% of Christian teenagers will abandon their faith, disaffiliate from the church, and disengage from participation in the Kingdom shortly after high school.

Our faithful response as God's people is to actively transmit a viable faith from one generation to the next. Today's youth need a faith that helps them navigate the unique challenges of youth culture and grows with them into adulthood.

Over the next few weeks, we will explore ways we can locate our identity in Christ, find our belonging among the people of God, and discover our purpose in God's redemptive mission. Today's Scripture not only challenges us to anchor our faith in God, but to pass that faith along.

Movement #2

Trust in God, Who is One (6:4)

- God is complete in himself – Our God is One
- Perfect in every way, lacking nothing – Our God is One
- Completely self-sufficient needing nothing – Our God is One
- Near, engaged, and present among us – Our God is One
- Absolutely free to choose, create, tear down, start over, make new – Our God is One
- He is not bound by obligation, limitation, or inadequacy of any kind – Our God is One

As such, he alone is worthy of our worship, loyalty, trust, and love. Our faith calls us to reject the thousand little insufficient gods of our culture in favor of the single, big, all sufficient One God.

Therefore, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. This is the baton of faith. Because the Lord Our God is One, we not only love him with our 'everythingness', but we are certain to pass this faith to the next generation.

Movement #3

Take every opportunity to tell the story (6-9).

- Entrust the next generation with the faith
 - Engage in God-talk
 - Demonstrate the Kingdom
 - Tell the story with your life
- Take every opportunity to pass the baton of faith
 - Illustration Harvey Baily (the men's room)
 - Affirm a place of belonging among the people of God
- Gather around The Table to pass the faith along
 - Paul - 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
 - Pass the elements, pass the faith

Movement #4

Conclusion - One of the common places we intentionally pass the faith along is here at the table of the Lord.

- Identity – In these symbols of his body and blood, Jesus again offers himself to us
 - So that his life can be lived in us.
 - As we draw life from him, our identity is no longer dictated by our culture but is enfolded in Christ.
 - His life lives in us and through us into the world.
- Belonging - Here at the table – we are welcomed to belong as we find our place among the people of God gathered (re-membered) to share a common identity and mission.
- Purpose – The Body of Christ was not broken for our redemption alone. The blood of Christ was not shed for our redemption alone. Taking the life of Jesus in, we are re-membered into the Body of Christ. Now that we belong to the Body of Christ, we are sent into the world to be broken and poured out like Jesus, for the redemption of our world.

These symbols – like batons passed in a relay race- represent the faith that we hand down from one generation to the next (sometimes up). Today, as the elements are distributed to the congregation, we invite you to consider passing them along to the person next to you as an expression of your commitment to faithfully pass the baton forward.

When all have been served, we will affirm our faith by reciting the Apostles' Creed and partaking of the Lord's Supper together. Finally, the service will conclude as the congregation joins in The Lord's prayer.

WEEK #2

The Body Needs All Its Parts

Guiding Theme: Unity in Diversity: Every Part is Necessary

Opening Illustration: A Lesson from the campfire

Sitting around a campfire late one autumn evening with the harvest moon tucked behind the clouds, my marshmallow securely impaled on a maple stick turning golden brown, the fire suddenly POPPED and shot a flaming coal at my feet. I watched as the flame died, and the coal glowed red for a bit. By the time I slid my perfectly melted marshmallow between dark chocolate bars resting on graham crackers, the coal was blinking yellow to black. As I finished the last sticky bite of my s'more, the coal was reduced to smoking gray ash. I picked it up with my fingers to find it warm but not hot.

Placing it close to the other red coals of the fire, I was surprised to see it recapture its warm glow. It quickly changed from yellow to orange to red. I dared not touch it again, but teased it away from the other coals with my maple stick. Away from the fire, the coal was reduced to ash and smoke. Placing it a second time near the red coals of the fire once again restored its hot red glow. That night before bed, I spread the red-hot coals along the outer edge of the fire until they all went out and the smoke died down.

