

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Intergenerational Model of Discipleship

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

by

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July 2022

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Some of God's most prominent spiritual leaders are characterized by their deep intergenerational connections. People like Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and John exemplify it. In this study, "intergenerational" means creating opportunities for intentional dialogue and interaction cross-generationally to foster mentoring and biblical discipleship. This research aims to create an intergenerational model of ministry that will encourage churches to embrace intergenerational discipleship concepts. It is not uncommon for church ministry to seem like silos, with people compartmentalized according to age or phases of life. Silo ministry can hinder individuals from forming generational relationships. Unfortunately, churches have been taught to create learning environments based on age segregation. This conventional way of thinking faces the danger of members behaving more like strangers and less like the family of God. Therefore, this action research thesis seeks to prove that if spiritual socialization is mediated by biblical discipleship throughout generations, a biblically balanced ministry will result. The study involves developing a hybrid model incorporating the most effective aspects of Sunday school and small group settings. This study focuses on altering the format of Sunday school to incorporate participants aged 18 and above in a discipleship class environment. Classes are created where students in these age groups will engage in an intergenerational discipleship environment for learning. Each class term lasts ten weeks, after which new classes will begin. Class rotation allows for meeting new people across generations. Qualitative data were collected from a survey of participants. In addition, a focus group of no more gathered to discuss intergenerational and conventional age-segregated ministries. Furthermore, qualitative data were derived from the researcher's observation field notes of class time and focus group.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
CTR	<i>Course Teaching Request Form</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The indwelling power of the Holy Spirit infused the believer with spiritual DNA made up of numerous binding characteristics on the day of Pentecost. Unity is one of these spiritual traits. The beauty of the believer's unity resonates in the unique generational diversity within the body of Christ. A legalistic point of view may claim that unity implies uniformity as if all Christians must think, look, and act alike to be spiritually united. However, the Bible does not teach this. True biblical unity is centered on the believer's oneness in Christ rather than adherence to human standards. Robert McQuilkin contends, "On the solid rock of biblical truth alone can a church find true unity."¹ Biblical unity should include believers of every generation working toward the same goal: glorifying God and proclaiming the gospel. Christ's church is at its most unified when its members use their various spiritual gifts to serve the body of Christ. Authors Bruce Barton and Grant Osborne explain, "No believer is unimportant—each one has a gift to share to make the body function that much more effectively."² As a result, members of the Christian community need the presence of one another to feel spiritually whole (Romans 12:4–5).

Working as intergenerational teams (young and old) to focus on spiritual growth is an excellent example of how to employ a variety of talents to serve the whole body.³ The Spirit

¹ Robertson McQuilkin, *The Five Smooth Stones: Essential Principles for Biblical Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 199.

² Bruce B. Barton and Grant R. Osborne, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1999), 180.

³ Jack O. Balswick, Judith K. Balswick, and Thomas V. Frederick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: 2021), 340.

unites believers into one body, and each member, regardless of age, is endowed with different gifts and functions (1 Corinthians 12:12–27). The Great Commission is not just for the adult population; the command of Christ is intergenerational. Commenting on the passage found in Ephesians 4:11–16, writers Francis Chan and Mark Beuving argue that “The members of the early church took their responsibility to make disciples very seriously. To them, the church wasn’t a corporation run by a CEO. Rather, they compared the church to a body that functions properly only when every member is doing its part.”⁴ Thus, all believers of every age must join in unity in the missional movement of the church to proclaim the gospel and make disciples.

This DMIN action research thesis will examine intergenerational discipleship in the context of Parkway Baptist in Fort Oglethorpe, GA. The first chapter describes the ministry context, the problem presented, the purpose statement, basic assumptions, definitions, limitations, delimitations, and concludes with the thesis statement. The ministry context illustrates the geographical location nestled in the scenic mountains of North Georgia. The dynamic historical setting explores the church’s origin. A thorough examination of the various demographical features within the church and the local culture is established. The church’s biblical worldview is examined through the lens of Scripture. The problem presented reveals the need for intergenerational biblical discipleship and fellowship to characterize the culture of the ministry. The purpose statement emphasizes the need for Parkway Baptist to identify the phrase “Elijah/Elisha principle” as a method of comprehending intergenerational dialogue and interaction. The basic assumptions reveal the author’s presuppositions on intergenerational ministry, and the definition section provides guidance for understanding the author’s critical

⁴ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 34.

thinking on the subject. The limitation section will note things outside the author's control for research, and the delimitations section provides the parameters in which the author framed the study. Finally, the first chapter concludes with the thesis statement being explicitly stated.

Ministry Context

The local ministry context is drawn from Parkway Baptist, located in the historic city of Fort Oglethorpe, GA, with a 2022 population of 10,655.⁵ The city is located just north of the Chickamauga National Military Park. The park memorializes the site of the Battle of Chickamauga, September 19–20, 1863, known as the bloodiest two-day battle of the Civil War. Sadly, thirty thousand Confederate and Federal soldiers lay dead, dying, and wounded.⁶ Author Chris Greer suggests that the loss of life was even higher and “resulted in almost 35,000 casualties (second only to Gettysburg) between the two sides.”⁷ One hundred and ten years after the Civil War, Parkway Baptist was established in 1975.

In 2003, the church membership voted to make the author the senior pastor of Parkway Baptist based on the recommendation of the Board of Deacons. At that time, the author had already been serving on the pastoral staff for three years and had formed strong connections with the members of Parkway Baptist. Through the blessing and favor of Christ, the church has seen an influx of new members, people trusting in Christ for salvation and following in baptism, families dedicated to the Lord, and much more. Parkway Baptist is a place of spiritual renewal

⁵ “Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia Population 2022,” *Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia Population 2022 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)*, accessed August 26, 2022, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/fort-oglethorpe-ga-population>.

⁶ J. William Jones, ed., *Southern Historical Society Papers*, vol. 20, (Medford, MA: Perseus Digital Library, n.d.), 124.

⁷ Chris Greer, *Georgia Discovered: Exploring the Best of the Peach State* (Guilford, CT: Globe Pequot, 2020). Chap, North Georgia, Logos Electronic Edition.

and growth. The vibrant atmosphere encourages members to grow in their faith, seek the Lord's guidance, and deepen their understanding of Scripture. As a growing church fellowship, Parkway Baptist remains dedicated to its mission of leading people into a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.

Historical Origins of Parkway Baptist

Parkway Baptist's roots can be traced beyond 1975 to the late 1940s, when the church was known as a missional project called Park City Baptist Church. The world was in a vulnerable condition in those days. The death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945 left the country in a state of shock and grief. The United States had just emerged from World War II and was still trying to pick up the pieces from the Great Depression that preceded it. Newly appointed President, Harry Truman, faced the difficult task of calming a tense nation and rebuilding an economy that had been hurt for decades by the war effort. As the new president, Truman had to lead communities to make difficult decisions about rebuilding and moving forward. According to one writer, "Truman initially felt ill-prepared to govern the United States. Roosevelt had not confided in him about complex postwar issues, and he had little prior experience in international affairs."⁸ It was a difficult time for a nation to be rebuilt and renewed.

During these critical days in America, a new church originated as a missional church plant organized by the Highland Park Baptist Church in Chattanooga, TN. A military Quonset hut on Park City Road in Fort Oglethorpe served as the group's inaugural meeting site. The upbeat congregation started seeing an increase in spiritual development and numerical membership. The optimistic group began to entertain lofty ambitions to become a local house of

⁸ Francis Whitney, *An Outline of American History* (United States Information Agency, 1994). Chap.11, Logos Electronic Edition.

worship. The church formally established itself as a church to maintain momentum. The group organized the first official officer election on July 31, 1949, as an Independent Baptist Church. D. L. Parker served as the first moderator, and Eleanor Lamprecht served as a temporary secretary. On September 5, 1949, Reverend Paul Norris, by a unanimous vote to serve as the church's first pastor, received a weekly salary of \$10. Fifteen years later, on September 30, 1964, the church held a meeting to discuss a proposed plan to acquire property in Fort Oglethorpe for \$15,000. The church received a contribution covering half of the property's purchase price, and a vote was taken, with 60 members voting in favor and 5 against, to buy the land for \$7,500. The congregation decided to construct a new church on February 12, 1975, and on September 14, 1975, the people dedicated the new church structure. On December 17, 1975, three months after the transition, the congregation voted to change the church's name to Parkway Baptist Temple to reflect the new location. Thirty-nine years later, on Wednesday, February 5, 2014, a vote was taken to shorten the church's name to simply Parkway Baptist. The church has had five pastors since 1975, and the author is the fifth of those pastors.