This experience had me thinking about how the fire serves as a metaphor for the church. It got me wondering how isolation leads individual coals as well as the whole fire to burn out. Likewise, how engagement contributes to the health of the whole fire, enabling it to fulfill its purpose. In 1 Corinthians the Apostle Paul uses another metaphor to talk about the church. He thinks of the church as a body.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-31

Movement #1

How the Body Works: “But you are the Body of Christ, and every one of you is a part of it.” The Greek construction of this phrase is plural and imperative or emphatic. Therefore, we should read this verse in capital boldface letters.

YOU ALL TOGETHER ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST.

Only together are we the Body of Christ. If not, we are a monstrosity – a loosely held conglomeration of unstable body parts.

You and I together are the Body of Christ. Only together can we be the body. Only together with everyone contributing their gifts, wisdom, experience, and expertise can we become the missionary outpost we were placed on this corner to be. Only together are we the body.

“We are, each of us angels
Each with one wing.
We can only fly
Embracing each other.”
- Luciano De Crescenzo

Diversity is not the problem. Diversity is a blessing. God loves variety. He created it. It is his idea. Problems can often occur because of the way we respond to the differences of others. Paul argues for equality in our text. Not to turn a blind eye to our differences but embrace them **as well-needed contributions to the Body's function in the mission of the Church.** Paul argues for the equality of diversity that brings unity to the Church in her love for God and her passion for his mission.

Movement #2

The Body: Greater Than the Sum of its Parts: Our trouble likely starts with the parts. Maybe our understanding of “person” is all wrong. Our hyper-individualistic culture identifies a person as a separate individual with a recognizable face and distinguishing characteristics. However, Paul reflects a Biblical anthropology in 1 Corinthians 12 by identifying a person as they relate to and connect with others in the body. “Personhood is not our radical difference from each other but our radical belonging to each other. Where did we learn this? By looking into the face of God. God in whose image persons are made, cannot be divided into three pieces that make sense apart from the One Whole.”¹⁴⁷ Let’s illustrate the differences.

Our Culture Imposes Individual Identity that says:	Belonging to the Body of Christ Invites us to Draw our Identity from Him. ¹⁴⁸
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am an individual • I am distinguishable from you • I have a social security number that is different from yours • I exist in this identifiable sack of skin • I make choices in line with my ruling desires • I enter relationships that are meaningful to me • I seek out experiences that are relevant to me • I have limited time and do not want to waste it on uninteresting people • I choose my politics • I decide whether women can preach • I decide my sexual ethics, my opinion about homosexuality, my theory of creation • I am responsible for myself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am a child of God • I belong to the people of God by baptism • I exist as a boy within a body • I take interest in the lives of my sisters and brothers, some are energizing, some are draining • I am obligated. People have the right to expect certain things of me in light of the covenant that we share • I seek to be faithful to them • I cannot think of myself apart from the Body of Christ • I am given the mind of Christ regarding women in ministry, sexual practices, concern for the effect of alcohol on the neighbor, homosexuality, differing theories of creation, and abortion • I learn to think about these things at the table as Trinity guides the Body in conversation • I am a new creation

¹⁴⁷ Dan Boone, “Recovering Our Identity as People of Trinity,” Dan Boone, June 9, 2015, <http://www.danboone.me/recovering-our-identity-as-people-of-trinity/>.

¹⁴⁸ Dan Boone *A Charitable Discourse: Talking About the Things that Divide Us* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2010) 144-145.

Movement #3

Participation in Something Larger Than Ourselves: Some parts of the body that seem weak, young, and least influential are really the most necessary, just like the human body. Some of the weakest parts, like your liver, kidneys, and heart, are the most valuable hidden, nurtured, and protected by other members of the body. In the same way, all parts are necessary for the body to be healthy and function as God designed it.

- The adult cannot say to the child ... your place is not as important
- The teenager cannot say to the senior ... you are no longer needed
- The college student cannot say to the pastor ... I don't need you
- The rich cannot say to the poor ... you have nothing that I need
- The musician cannot say to the sound tech ... I am of more value
- The mother of three cannot say to the single ...
- The treasurer to the ...