Demographic and Geological Location

As stated above, Fort Oglethorpe lacks the criteria of being a big metropolitan city. The city developed in the aftermath of World War II. The Army established Fort Oglethorpe in 1904. The 6th Cavalry used it as a base. During WWI, Fort Oglethorpe held 3,400 German POWs and civilians. During WWI and WWII, the military operated an induction and processing site and the Women's Army Corps training facility in WWII.⁹ Gerry Depken, who collated historical data for the city of Fort Oglethorpe, wrote,

⁹ Gerry Depken and Julie Powell. *Images of America: Fort Oglethorpe* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 33, 61.

In 1946, after the end of World War II, the War Department determined that the army facility known as Fort Oglethorpe had become a surplus property and instructed the War Assets Administration to sell the land and structures to the public. With a vision for the future, local residents applied to the state of Georgia for incorporation. In 1949, the city of Fort Oglethorpe was established, the first city to be formed in Georgia in 25 years.¹⁰

The emerging city started building schools, churches, and economic possibilities.

Lafayette Road was moved with a broader route to travel in 1964 by giving passengers more accessible access to Chattanooga, TN. Later, Battlefield Parkway, the road where Parkway Baptist now stands, was built to link the county seat to Interstate 75 and Ringgold.¹¹ The city's road connection to other cities tremendously benefited transporting commodities to and from Fort Oglethorpe. Today, the city seems to have plateaued. In 2020, Fort Oglethorpe, GA, included just under 10,000 residents, a median age of 46, and a typical family income of \$40,564. Between 2019 and 2020, the city population fell from 9,954 to 9,877, a 0.774% drop, while the median household income fell from \$45,394 to \$40,564, a 10.6% drop. The city's five most prominent ethnic groups include White (Non-Hispanic) (84.6%), Two (Non-Hispanic) (6.07%), Asian (Non-Hispanic) (3.65%), Black or African American (Non-Hispanic) (3.23%), and Black or African American (Hispanic) (0.547%).¹² Parkway Baptist is not a large interracial congregation. One person of African American descent and one Hispanic family of four are members of Parkway Baptist. The majority of the congregation is primarily Caucasian. Despite diverse backgrounds, Parkway Baptist provides an inclusive atmosphere for all people.

¹⁰ Gerry Depken, "Fort Oglethorpe History - Catoosachamberofcommerce.com," Catoosa Chamber of Commerce, Last modified January 17, 2014, accessed August 26, 2022, <https://www.catoosachamberofcommerce.com/PDF/FortOglethorpe.pdf>.

¹¹ Depken and Powell. *Images of America*, 79.

¹² "Fort Oglethorpe, GA," Data USA, accessed August 28, 2022, [https://datausa.io/profile/geo/fort-oglethorpe-ga#:~:text=The%205%20largest%20ethnic%20groups,\(Hispanic\)%20\(0.462%25\)](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/fort-oglethorpe-ga#:~:text=The%205%20largest%20ethnic%20groups,(Hispanic)%20(0.462%25)).

Worship Service

Over the years, Parkway Baptist has welcomed innovative ministry and outreach concepts, but the paradigm reflects conservative and traditional Baptist life. A music director leads the worship music, which includes a choir and an eight-person praise team on stage. A musical band of five members (two guitars, bass, keyboard, and drummer) supports vocalists. The choir performs most of the music, but at the beginning of the service, everyone stands to sing congregational hymns. Typically, a soloist, duet, trio, or a small ensemble sings before the pastor preaches the sermon. The pastor encourages an altar call invitation after the sermon and asks people to commune with God or to request prayer guidance from one of the pastoral staff. Then, in response to the gospel, the pastor exhorts listeners to come forward and pray, usually accompanied by a soloist or small ensemble song.

Parkway Baptist's pastoral staff, deacons, teachers, and leaders acknowledge that the Bible constitutes the complete and final revelation of the Living God to man, and the ministries of Parkway strongly devote efforts to study and teach the Scriptures. In 2011, the author changed the church motto to "Changing Lives, ONE Verse at a Time." The result is that most preaching and teaching focus on expository preaching rather than topical presentations. Parkway Baptist's preferred Bible version is the King James Bible (KJV). The church does not oppose using other versions for study purposes; however, to encourage unity and harmony in group Bible reading, the church stated in their bylaws that the KJV should be utilized in all preaching and teaching settings.

Ministry Programs

Parkway Baptist offers a wide range of ministry opportunities through which families may connect with the church leadership and meet new people while using their unique talents

and gifts. While parents attend small group sessions and worship, a nursery ministry offers care and comfort for little ones. The student ministry encompasses all ages (preschool through K12) and includes college and career (ages 18–26), with a ministry atmosphere tailored to each group. In addition, opportunities for fellowship and outreach among young adults and senior saints typify the ministry. Parkway Baptist's missions ministry flourishes as a focal point. In 2022, the missions ministry set a budget of \$76,625. Including additional missionary projects, short-term mission trips, and offerings, mission expenses add to \$150,000. Parkway Baptist established a missional church plant in the Dominican Republic's Los Montones community in 2009. The village was entrenched in Voodoo paganism; however, through the diligent efforts of the missionary pastor, the village was converted to Christianity. Each year, except for unforeseen circumstances, the church's mission team returns to the Dominican church to offer discipleship, humanitarian assistance, and ministry with the local missionaries. For example, in 2015, Parkway Baptist constructed a \$45,000 water system to provide villagers with clean water and generate revenue for the national pastor by selling water to local merchants.

COVID-19 Pandemic Shift 2020

The pandemic of 2020 brought about a significant change in the ministry operations of Parkway Baptist. There was a notable shift in attendance with the cancellation of in-person services and the convenience of attending online from home. Although the church's funding remained stable at roughly 90%, in-person attendance declined. The most significant modifications included the Wednesday evening Bible study and the Sunday evening worship. Parkway Baptist previously had an evening Sunday service until the COVID-19 shutdown in March 2020. Since then, however, the church has stopped gathering on Sunday evenings. Instead, other ministry opportunities involving outreach and discipleship replaced the Sunday

evening service. In addition, while Wednesday evening student ministry remains robust, adult Wednesday evening Bible study participation has declined since 2020. On campus, the church usually had an attendance of around 300 in the mid-week service, with 100 participating in the Bible study. Since 2020, a 30% decline has occurred in adult participation. The cause of the decline lies in the fact that people have fallen out of the habit of attending by replacing Bible study with other mid-week pursuits.

Parkway Baptist reopened once gathering became permissible again. The church began in-person services on Mother's Day, May 10, 2020, and altered the worship schedule to include two morning services. The first started between 8:30 and 9:30 a.m., and the second at 10:45 a.m. to spread out the audience and preserve social distance. The church adopted this model for a year but decided to bring everyone back to one-morning service. This schedule was a wise decision that restored enthusiasm and development in the church. In addition, several families joined after reopening due to watching the online services during the shutdown. Today, the church membership remains at over 500 people, with around 400 plus or minus in weekly attendance.

Problem Presented

A large metropolitan office complex filled with small cubicles had a humorous sign posted that read: "How can I think outside the box when I work in a cube!" The obvious implication is: how can a person attain objectives when separated from establishing relationships and experiencing the environment? Church ministry may often seem like a cubicle with individuals separated by age, demographics, family relationships, or life stages. The cubicle-minded ministry prevents individuals from developing stronger connections, benefiting from the wisdom of others, and fostering a sense of community through diversity. James Emery White argues that the church is a body and cannot function as such if it is made up of isolated parts. As

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, the church is composed of many members with unique gifts and talents that contribute to its unity and strength. This means believers need to be connected to one another for the body of Christ to be effective. When believers are isolated from one another, they limit their ability to minister to those around them and grow spiritually. Without a sense of connection between different age groups, whether through shared resources or joint mission work, the body of Christ will remain divided instead of unified.¹³ Churches have been trained to create spiritual socialization and educational environments in which the young assemble in one “cubicle,” the newly married in another, and the senior saints in yet another designated “cubicle.” Because of this conventional way of thinking, church members face the danger of behaving more like strangers and less like the family of God.

A paradigm that divides and isolates adult generational groups for ministry purposes traditionally claims age-segregation as vital for church development. The issue is that in the absence of generational engagement, the church becomes spiritually anemic by lacking intergenerational connections. Spiritual socialization, mentioned above, refers to more than just a church potluck in the fellowship hall or a church-wide barbecue at the park. Spiritual socialization is the blending of intentional dialogue and interaction between generations. The need for intergenerational spiritual socialization is critical because, without it, Parkway Baptist cannot properly demonstrate love for the members and fulfill the will of God (Ps. 50:5, John 13:34, Col. 3:16, 1 Thess. 5:11, Titus 2:4–5, and 1 Pet. 5:5). The problem is Parkway Baptist’s lack of intergenerational spiritual socialization opportunities produces a culture of spiritual detachment among the members.

¹³ James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014). 166-67.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to create a biblically sound intergenerational discipleship model to engender Parkway Baptist toward an Elijah/Elisha principle. This principle is explicated in the definition section of this chapter. For now, however, the principle underscores the importance of generational teamwork. The relationship between Elijah and Elisha is a paragon of how generations can work together in ministry. Generational bonds are forged throughout the Bible, leaving a lasting mark on the pages of history. Historical instances include the elderly, austere Moses, who forms a bond with the youthful, passionate conqueror Joshua. Moses and Joshua's exploits were epic, and their bond was undeniable. Then there is the widow Naomi's sensitive bond with Ruth, her young, bereaved daughter-in-law. Their devotion to one another in a time of adversity is exemplary. Also, the Apostle Paul served as a spiritual mentor to the younger Timothy. Their friendship advanced God's missional purpose in the churches Paul established. However, two of Israel's most bold and beloved prophets forged a legendary generational link that significantly influenced their period. Elijah and Elisha's extraordinary impact is still honored in Israel and among Christians.

Elijah and Elisha were remarkable prophets of God. Elijah the older and Elisha the younger are excellent examples of intergenerational ministry. An examination of their lives reveals a magnificent principle. The principle is that when generational connection occurs in ministry, the church will become a place where tolerance triumphs over intolerance, acceptance is warmly embraced, and generational connection impacts the world with the gospel. One author presents a persuasive argument: "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.”¹⁴ Intergenerational mentoring is a selfless investment in the mentee’s growth, maturity, and success. It is founded on trust in the worth of the other person. The mentor’s objective is the mentee’s success. Therefore, mentoring requires self-sacrifice.¹⁵ Before being taken into Heaven, Elijah’s goal is to encourage the young men enrolled in the school of the prophets, particularly Elisha, who will receive the mantle and continue the task of the ministry. The Elijah/Elisha biblical principle will be explained more thoroughly in the theological section of Chapter 2.

Basic Assumptions

This DMIN action research requires the researcher to articulate some basic assumptions by exploring the possible variables that could impact the study. Accordingly, the researcher has considered several fundamental assumptions. First, it is the basic assumption of the researcher that some members of Parkway Baptist may prefer more traditional forms of ministry that involve separate programs for different age groups. Traditional ministry, such as age-specific Sunday school, is preferable for some congregants since mixing with varying age groups presents more relational challenges than peer-related activities. Second, it is assumed that when Parkway Baptist members exclusively interact with individuals of similar ages, they lose out on mentoring opportunities to learn from and bond with members of various generations. Third, if intergenerational discourse, discipleship, and connection are not pursued, Parkway Baptist will not maximize its potential to demonstrate a loving faith community. Fourth, Parkway Baptist’s numerical growth might be stunted if the church does not try to reach out to the community’s

¹⁴ James D. Whitmire, “Intergenerational Worship,” *The Journal of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary*, Spring 2016 no. 3 (2016).

¹⁵ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 463.

younger generation. Those who do not fall within the ministry's preferred demographic may begin to feel rejected and alone. Fifth, it is assumed that there is often a lack of communication between young people and older adults at Parkway Baptist. However, it is also believed that if each group is placed in a setting that requires them to communicate to achieve a similar objective, they may develop more substantial connections and understanding of one another.

Definitions

In this section, the author will define specific terms used in this essay so that readers may follow along and grasp the context of the presented arguments. In addition, by clearly defining key terms, the author allows readers to engage with the ideas in the essay on a deeper level. Finally, since the cultural context of this essay deals with Parkway Baptist in Fort Oglethorpe, GA., clarifying terminology might aid in avoiding misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the author's objective.

Ageism. This term refers to holding negative attitudes or engaging in discriminatory behavior against persons because of their age. According to James Taylor, the term was "coined by R. M. Butler in 1968 to signify prejudice or discrimination against people on account of their age."¹⁶ Ageism is a type of prejudice based on an individual's age. Ageism can manifest itself in various ways, including hiring, promotion, compensation, benefits, work assignments, and layoffs. It might also take the form of unfavorable attitudes or preconceptions towards older adults. In the context of ministry, ageism can surface in exclusion, avoidance, neglect, and intolerance. Furthermore, ageism in the church can manifest in two ways: the younger generation avoiding the older generation or the older generation neglecting the younger generation.

¹⁶ James Taylor, *Pastors Under Pressure: Conflicts on the Outside, Fears Within* (Leominster, England: Day One, 2004), 123–24.

Biblical Worldview. A biblical worldview is a theologically grounded perspective on the world that is explicitly informed by Scripture. It is a way of understanding the world based on God’s Word and provides a framework for understanding reality from a Christian perspective. A biblical worldview is not merely a set of ideas but a comprehensive view of the world rooted in the teachings of Scripture. While secular culture views the world through a materialistic, scientific, or humanistic grid, Christians evaluate the world through biblical conviction drawn from Scripture. According to Michael S. Craven, everyone has a worldview, which he defines as “[A]n all-embracing life system that emanates from our fundamental conceptions of ultimate reality.”¹⁷ Kerby Anderson’s analysis of how one’s worldview influences behavior is insightful. Anderson argues, “Behavior results from our values and beliefs. Thinking biblically about the issues of life should ultimately result in living biblically in society.”¹⁸ Therefore, a biblical worldview aids the believer in living their life by the Word of God.

Discipleship. Discipleship is the process of growing in one’s relationship with God, becoming more like Christ, and learning to live out the gospel in obedience to the Holy Spirit in all areas of life. This process usually involves some combination of mentorship, study, prayer, fellowship, service, and evangelism. One writer contends, “An ever-expanding discipleship base is the only effective way a church can continue to mature spiritually and grow numerically.”¹⁹ Discipleship is an invitation to know more about Christ as one passionately follows His Word. There is no quick fix for developing a mature faith. It takes time, experience, and spiritual

¹⁷ S. Michael Craven, *Uncompromised Faith: Overcoming Our Culturalized Christianity* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009), 34–35.

¹⁸ Kerby Anderson, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005), 1.

¹⁹ John Mark Terry, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson, *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 509.

discipline to mature as a Christian. The process of becoming a disciple is not a sprint but a marathon that requires perseverance in discipleship. As Trent C. Butler puts it, “A mature disciple devotes a lifetime to listening to God’s Word, retaining that Word in his heart, and continuing throughout life to listen to the Word so that it becomes more and more a part of life.”²⁰ Thus, discipleship is a biblical process that takes place within the context of a close relationship with a more mature believer who can model the life of a disciple and help guide others on their spiritual journey with God.

Emerging Adults. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett was the academic researcher who coined the phrase “emerging adulthood.”²¹ Arnett defined emerging adulthood as a period from about age 18 through mid-to-late twenties (eighteen to twenty-seven), during which young people explore their identity, establish independence, and develop intimate relationships.²² Before Arnett’s work, most scholars and researchers focused on adolescence as the primary period of identity development. However, Arnett’s research showed that many young adults continue to explore their identity well into their twenties. Therefore, an emerging adult is a person who is in the process of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood within a specific age limit. Authors Mary T. Lederleitner, Andrew MacDonald, and Rick Richardson think that “The phrase emerging adulthood relates most frequently to the maturation process a person undergoes as part of their development to adulthood.”²³ Thus, the term “emerging adults” refers to more than just a

²⁰ Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, vol. 3, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 133.