The fact is, we need each other – every last one of us. We are deficient without you. **YOU ALL TOGETHER ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST.** Together we discover our identity in Christ, find our belonging to the Body, and live out our purpose in the mission of God.

Movement #4

Closing - Honor the Body: As we close our service, consider ways to glorify the Lord these next two weeks by honoring his body. Are there parts of the body that are unfamiliar to you? What can you do differently this week to encourage, support, protect, nurture or free that part of the body?

Is there someone you can affirm or forgive?

Is there someone or a group of people you are drawn to support and encourage?

Do you know of someone who carries a load, a burden, a weight you'd like to help relieve?

In discipleship groups this week, we will seek to locate our identity in the Body of Christ and think about ways we can acknowledge and affirm the place of others.

Consider leaving time at close of the service for an invitation to pray about where members find themselves in the body and how members can value and affirm the place of others who may have something different to contribute. Challenge the people to commit to at least one act of affirmation that will encourage that person or persons over the next few weeks. Advanced planning will help design or adapt a closing exercise like the following example.

As people leave have simple craft stations set up with markers and 3x5 cards. Instruct the congregation to stop by the stations and write a person's (or group of persons) name on a card to be displayed next Sunday in public place like the foyer. When that person comes into the building and sees their name, they will know two things – they are a valued member of the body, and something has or will be done for them by another member to affirm their place. Pastoral staff may have to fill any gaps left by those whose names have been overlooked.

WEEK #3

Hospitality – Welcoming the Other

Guiding Theme: Hospitality: Receiving the Stranger/Welcoming the Other to Belong

Opening Illustration: Jesus and the Little Children (Mark10:13-16), a story retold and embellished.

Picture Jesus on his way from Jericho to Jerusalem. He has taken this opportunity to teach those who are following him about the Kingdom of God. We see him drinking from a sheepskin container while sitting on that stone wall running parallel to the busy road as he pauses for a break.

As people travel that dirt road about their daily business, Jesus is teaching his disciples. Soon a large crowd gathers and some busy travelers who don't have time for Jesus have to go around them to get to Jericho today. Jesus is engaging the public, asking, and answering questions about the Kingdom of God. Something interesting begins to happen as he is teaching.

A single mother squeezes unnoticed, from the back to the front of the crowd, with her disabled young toddler closely pressed and protected by her hands and legs as she maneuvers her way through the dense crowd toward the teacher. Finally, she gets to the front, where she can look right into Jesus' face. Her eyes are welling up with tears, and her arms are shaking with nerves. This is the moment she has been anticipating; this is the moment she's been dreading since she heard the Rabbi was passing by.

She waits in search of a break in the conversation where she can politely interrupt and plead her little boy's case. It is socially unacceptable that she moves to the front of the crowd. It is also socially unacceptable for her to interrupt the teacher or speak up while he is teaching the men about the kingdom of God.

She has been to the doctors and knows that unless God does something, her boy will never have a chance for a normal life. She also knows that without a husband to speak for her in the presence of all those men, it would be a serious offence to interrupt the teacher. The result would bring harsh consequences upon her and her disabled little boy.

Nevertheless, this is her child's only chance. She catches Jesus' eye, he pauses, and they exchange glances. She takes a deep breath, and then he looks away into the back of the crowd to hear another question. That was her chance; she had his attention and said nothing. Something in their exchange had left her dumbfounded and frazzled. She couldn't find her tongue. Her shoulders slump, and the tears begin to re-emerge. She had failed her son and lost her chance.

I imagine that with a smile on his face, still answering a gentleman's question from the back, Jesus leans forward, reaches out, and touches that little boy tussling his hair. Somehow, in a way that only Jesus can, without a formal exchange of words, he heard that mother's prayer. In a way that only mothers can, she knew that God had touched her boy.

Except for a select few, the crowd doesn't notice. An older woman recognized the mom and her desperate situation. She also knew a silent prayer had been answered. Moving through the back of the crowd, she scoops a six-month-old child out of her mothers' arms and quietly makes her way to Jesus.

At the same time, a dad who saw Jesus tussle the disabled boy's hair unconsciously takes steps forward with his silent, cross-eyed, pigeon-toed, 5-year-old. A mom and a dad wrestling

twins are now stepping toward Jesus. Some bring kids who aren't even sick in hopes of having the Lord bless them.