²¹ Mary T. Lederleitner, Andrew MacDonald, and Rick Richardson, “What Are We Talking About?” in *Formation for Mission: Discipleship and Identity for Emerging Adults*, ed. Mary T. Lederleitner, Andrew MacDonald, and Rick Richardson (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 8.

²² Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, Second Edition., Christian Association for Psychological Studies (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 209.

²³ Mary T. Lederleitner, Andrew MacDonald, and Rick Richardson, “What Are We Talking About?” 6.

generational trend or the label of a generation; instead, the meaning is deeply personal and limited by time.

Elijah/Elisha Principle. This is the principle developed by the author. The principle depicts Elijah and Elisha as a model for intergenerational ministry where the younger generation is not pulling to be contemporary in worship, and the older generation is not pushing to be traditional in worship. On the other hand, each generation is called to walk in unity as heart-to-heart in service unto God. Authors Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton contend, “Many biblical texts further emphasize the idea that older generations are responsible for passing on God’s truths to the younger generations. However, some passages offer examples of the younger generation leading or teaching the elders.”²⁴ Since every generation has something valuable to offer in terms of knowledge, wisdom, and experience, the essential idea of this principle is that individuals will benefit from forging a unified generational relationship with each other.

Intergenerational or Intergenerationality Ministry. According to researchers Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton, “[I]ntergenerationality is not a new program that must be added on to everything else the church is doing; rather, it is a way of being that can be woven into the fabric of already successful activities and ministries.”²⁵ Intergenerational ministry is sharing resources, knowledge, and experience between different generations. This can happen within a family, community, school, workplace, or church. Authors Cory Seibel and Malan Nel pointed out in their book that Joe Azzopardi and Kayle de Waal describe flourishing intergenerational churches as “those that foster an environment of interdependence between generations, that empower people of all ages to participate meaningfully in ministry, and that

²⁴ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 80.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

encourage the generations to make accommodations for one another's sake."²⁶ Interacting across generations can be a great way to foster friendships and open up new opportunities for building relationships in the church. The intergenerational ministry establishes a sense of generational connectedness and belonging by providing mentorship, leadership, and discipleship opportunities. Thus, an intergenerational ministry is creating environments where intentional dialogue and interaction between generations occur.

Juvenilization of Christianity. Juvenilization is a word coined by author Thomas E. Bergler. He writes, "Juvenilization is the process by which the religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for Christians of all ages. It begins with the praiseworthy goal of adapting the faith to appeal to the young. But it sometimes ends badly, with both youth and adults embracing immature versions of the faith."²⁷ In previous generations, Christians generally adopted the values and behaviors of their elders who undertook mentoring and discipleship (Titus 2:1-8). However, in recent years, there has been a paradigm shift where young people are setting the trends. This ministry shift has changed how Christianity is practiced, with a greater emphasis on an attractional model where everything is cool, hip, and acceptable as opposed to biblical. However, being biblical is the ultimate cool factor in ministry. It must be acknowledged that every generation can contribute to fostering inclusion. Furthermore, every generation can discover a renewed sense of direction by constructing a ministry bridge linking the generations involved.

²⁶ Cory Seibel and Malan Nel, *The Generative Church: Global Conversations about Investing in Emerging Generations* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 50.

²⁷ Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 4.

Life Stage. The life stage of an individual is the period in their life during which they experience certain developmental milestones. Life stages can be divided into various stages, such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Each step is characterized by different physical, psychological, social, and spiritual changes. What Norman H. Wright asserts about adolescence is true of all life stages, as he stated: “Adolescence is a life stage filled with an abundance of changes. This is a time between childhood and adulthood. It’s a major transition of life, filled with loss. There are physical, mental, and emotional changes—loss even on a daily basis.”²⁸ The numerous life stages aid in forming a person’s identity in life. Each level comes with a set of expectations. Early childhood, for example, relates to the development of motor skills. Adolescence is when young people explore their identities and discover who they are. Adulthood is when individuals settle down and find their potential in society. Finally, in the elderly life stage, individuals often retire to enjoy leisure activities with family and friends. Every life stage brings new challenges and opportunities for personal development.

Parents: In this essay, the term “parent” indicates that children have both a biological male and a biological female parent, who can only be a biological man or woman known as “father” and “mother.” However, the author acknowledges various parenting types, including birth parents as the child’s natural or legal mother and father. Adoptive parents are those who have adopted a child lawfully. Foster parents are government-approved individuals who temporarily provide for a child in need. June Hunt argues,

A parent (noun) is a mother or father, with responsibilities as provider, protector, and defender of a child. The Hebrew word for parent is *horim*, derived from the same root word as *moreh*, which means “teacher.” To parent (verb) means to physically raise,

²⁸ H. Norman Wright, *The Complete Guide to Crisis & Trauma Counseling: What to Do and Say When it Matters Most!* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2011), 389.

emotionally nurture, and spiritually nourish a son or daughter. A parent is the single most important teacher a child will ever have.²⁹

Therefore, a parent provides support and protection for their children and displays affection through physical comfort, loving interactions, educational instruction, and spiritual development.

Spiritual Formation. Spiritual formation is defined by authors Anthony J. Michael and James Estep Jr. as, “This process of spiritual formation is one of the central themes of the New Testament. The maturation process requires a constant transition from old nature to new, from taking off our corruptible flesh to the taking on of our new incorruptible nature in Christ.”³⁰

Thus, spiritual formation refers to growing in one’s relationship with God. Personal contemplation, repentance, prayer, participation in worship, service, and Scripture study all contribute to a person’s spiritual development. Dave Earley makes the following claim: “Spiritual formation is for every believer, not just the spiritually elite, not just the mystical, not just the introverted, not just the highly disciplined, and not just the people who have no problems in their lives. All of us can and must put ourselves in a position to receive the grace of God to be changed into the image of Jesus.”³¹ Spiritual development often results in a stronger connection with God, a more thorough understanding of one’s beliefs, and more self-awareness before the Lord.

Spiritual Socialization. Socialization, as noted by David Witthoff, refers to “Concepts of how individuals grow to understand society and societal norms.”³² However, spiritual

²⁹ June Hunt, *Biblical Counseling Keys on Parenting: Steps for Successful Parenting* (Dallas, TX: Hope for The Heart, 2008), 1.

³⁰ Michael J. Anthony and James Estep Jr., *Management Essentials for Christian Ministries* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 28.

³¹ Dave Earley, “The Process of Being Changed to Be Like Jesus,” in *Spiritual Formation Is...: How to Grow in Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 10.

³² David Witthoff, ed., *The Lexham Cultural Ontology Glossary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014). Logos Electronic Edition.

socialization is the process by which Christians learn to become members of a spiritual community. Biblical socialization is not a one-day-a-week effort but a part of daily living (Acts 2:46). One writer explains, “The gathered church had fellowship in suffering (Acts 4:23; 5:41), fellowship in unity (Acts 2:46; 4:31; Phil. 2:1–4), fellowship in ministry (Acts 4:31), fellowship in prayer (Acts 2:14, 42; 4:31; 12:5, 12; 13:3; 16:25), fellowship in the Lord’s Supper (Acts 2:14), as well as fellowship around meals (Acts 2:46).”³³ Believers learn the values, beliefs, and actions required of them in their spiritual tradition through spiritual socialization. Formal settings, like the local church, and informal ones, like the home, are both suitable for spiritual socializing. Believers must form meaningful relationships with other Christians to foster a strong sense of identity and purpose in their spiritual lives.

Social Capital. According to researchers Farrell, B. Hunter, and S. Balajiedlang Khylllep, social capital is “the potential of individuals to secure benefits and invent solutions to problems through membership in social networks.”³⁴ One academic researcher distinguishes between religious and secular forms of social capital by pointing out, “The social capital provided by faith-saturated programs was similar to secular programs, except that the religious programs may reach beyond professional relationships to include congregational networks of relationships for resources.”³⁵ Spiritual, social capital refers to the relationships between individuals and groups based on shared values, beliefs, and traditions. These interactions foster community and social cohesiveness, which may benefit individuals and organizations. Spiritual, social capital can be

³³ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Jim Vincent and Allan Sholes, Revised and Expanded. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 381.

³⁴ B. Hunter Farrell and S. Balajiedlang Khylllep, *Freeing Congregational Mission: A Practical Vision for Companionship, Cultural Humility, and Co-Development* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: 2022), 152.

³⁵ William Lockhart. “The Added Value of Religion in Poverty to-Work Programs: A Framework for Analysis.” *Journal of Markets & Morality (Spring and Fall 2003)* 6, no. 1 & 2 (2003): 510.

used to build bridges between different communities and to promote understanding and cooperation.

Intergenerational Reciprocity. Intergenerational reciprocity is the practice of passing on and receiving love, knowledge, wisdom, and resources from one generation to another. One writer said intergenerational reciprocity “includes knowledge of age appropriateness in such areas as faith and moral development, so there will not be unrealistic expectations of persons of a certain age.”³⁶ By intentionally ensuring that each generation passes on its values, skills, and resources to the next, believers can ensure that the message of Christ reaches far into the future.

Limitations

The first limitation is time constraints. As a staff employee of Parkway Baptist, the researcher serves as the full-time senior pastor and is responsible for various weekly pastoral responsibilities. Time constraints limit the project’s study as a result of seeking to maintain a healthy balance between research and pastoral responsibilities. In addition to the time constraints imposed on the researcher, there is a time constraint imposed on the interviewees. The researcher is fully aware of competing for the time of young families to conduct the necessary interviews for the study. The family time commitments required for school and extracurricular activities might make it challenging to gather all the essential material from families within the time frame for the completion of the essay.

Second, since a version of Parkway Baptist (formerly Park City Baptist) has been in operation since 1949, there is a possibility that some of the church’s historical records have been

³⁶ Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 343–44.

lost or damaged beyond reading. Furthermore, since no church members from the inaugural service in 1949 are still living, oral transmission of historical knowledge is impossible.

Finally, while there is historical data dealing with business meetings, the development of ministry operations and objectives is only partially documented. Thus, Parkway Baptist's history of intergenerational ministry has several challenges due to the limitations of the historical data.

Delimitations

Parkway Baptist includes people of all ages and stages of life. However, no one under eighteen will be selected for an interview in this action research study. To participate in an interview, anybody under eighteen must get approval from a parent or guardian. In-depth information on a person's growth, experiences, and perspectives on particular themes is better gleaned through age-specific interviews relevant to intergenerational discipleship.

Members with a six-month membership or longer will be the only ones eligible for interviews for this study. Adult members of Parkway Baptist should be able to provide substantial feedback on the church's intergenerational initiatives within six months of joining. The researcher maintains that to discuss the church's mission rationally, one must spend at least six months fully immersed in the church's culture. Furthermore, only current staff workers, deacons, leaders, or members of Parkway Baptist will be considered in the interview process.

The research is headquartered at Parkway Baptist in Catoosa County, Georgia. No other church ministries will be included in the analysis since Parkway Baptist will serve as the research's basis and framework. Parkway Baptist is an Independent Baptist congregation, making it part of the protestant Christian tradition.

Most interviews will be conducted either in person or over the phone. However, parents must accompany all minors during interviews, and all ladies, regardless of age, must always have

a companion present. Because the participants are Parkway Baptist members, alias names will be offered for those who choose to remain anonymous.

The population of interest is restricted to the congregation that attends Parkway Baptist. Therefore, the questionnaire survey and interviews about intergenerational discipleship will not include interviews with other church ministries or religious organizations.

Thesis Statement

The Elijah/Elisha principle set forth in this project will be evident in members when the older generation refuses to push the younger generation to be traditional in worship, and the younger generation refuses to pull the older to be contemporary in worship. Intergenerational bonding will provide a stable footing to perform ministry together. If spiritual socialization is mediated by biblical discipleship between all generations, then Parkway Baptist will exemplify the Elijah/Elisha principle producing a biblically balanced intergenerational discipleship ministry.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As the researcher developed a Doctor of Ministry project that adds to the wisdom of the academic knowledge of those who made pioneering breakthroughs on the topic, he found it necessary to evaluate what has already been explored and expounded by synthesizing the research to further the academic discussion. The literature review will explore related themes and competing views that will identify critical gaps not yet explored by scholars. The subject of biblical intergenerational discipleship will be explored through the prism of numerous sources that will prepare the way for the research path.

Literature Review

A train must ride on two rails to maintain balance and arrive safely at the desired destination. If the train experiences track failure, it loses stability, the cargo shifts, and the train derails. The church ministry, like a train, runs on two essential tracks “the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship” (Acts 2:42, King James Version). Doctrine points the believer to the precepts, principles, and promises of God’s Word. On the other hand, fellowship points the believer to a mutual partnership that creates connection and community within the church. Intergenerational discipleship opens the way to sharing and learning from each other’s experiences and unique perspectives, which is a critical component in intergenerational faith formation.¹ The literature

¹ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 20.

review explores the importance of fellowship encompassing an intergenerational discipleship model and how it provides stability and balance to ministry.

Multigenerational vs. Intergenerational

Most ministry models offer a multigenerational ministry where people are divided by age, demographics, or common interests. Spiritual leaders desire generational connections but limit interaction through ministry-assigned roles. For many working as multigenerational teams (young and old), focusing on spiritual formation is an excellent illustration of how to use a variety of gifts to serve.² However, this line of thinking exposes a gap in spiritual leaders' understanding of ministry. Instead of blending generations to work together as a team, they insist on ages being split into groups of young and old. Therefore, a better terminology to integrate with biblical discipleship is intergenerational rather than multigenerational.

The phrase “intentional intergenerational ministry” is credited to James V. Gambone, an author and principal partner of Points of View Incorporated, a consulting organization in Minnesota.³ Gambone emphasizes the importance of intentional dialogue and interaction between the generations. Other discipleship leaders like Robby Gallaty would concur with Gambone. Gallaty believes that a flourishing group requires simple interaction and dialogue with others. Since people want to be heard and recognized, Gallaty believes that Life Groups provide a setting where both conditions are addressed through interaction and togetherness.⁴

² Jack O. Balswick, Judith K. Balswick, and Thomas V. Frederick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 340.

³ Allen and Lawton, “Intergenerational Christian Formation,” 70.

⁴ Robby Gallaty, Chris Swain, and Robert E. Coleman, *Replicate: How to Create a Culture of Disciple-Making Right Where You Are* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020), 142-43.

Interactions between different generations highlight the need to develop listening comprehension and communication abilities. Unfortunately, most older people hesitate to engage in conversation with the younger generation. What older people do not realize is that younger people welcome it. Carolyn Wason contends she has never heard of millennials disregarding older people in worship; they value their presence. Wason claims, “In fact, ‘intergenerational’ is a bit of a buzzword for church-shopping millennials.”⁵ The word is a catchphrase because millennials place high importance on the wisdom of their elders, and they understand that their future is futile without informed knowledge of the past. Consequently, the push for intergenerational ministry has become an integral aspect of youth ministry. This approach represents progress toward adopting a more integrated and comprehensive methodology for youth ministry that involves the older generation.⁶ In churches where older generations are more linked to emerging adult generations and where parent and child connections are spiritually fostered and reinforced through the love of Christ, the youth grow spiritually mature, and stronger faith among the young is generally the outcome.⁷

Intergenerational Mentorship

It is important to remember that although student ministry takes up a large portion of church activities, adult involvement in ministry should not be forgotten. Authors Brian Hull and Patrick Mays contend, “Adults still need to be engaged and involved in mentoring young people. Young people still need adults to encourage, support, resource, and model for them what this life

⁵ Andrew F. Bush, Carolyn C. Wason, and Eloise Meneses, *Millennials and the Mission of God: A Prophetic Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017), 148.

⁶ Chap Clark, *Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong*, ed. Chap Clark, Youth, Family, and Culture Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 65.