With each moving forward, the crowd presses in, and the people get irritated. In charge of crowd control, the disciples try to keep order and a healthy distance. They start turning the children away. "Step back," they demand.

The crying of children and the crowd's murmuring, keep people from following the conversation. Then, suddenly amid the chaos, Jesus jumps up on that stone wall and says, "Quiet, please! Make way. Bring the children to me."

He sits back down, gathering the little ones around. He has the attention of the entire crowd. Even those traveling down to Jericho pause to see what he's doing. He brings the children close and whispers something to them, and they all laugh, giggle, and smile. He looks at the bewildered crowd as he blesses each one and says, "Let me tell you something about the Kingdom of God. Unless you become like one of these . . . poor, helpless, innocent, pure, invisible, broken, taken for granted, misunderstood. Unless you become dependent, desperate, and needy, you don't enter my Father's Kingdom. Listen, you come into the Kingdom of my Father like this Or you don't come at all."

Prayer: *Father, help us to lay aside the notions that keep us from your Kingdom and embrace the simple, dependent childlike faith that brings you joy. Use us to open wide the doors of your home, giving access to everyone who will come. Help us extend the family table to strangers, foreigners, outsiders, and the vulnerable, and let us find our home with them in you.*

Introduction: In the sermon text for today, Jesus demonstrates the radical hospitality of the Kingdom. During his ministry here on earth, the gospels record that Jesus was infamous for receiving the stranger and welcoming the other, those whom society would discount and marginalize, find a welcome sense of belonging in Jesus.

- Samaritans
- Women
- Children
- Crippled, lame, and the blind

Scripture: Matthew 19:10-13

In both gospel stories we discover Jesus intentionally crossing cultural barriers to welcome the marginalized to a central place of belonging. He dignifies the 'invisibles,' the 'less-thans,' and the 'rather nots' by recognizing them, valuing them as people worthy of his attention and blessing.

Movement #1

Hospitality: Jesus makes space where people who would not otherwise find themselves are invited and welcomed to belong.

Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those specially gifted for it. It is, instead, a necessary practice of the community of faith. One of the key Greek words for hospitality, *philoxenia*, combines the general word for love or affection for people who are connected by kinship or religion (*phileo*), and the word for the stranger (*xenos*). Thus, etymologically, and practically, hospitality is closely connected to love in the New

Testament. Moreover, because philoxenia includes the word for stranger, hospitality's orientation toward strangers is more apparent in Greek than in English.¹⁴⁹

Hospitality creates a sense of belonging.

Love for the stranger creates a welcoming sense of belonging. Belonging happens when the strangers and outcasts feels noticed and affirmed as a human, named and valued as an individual, and known and respected as someone with something to contribute.

- The intimate nature of table fellowship in biblical culture creates an environment of acceptance and trust. Fellowship meals indicated a commitment of solidarity and belonging.
- Jesus demonstrated the radical hospitality of the Kingdom with and without a home or table. In every case, Jesus mysteriously moves from guest to host. People once on the margins, strangers and outcasts found a home and discovered dignity in Jesus.
- Christian hospitality extends the family table with all its privileges and responsibilities to the other.

The Stranger Among Us

The contrast between Jesus and his dinner companions could hardly be more shocking. The story is intriguing, not because the people at the meal were so terrible, but because they were so different. Jesus eating with priests and Levites would hardly warrant a mention in the gospels. Likewise, no one would take notice of a bartender drinking with alcoholics and strippers, but add a religious leader to that mix, and you've introduced the making of a scandal. Let us consider:

- Who are the 'invisibles, less-thans' and 'rather-nots of your world'?
- Are there marginalized people in our lives that Jesus seeks to welcome into the Kingdom?

Movement #2

Introduce Generation Z – The loneliest generation

Three of the more peculiar characteristics of Generation Z are their experiences with deep feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and high levels of anxiety.

- Loneliness epidemic – In spite of almost 24/7 access to a myriad of social networking platforms and innumerable friends and followers, some social scientists have diagnosed Generation Z as the loneliest Generation in American History, calling the loneliness problem a social epidemic.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 36.

¹⁵⁰ Katrina Trinko, "Gen Z Is the Loneliest Generation, and It's Not Just Because of Social Media," USA TODAY, May 4, 2018, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/05/03/gen-z-loneliest-generation-social-media-personal-interactions-column/574701002/>.

- Social Isolation – A close companion of loneliness; social isolation is the experience of feeling like an outsider without a meaningful connection to a social group. "2/3 of young people report having 3 or fewer meaningful interactions on a typical day. With these high percentages of young people lacking meaningful social interactions, it is not surprising that nearly 40% feel as if no one knows them"¹⁵¹
- High levels of Anxiety - In a study conducted in 2017, the National Institute of Mental Health found that just under 30% of girls and just over 20% of boys suffer from an anxiety disorder that impedes their daily function.¹⁵² Dr. Twenge sounds the alarm on a generation of students who are constantly combining deep feelings of loneliness, social isolation, and high levels of anxiety, calling it "The worst mental health crisis in decades, with rates of teen depression and suicide skyrocketing since 2011."¹⁵³
 - **Consider Illustrating percentages with ten young people arranged ahead of time**
 - Story of Lauren
I have anxiety. I've had it [from] a young age, and that has caused me not to really trust people or to feel like - even though logically I know they invited me out - that they like me, they want to spend time with me, then my mind tells me that they don't really want to spend time with me and they're just trying to be nice. I'm usually not the one who [likes to] initiate conversations with others or to invite somebody out because **I always feel uncomfortable**.¹⁵⁴

Movement #3

Closing - Radical Hospitality: The radical hospitality of the Kingdom demonstrated by Jesus provides an atmosphere of acceptance and belonging that helps to put the stranger at ease. Increasing the number of trusted adults in the lives of young people is a critical response to loneliness, social isolation, and anxiety. But the cure is not more activity with more people – it's intimacy. The depth of our relationship reflects the 'radical' in kingdom hospitality. When people are affirmed as human, named, and valued as an individual, and known and respected as someone who has something to contribute, the less lonely, isolated, and anxious they become, the more they belong.

¹⁵¹ Springtide Research Institute, *Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation* (Bloomington, MN: Springtide Research Institute, 2020), 24.

¹⁵² "Any Anxiety Disorder," National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), n.d., <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/any-anxiety-disorder>, accessed April 30, 2021.

¹⁵³ Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood* and What That Means for the Rest of us* (New York: Atria an Imprint of Simon & Schuster Inc., 2017), 3.

¹⁵⁴ Springtide, *Belonging*, 31.

Jesus responds to the lonely, isolated, and anxious by extending the radical hospitality of the Kingdom. Jesus is deeply concerned for this lonely, isolated, and anxious generation.

- How can we extend the grace of his hospitality through this community of faith?
- Consider what barriers might be preventing you from welcoming the stranger.
- How can Jesus welcome the young person and help the struggling teenager to belong?

In our small groups this week, we are going to talk about what it means for us to extend the radical hospitality of Jesus.

NOTE: Advanced preparation will enable your congregation to physically respond to the message of the day. Consider adopting or adapting the following idea:

You received a 'Connect Card' on your way into worship today. As the musicians and song leaders come to lead us in our closing, I invite you to prayerfully consider how you might extend the hospitality of Jesus and commit to an expression of welcome and belonging. The 'Connect Card' can be deposited as you leave or you can keep it as a prayerful reminder.

Connect Card

We pray these expressions of welcoming and belonging help facilitate a relationship of mutual care and support.

For the Next Two Weeks:

In addition to keeping my heart open and sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit, I would like to share the hospitality of Jesus by committing to the following practice(s):

Share a meal with a college student at our expense

Welcome some 'other' into my/our space

Prayerfully encourage a young student once a week

Offer transportation

Invite the pastoral staff to contact me when needs arise

Reach out to the marginalized

Other _____

WEEK #4

The Mission is Here

Guiding Theme: The Church is a Missionary Movement / Generation Z is a Mission Field

Opening Context: Generally speaking, when it comes to following Jesus, the Gospel of Matthew records three kinds of people.