⁷ Ibid.

in Christ looks like—a life in Christ that is not perfect but rather full of ups and downs, joys and heartache, sufferings, and successes.”⁸ Younger generations need to witness the evidence of a transformed life of faith in Christ. According to Howard Vanderwell, the Christian mission is intrinsically linked to the duties of becoming a Christian adult.⁹ Vanderwell argues that each generation must influence the next so that each generation is aware of God’s incredible power. The interaction of generations in reminding one another of the reality of the gospel and God’s works are an essential component of the church’s survival. A vital part of the church’s continual influence is how the generations work together to remind each other of the truth of the gospel and the things God has done.¹⁰ The Scripture is clear about the believer’s individual and collective responsibility to mentor emerging adults. Generationally speaking, Paul explains in Titus 2 that older men and women must educate, encourage, and exhort the younger. It is also expected that the mentoring connections would help believers learn about the distinct qualities and attributes associated with their gender and the God-given duties that men and women are assigned.¹¹

Intergenerational Spiritual Formation

Intergenerational spiritual formation is the process of maturing as members of the body of Christ within the context of the local church through biblical discipleship. Not only do adults come to a saving knowledge of Christ, but also, as one author summarized, “Children can and

⁸ Brian Hull and Patrick Mays, *Youth Ministry as Mission: A Conversation about Theology and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2022), 174–75.

⁹ Cory Seibel and Malan Nel, *The Generative Church: Global Conversations about Investing in Emerging Generations* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019). 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ R. Scott Pace and Ed Newton, *Student Ministry by the Book: Biblical Foundations for Student Ministry* (Hobbs College Library), ed. Heath A. Thomas (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2019). 37.

will be saved when the church opens its doors and its arms to the little ones. Once they have made that first-time commitment to Christ, the church must support them in an ongoing discipleship process.”¹² The church is obligated to disciple members and encourage, support, and facilitate the discipleship of other Christians.¹³ Completing a discipleship course or a successful performance on a test of biblical knowledge is not the end objective of spiritual formation through biblical discipleship. The goal is to become what the early Christians called “followers of the Way.”¹⁴ Through intentional discipleship, believers can learn from one another, receive wisdom from those who have walked with Jesus for many years, and benefit from the godly counsel of seasoned leaders. Through these relationships, believers grow in faith, become more like Jesus every day, and learn how to live spiritual lives in an empowered way.

Intergenerational Education

When parents and other adults in the congregation make it a priority to construct an educational program for understanding and implementing the truth of Scripture, they are laying the groundwork for the younger generations to fulfill the goal of spiritual development. For most congregations, the Sunday school ministry plays an intricate role in spiritual education. Holly Allen argues, “Sunday school is one of the few places where children have opportunities to regularly and personally interact with adult believers.”¹⁵ The interaction of children with adults in educational settings is crucial, but there is less emphasis on adult interactions with other adults

¹² Dick Gruber, *Foundations of Children’s Evangelism: How to Lead Kids to Christ* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2017), 59.

¹³ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 211.

¹⁴ Clark, *Adoptive Church*, 54.

¹⁵ Holly Catterton Allen, *Forming Resilient Children: The Role of Spiritual Formation for Healthy Development* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 95–96.

across generations. While age-based learning among kids and youth is an important feature of spiritual formation, the problems associated with age segregation must not be ignored. One author contends, “While there are certainly benefits to age-based ministry, many local congregations underscore the positive elements and overlook the deeply problematic aspects involved in dividing the generations, so much so that such separation may be seen as downright necessary for the church’s shared life of discipleship.”¹⁶ To nurture the Christian’s spiritual walk, believers need faith environments of believing brothers and sisters in Christ, both older and younger. While Sunday schools are key locations for cultivating these connections, they should not be the only educational consideration. Being restricted to a single teaching model may unintentionally impede spiritual development.

Religious Individualism

Christine Lawton recounts her experience working on staff at her church and seeing the younger age groups lose interest in ministry. She began to think about ways to integrate the generations and establish good connections among them because she wanted to help the younger generation understand and experience the church as the “body of Christ,” the “family of God,” and the “community of faith.”¹⁷ Her passion led her to discover the beauty that stems from an intergenerational ministry. She found that intergenerational ministry teaches the essence of the biblical understanding of the body of Christ and capitalizes on a congregation’s natural multigenerational quality.¹⁸ Lawton and Holly Allen contend that the church has pressed toward

¹⁶ David M. Csinos and Rev HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022). Logos Electronic Edition. Chap. 1.

¹⁷ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 12–13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

life-stage segregation for various reasons. However, their research shows that regular cross-generational encounters are vital for Christian formation.¹⁹ The pushback to intergenerational connection is the problem of individualism. Elisabeth Sbanotto claims that millennials cherish autonomy and do not want to be perceived as an extension of anybody or anything.²⁰ She further argues that “both Xers and Millennials value individualism more than Boomers do. But while Xers often exercise individualism as an act of protest against confinement, Millennials do it as an act of celebration.”²¹ Chap Clark is correct when he suggests that the value of rugged individuality in our society trumps the biblical command for bodily unity.²² In an increasingly disconnected and individualistic society, the church has a unique opportunity to demonstrate a new way of interacting with one another through intergenerational ministry.

Not only is individualism indicative of society, but it can also be present in the saints who serve in the church. The church becomes the greatest enemy of fellowship when members of different ages fail to communicate and connect. A church divided is a church disconnected. Ronald Sider and Ben Lowe contend that relativism and extreme individuality do not lead to the unity that the Lord desires for His church. Instead, the church needs to know each other better, study the Bible together, reevaluate and repent together, put more emphasis on central truths together, and implore the Lord to lead the church into unity.²³ Intergenerational discipleship can remove the barriers of individualism when leaders embrace the will of God for the church.

¹⁹ Allen and Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 25.

²⁰ Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto and Craig L. Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry: Biblical and Practical Insights for Transforming Church Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 171.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

²² Clark, *Adoptive Church*, 108.

²³ Ronald J. Sider and Ben Lowe, *The Future of Our Faith: An Intergenerational Conversation on Critical Issues Facing the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016). 184.

Robby Gallaty believes Christians can and should develop disciples as they follow Jesus and implement His missional mandate. Still, it will require a structure of key leaders to expand the gospel worldwide.²⁴ Success as a key leader depends on declaring the gospel, submitting to the Holy Spirit, glorifying Christ, and working missionally with all generations.

Legalistic Religious Intolerance

Individualism is not the only adversary of intergenerational ministry; intolerance is also. When people are intolerant of others in the church, it creates an atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion, ultimately leading to conflict. When intolerance reaches its peak, people can become judgmental, develop animosity, and even display violent behavior. It goes without saying that it has no place in God's church. However, this is not to say the church should not speak out against sinful behaviors in the world and church. Brian Hull and Patrick Hayes genuinely believe that the destructive power of sin introduced into God's creation by human disobedience against God necessitates a divine restoration.²⁵ Claiming that someone else's ideas and actions are wrong is often seen as intolerant, but this is a terrible misunderstanding of real intolerance.²⁶ For various reasons, the church should not tolerate sin.

First and foremost, sin is an insult to God and His holiness. However, the intolerance that is the enemy of intergenerationality is colored by ageism, discrimination based on a person's age. Ageism is not just a problem between older and younger generations but also a systemic failure within the younger generation. Studies reveal that in many Western contexts, Xers and

²⁴ Robby Gallaty, Chris Swain, and Robert E. Coleman, *Replicate: How to Create a Culture of Disciple-Making Right Where You Are* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020). 205.

²⁵ Brian Hull and Patrick Mays, *Youth Ministry as Mission: A Conversation about Theology and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2022), 37.

²⁶ Ronald J. Sider and Ben Lowe, *The Future of Our Faith: An Intergenerational Conversation on Critical Issues Facing the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016). 167.