- Those who are openly opposed to Jesus
 - Accuse him
 - Look to trap and discredit him
 - Pharisees, Sadducees, Teachers of the Law stand in opposition/contrast to him
- Those who follow at a safe distance, are amazed by him, but still unwilling to risk
 - Recipients of his blessings, but make no real commitment
 - Matthew offers a vague determination, “The Crowd, Masses, All the People”
 - These are the people who shout both “Hosanna” and “Crucify” in the same week
- The Disciples
 - Left home, friends, family, job, etc.. to follow
 - Witnessed his life and are committed to their Rabbi
 - Participate, however awkwardly, in the redemptive mission of God

Today we are invited to take our place among the disciples, engaged in the mission of God to our world: To do what he does, to care about the things he cares about, to see the world the way he sees the world, to love as he loves. We are following Jesus, learning from him how to be just like him . . . because that is what disciples do.

Scripture: Matthew 9:35-10:8

Recast the story to fit a 21st century context with Generation Z as the harvest.

In Matthew 9, Jesus takes his disciples on a missionary tour beginning in his hometown. Throughout the chapter, he teaches, heals, drives out demons, and demonstrates the inbreaking Kingdom of God. As disciples and followers of Jesus - You and I are privileged to have these first-hand experiences.

On Friday night, Jesus enters Weymouth, and we stand in line at the ticket booth for the homecoming game against Plymouth. After stopping by the concession stand for a hotdog and beverage, we ascend the bleachers all the way to the top and take our seats just to the left of the announcer's booth behind the band. It's Jesus' first football game, and we are curious about his opinion. We look up to see him standing on the last bench scanning the crowd: shoulders slightly slumped, lips hard pressed together, and his brow furrowed with concern ... or is it pain?

"Master, are you alright? You need to sit down?"

Jesus pans the crowd: Parents with eyes glued to their cell phones, coaches yelling at players, and fans booing the referees. Three cheerleaders make a TikTok as two band members slip out from under the bleachers. Two police officers pat down a student as they question him. A single mom checks the bench to see if her son will play this game at all. The homecoming queen has thick mascara running down her cheeks. Three teachers are reliving the latest high school drama. Finally, the punting unit comes on the field as the defense makes plans for the after-party.

Jesus – moved with compassion, looks us all in the eyes and says, "See, the harvest is plentiful – but the workers are few. Pray to the Lord of the harvest to send workers into his field."

Movement #1

Compassion - The word compassion used here is a derivative of the Greek *Splagchnizomai*. It means to be physically moved by a deep concern for others. Emotions often express themselves in physical responses. Have you ever been so happy you started to cry? Have you ever felt so in love you thought your feet would never touch the ground? Have you ever been so angry you began to perspire? Have you ever gotten news that made you so anxious you felt like you would pass out or vomit? Have you ever felt so much compassion for another person that you felt its sharp pain in your guts? Have you ever been in so much anguish that you sweat great drops of blood?

Jesus makes eye contact with us, his disciples, and then pans his hand out over the valley and announces, "*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask (pray for, beseech, beg) the Lord of the harvest therefore to send out workers into his fields.*"

Movement #2

Define The Mission Field: When we think mission, we often think of transoceanic, cross-cultural, multi-lingual ministry done elsewhere. Our story for today puts the mission field in our backyard. In a lot of ways foreign (short term) missions require less investment. It can be a little less messy, and most of the time short-term missions call for less commitment. To live missionally, however, is another story – a more biblical story.

Many of today's young people face a unique set of challenges that threaten their spiritual development:

- 7-27-Year-Olds – Gen Z.
- Largest people group – 25% of the US population
- Most ethnically/culturally diverse - 50% belong to a minority group and are exceedingly socially acceptable
- Wi-Fi enabled technology driven – Live in a digital environment
- Mentally Fragile – The US experiencing the worst mental health crisis in decades
- Lonely, Isolated – Largely abandoned by the adult world
- Post-Christian - The first generation to grow up in post-Christian America

As Jesus walks through our neighborhoods, down the halls of our public schools, and sits in our youth programs, I wonder if he is not moved with compassion by our young people, seeing them "Harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." Teenagers face a variety of unique complexities that threaten healthy adolescent spiritual development and challenge the church to reexamine youth ministry in light of God's mission. What will it mean for this community to actively participate in and engage this peculiar mission field just outside our doors?

Movement #3

Mission Strategy: Disciples of Jesus do not follow him very long before they realize how passionate God is about people who are harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. The Kingdom of God appears to be directed toward those along the margins. You cannot follow Jesus very long before you hear his words, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask (pray for, implore, beg) the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his fields.*” In response, the church grabs hands, and we pray for God to send workers into the valley to win souls for Christ.

But then it gets messy. The Gospel of Matthew 10:1-6, records what happens next. Jesus turns to his disciples and grants them authority to be his missionaries. He commissions you and I and equips us to go out and do exactly what we just prayed for. Jesus invites us to join him in what he has been doing. Christ calls us to reach out to lost, helpless, and harassed people in his name, under his authority, with the same compassion and intensity he has. Our mission field sits underworked and mostly neglected in our own backyard.

Here in Matthew 10:2, the gospel writer introduces a new word - *Apostlos*. This is the only time Matthew uses this word or any of its forms. The word apostle means delegate, messenger, representative, ambassador, one sent on behalf of and with the authority of another. An apostle is someone who has been charged and equipped to continue the work of Jesus. Apostles participate in the redemptive ministry of Christ in their world. Matthew makes a list of the first apostles of his day. That list of apostles has grown and reads very differently today. Some names are the same, like James and John, but others have been added, like: (Name members of the congregation).

We cannot expect our mission field to do the missionary work of crossing cultural boundaries, distance, and relational barriers that keep young people from the Kingdom.

It is too much to expect our mission field to do the hard work of missions.

- Arrange transportation to our facility
- Adopt our vocabulary
- Sing our songs
- Honor our traditions
- Believe our message
- Become like us

Crossing boundaries, distances, and barriers is the ministry of the missionary, apostle, disciple, and follower of Jesus. It is our responsibility to initiate, establish, and cultivate safe, trusting relationships with young people that direct them to find their identities in Christ, their belonging to the Body of Christ, and their purpose in the mission of God.

Movement #4

Challenge: To pray for and seek ways to insert yourself in the lives of young people. Take the authority that Jesus offers and accept the missional assignment to engage youth culture as a representation of the Kingdom. Recognize and adopt the mission field in our own backyard.

Do we have to become an expert in youth culture? Not necessarily. However, we can,

- Show up where young people gather.
- Attend a concert, a ball game, or a recital.
- Offer transportation, engage in conversation, and seek out ways to be supportive.

We can enter the world of today's youth, not to judge, but to learn; not to direct them, but to partner with them. We can enter the world of young people not with all the right answers, but lots of questions. We can see this opportunity not as a short-term mission project, but as a long-term missionary investment.

Consider rereading the text from Peterson's *The Message* in closing.

Then Jesus made a circuit of all the towns and villages. He taught in their meeting places, reported kingdom news, and healed their diseased bodies, healed their bruised and hurt lives. When he looked out over the crowds, his heart broke. So confused and aimless they were, like sheep with no shepherd. "What a huge harvest!" he said to his disciples. "How few workers! On your knees and pray for harvest hands!" Matthew 9:35-38

The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives. Matthew 10:1-3

This week, our discipleship groups will work to develop a plan to engage and support young people in ways that build relationships and help our community better understand our mission field. I'm excited to hear about the creative, innovative ways we'll be reaching out as the body extends the hospitality of the kingdom, joining in God's redemptive mission to young people. As you enter the harvest field this week, go with this blessing:

Benediction

- The zealous love of God the Father inspire you to be good news to young people
- The overwhelming compassion of God the Son compel you to invest in young people
- The abiding presence of the Holy Spirit cause you to be a winsome, welcoming friend that escorts young people into the Kingdom
- To the honor and for the glory of God – Amen.