Millennials have made great strides in eliminating racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism in many Western environments. However, ageism has increased.²⁷ In this, David M. Csinos and HyeRan Kim-Cragg claim that many younger ministries want to adopt the slogan “No age on stage!”²⁸ This thinking is disturbing and a clear departure from biblical theology that intergenerationality can rectify. Because we live in an energetic youth-oriented culture, many deny the reality of aging. Intergenerational relationships in the church should be seen as an opportunity to learn from and bless each other rather than something to be feared or avoided. Believers must remember that God has placed the older generations among them for a reason. They are the teachers and mentors with spiritual insight and experience that many younger generations lack. They can share their wisdom and encouragement and pass down faith principles that have been taught for centuries. They can help younger believers understand their place in the larger story of God’s plan unfolding throughout history. By embracing intergenerational relationships, believers can use their talents to encourage each other, learn from each other, and make the church a stronger, healthier body of believers.

Segregation of the Saints

The problem of segregation in church ministry has been around for many years. Ronald J. Sider and Ben Lowe recall the startling words of Martin Luther King Jr. The latter once claimed that 11 a.m. on Sunday mornings was the most segregated hour in Christian America. Lowe continues with the sidebar from Christena Cleveland, Associate Professor of the Practice of Reconciliation and Director of the Center for Reconciliation at Duke Divinity School, who remarked that some today believe that “the Christian church remains the most segregated

²⁷ Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto and Craig L. Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 67.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

institution in America.”²⁹ Although racism still rears the ugly head of prejudice, studies show that segregation in church nowadays has little to do with race. According to the research of political scientists Naomi Cahn and June Carbone, churches are becoming more divided along the lines of political orientation, socioeconomic status, theology, and popular culture.³⁰ The list should also include generational segregation in the church. Summarizing the ideas of Urie Bronfenbrenner, a Russian-born American psychologist, Holly Catterton Allen related that the institutions of society have produced and perpetuated the age-segregated, which has paved the way to an antisocial world in which children live and develop.

Throughout the past century, society has undergone gradual changes that have divided families and segregated age groups, not just in educational settings but in other aspects of life.³¹ The church has evolved in lockstep with society’s push for age segregation. The church’s increasing separation of ages was marked by the noble goal of maturing believers in the Christian faith.³² The good intentions, however, paved the way for generational isolation. Unfortunately, churches have always had some sort of separation between the older and younger generations. This can be seen in how Sunday school classes are typically divided by age group. While there may be some benefits to this type of arrangement, it can also lead to many problems. One of the most significant issues with segregation in church ministry is that it can lead to feelings of separation among the members. In the absence of good social support, many feel they are on their own to negotiate the quickly changing social environment. They are frequently left

²⁹ Ronald J. Sider and Ben Lowe, *The Future of Our Faith: An Intergenerational Conversation on Critical Issues Facing the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016). 167.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 168–69.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³² David M. Csinos and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *A Gospel for All Ages: Teaching and Preaching with the Whole Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2022). Chap. One. Logos Electronic Edition.

feeling isolated and alone.³³ Modernity has shattered the feeling of community and family life.³⁴ When individuals are separated into age-based groupings, they may feel they do not belong to the local church community. Thus, an intergenerational community reduces emotional barriers and fosters feelings of community.

Building an Intergenerational Youth Ministry

Intergenerational youth ministry is a vital component of a spiritually healthy church. When done well, it can help young people feel connected to the larger body of Christ and engage them in meaningful ways. Holly Allen is correct in her assertion that spiritually nurturing youth is a complex endeavor, and intergenerational small groups provide chances that age-specific Sunday schools cannot, worshiping together with the whole body of Christ.³⁵ It does not take long in student ministry to recognize that youth ministry is much more than educating teens. It is about reaching out and ministering to families.³⁶ Thus, intergenerational discipleship is critical to family faith formation. Each student symbolizes a family unit designed to serve as a cornerstone of the student's spiritual journey and development.³⁷ Therefore, a critical element of intergenerational ministry is ensuring that the different age groups within the family dynamic interact. Generational interaction with youth can be done through small groups, service projects,

³³ Clark, *Adoptive Church*, 29.

³⁴ Jack O. Balswick, Judith K. Balswick, and Thomas V. Frederick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*, Fifth Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic), 322.

³⁵ Holly Catterton Allen, *Forming Resilient Children: The Role of Spiritual Formation for Healthy Development* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 93.

³⁶ R. Scott Pace and Ed Newton, *Student Ministry by the Book: Biblical Foundations for Student Ministry* (Hobbs College Library), ed. Heath A. Thomas (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2019). 64.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

mentoring relationships, and more. Cross-generational exchange can have a profound impact when young people see that older Christians are invested in their lives.

The focus of youth ministry cannot be a ministry to youth but a ministry with youth.³⁸ Intergenerational youth ministry calls for generational involvement. This transition from ministry *with* youth to ministry *to* youth demonstrates a drop in the importance put on young people's abilities and, therefore, a reduction in youth involvement in the life of the church.³⁹ The church has the privilege and pleasure of developing a discipleship culture with the conviction that the youth of each generation has been given the ability to transform the world when they align themselves with Christ.⁴⁰ Teens must remember that they are never too young to make a difference in the world. Christian teens are not the church of tomorrow; they are today's church. As church leaders adopt an intergenerational model, Chap Clark argues that there is a reasonable next step to take. The next step to designing a biblically balanced youth ministry is inviting the whole congregation to live the truth in conjunction with youth.⁴¹

Theological Foundations

There is not a single passage in the Bible that starts with the words “Discipleship ministry is” and then goes on to provide a definitive scriptural explanation of the process. Discipleship can be described in a variety of ways based on biblical precepts. Fundamentally, however, discipleship supports others in building a stronger relationship with God. The practice of discipleship, therefore, is central to the Christian faith.

³⁸ Brian Hull and Patrick Mays, *Youth Ministry as Mission: A Conversation about Theology and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2022), 169.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴⁰ Pace and Newton, *Student Ministry by the Book*, 104.

⁴¹ Clark, *Adoptive Church*, 165.

This project seeks to perpetuate and promote biblical unity among believers, generational discipleship and mentorship are essential to church ministry. Authors Cory Seibel and Malan Nel believe that “Discipleship and intergenerationality go hand in hand to deepen the core of Christianity and advance the kingdom of God. In fact, the Bible provides both the spiritual and conceptual framework to understand intergenerational congregations as the ideal context for discipleship.”⁴² Biblical examples of such framework are evident in the life of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and the Twelve. These examples exemplify how different generations can connect in unity, discipleship, and fellowship.

Ministries within the church need to question themselves, based on what is occurring in the church right now, whether it will generate resilient disciples for the future. What Jared Kennedy has to say is quite illuminating. Kennedy contends, “The truth is that even before children develop the ability to learn cognitively, they are already learning through emotion and experience—through a teacher’s facial expressions and example, and through hands-on activities and active games.”⁴³ Raising, instructing, and developing resilient children is about equipping them with the skills and confidence to manage life’s difficulties. Assuming we can protect the next generation from all bad influences and unforeseen circumstances would be unreasonable. However, psychologists Margalis Fjelstad and Jean McBride contend, “What you can do is help them learn to use a variety of skills and cultivate a way of thinking that will prepare them for the many emotional and physical challenges they’ll meet in life.”⁴⁴ Thus, parents and churches can

⁴² Seibel, Cory, and Malan Nel, *The Generative Church: Global Conversations about Investing in Emerging Generations* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 51.

⁴³ Jared Kennedy, *Keeping Your Children’s Ministry on Mission: Practical Strategies for Discipling the Next Generation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 117.

⁴⁴ Margalis Fjelstad and Jean McBride, *Raising Resilient Children with a Borderline or Narcissistic Parent* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), 47.

disciple children and teach them that no matter what life throws their way, they never have to face it alone.

Kathy Kouch, the Founder and President of Celebrate Kids, Inc., based in Fort Worth, TX, and a co-founder of Ignite the Family, based in Alpharetta, GA, sees the need for developing spiritually resilient kids. Kouch said, “For children to have spiritual resilience, they need to know who the God of the Bible is. A broad, accurate understanding based on more than their favorite name of God and favorite verse will serve them well. They need to understand the value of spiritual disciplines and use them well to connect to God so that they love Him more deeply.”⁴⁵

Resiliency is fleeing among the Gen Z generation. In a rapidly changing world, Gen Z faces unique challenges that can make it more difficult to build resiliency. With much of the Gen Z worldview produced by social media and the internet, truth is mixed with error, causing uncertainty about reality. Not only is there a distortion of truth, but there is also a lack of biblical discipleship in the home. One writer said, “[N]ewer research shows many in Gen Z are struggling to develop resiliency and grit, having been sheltered by parents from disappointing and hurtful experiences more than prior generations.”⁴⁶ Intergenerational discipleship and mentorship in the local church build resiliency because they are based on a biblical mandate of passing wisdom from one generation to another. When stories of the successes and failures intertwined with God’s providential care are shared, believers are encouraged to stand firm against the tide of falsehood. The psalmist David wrote, “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (Ps. 145:4, KJV).

⁴⁵ Kathy Koch, *Resilient Kids: Raising Them to Embrace Life with Confidence* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2022), 146–47.

⁴⁶ Mary T. Lederleitner, Andrew MacDonald, and Rick Richardson, “How Will We Respond?” in *Formation for Mission: Discipleship and Identity for Emerging Adults*, ed. Mary T. Lederleitner, Andrew MacDonald, and Rick Richardson (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 243.

Deuteronomy 6:7 records God’s command that each generation should teach their children the ways of the Lord so that they may serve Him. In Titus 2:1–9, Paul instructs the older generation to speak sound words of wisdom as they admonish the young men to mimic their faith. Similarly, in Hebrews 13:7, the writer instructs Christians to be mindful of the teachings of those who have trained them in the Word. Intergenerational discipleship is a gift. Warren Wiersbe rightly argues, “Salvation is God’s gift to us because Jesus died for us on the cross. Discipleship is our gift to Him as we take up our cross, die to self, and follow the Lord in everything.”⁴⁷ Intergenerational discipleship is an opportunity to honor Christ and demonstrate our love for Him. The church honors the Lord when a process is set up for older members to share their knowledge and experiences with younger people and for younger members to learn from what their elders do. Andrew Turner said, “We must make an effort to transfer our basic core values deliberately throughout generations. It will not be an easy task, but it is essential to our future.”⁴⁸ Through intergenerational discipleship, churches can create an atmosphere where people of all ages can grow closer to each other and the Lord. Discipleship will improve biblical resourcefulness and resilience. More importantly, theologically informed mentoring may assist people in addressing greater concerns of faith formation and thriving.⁴⁹

The Great Commission: Make Disciples

Matthew 28:18–20, commonly known as the “Great Commission,” is widely regarded as one of the most critical passages in the New Testament. In this passage, Jesus instructs His

⁴⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 170.

⁴⁸ Andrew C. Turner II, *After: Finding Your Passion & Purpose for What’s Next* (Bellingham, WA: Kirkdale Press, 2019), 157.

⁴⁹ Hammons, “Conclusion: A Season of Promise?” 153.

followers to “go and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19). The Great Commission is a summons to an epic, cosmic, spiritual conflict in which the forces of good and evil fight in fierce combat for the souls of men. In the spiritual conflict played out in the unseen world, God’s people assume God’s armor and advance against their adversary with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:10–18). Prevailing power is achieved through prayer, and out of the conflict, disciples are made. Therefore, believers are called to make disciples, equip them for spiritual warfare, and train others to take up the mantle of the Great Commission (2 Tim. 2:2). Disciples must be ready to engage in spiritual combat against their adversary as they carry out their mission of leading others into a deep relationship with Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, few Christians have ever taken somebody under their wing as a disciple. Even more distressing is that “Statistics tell us that a typical believer will die without leading a single person to a lifesaving relationship with Jesus Christ.”⁵⁰ A cosmic war is going on; the only issue is, who is winning the battle? Louie Giglio said, “[W]e are under the mandate of the grace of God—grace that found us, restored us, redeemed us, breathed life back into our dormant lungs, and brought us back from the grave for a purpose. And that purpose is that we would, with everything in us, become an amplifier of the beauty of Jesus among all the peoples on this planet.”⁵¹ Yes, Christ will ultimately win over all adversaries. Still, the daily battles of the believer are necessary to forge their faith and fortify their biblical conviction to carry out the Great Commission.

⁵⁰ Jim Putman et al., *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual: Equipping Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 13.

⁵¹ Louie Giglio, “The Galactic God Who Invites Us into His Glorious Plan,” in *Finish the Mission: Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged*, ed. David Mathis and John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 30.

The instruction to “go” is inextricably linked to the concept of “making disciples.” Some implications of making disciples include teaching people how to grow in their faith, assisting them in creating a deeper connection with God through prayer and Bible study, and encouraging them to act out their biblical beliefs. According to Ed Stetzer, the first step to discipleship is church planting since disciples cannot be produced outside the context of church ministry.⁵² A few other scholars, such as David L. Turner, concur with Stetzer’s assessment, stating, “All this implies the central role of the church as God’s primary agency for mission. Only in the community/family that is the church can disciples be baptized and taught to observe all that Jesus has commanded.”⁵³ While the researcher recognizes the importance of church planting, the author respectfully disagrees with Stetzer that church planting should be the starting point. Outside of the believer’s saving relationship with Jesus Christ, the initial step in becoming a disciple is the believer’s obedient surrender to Christ, who commanded, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19, KJV). Craig Blomberg said, “‘Follow me’ in v. 19 is literally *come after me*.”⁵⁴ Christ’s exhortation to follow Him by surrendering to His teachings and patterning the Christian life after His example is implicit in the divine invitation to begin the remarkable journey of faith.

The Great Commission text in Matthew instructs Christians to “teach all nations,” and the terms “go” (missional involvement), “baptize” (identification), and “teach” (proclamation) stand out as the process to accomplish the objective of making disciples. Robert Mounce stresses

⁵² Ed Stetzer, *Planting New Churches in a Postmodern Age* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 35.

⁵³ David L. Turner, “Matthew,” *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 690.

⁵⁴ Craig Blomberg, “Matthew,” vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 90.

discipleship as one who becomes a pupil or learner by saying, “Both *baptizantes* and *didaskontes* are participles governed by the imperative *matheteusate*.”⁵⁵ Mounce is echoed by James Leo Garrett Jr., who says, “In the Matthean form of the Great Commission (28:19–20), the only finite verb is ‘make disciples’ (*mathēteusate*), whereas ‘go,’ ‘baptizing,’ and ‘teaching’ are participles (*poreuthentes, baptizantes, didaskontes*). The principal action of this commission is the making of disciples, or ‘disciplizing.’”⁵⁶ Therefore, the words in the text precisely define the crux of how to make disciples. A deeper examination of the terms “go, baptize, and teach” is necessary to understand the implication of biblical discipleship.

When Christ spoke the word “go,” He was not merely addressing the disciples. According to C. Gordon Olson and Don Fanning, following the Protestant Reformation, there arose an interpretive misconception that the apostles were the only people to whom the context of Matthew 28 applied. Olson and Fanning provide the backdrop and explanation for the historical misinterpretation by stating, “[T]he Great Commission was only given to the apostles, who fulfilled it in the first generation of the church. Therefore, if the heathen are lost, it is their own fault, and we have no responsibility for their lostness. This became the majority Protestant view for over two hundred years after Luther and Calvin.”⁵⁷ This is biblically incorrect. Timothy Beougher concurs by saying, “While it is true that contextually the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) was given *to* the apostles, it was not *only* for the apostles.”⁵⁸ Christ’s words make the command explicitly clear. Since believers are to make disciples of all nations and Christ

⁵⁵ Mike Abendroth, *Jesus Christ: The Prince of Preachers: Learning from the Teaching Ministry of Jesus* (Leominster: Day One, 2008), 98.

⁵⁶ James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 382–83.

⁵⁷ C. Gordon Olson and Don Fanning, *What in the World Is God Doing?: The Essentials of Global Missions*, Seventh Edition, Expanded, Revised, & Updated. (Lynchburg, VA: Global Gospel Publishers, 2013), 40.

⁵⁸ Timothy Beougher, “Must Every Christian Evangelize?” *9Marks Journal* (2013): 17.

guarantees His glorious presence until “the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20), then the Great Commission is applicable for all believing generations. The mandate is a heavenly edict, and from the command given and until that point forward to Christ’s return, it will continue to be required of all Christians as a matter of spiritual obligation to live in a missional manner.

It must be noted that the term “go” did not proceed from the lips of an angel or apostle; the divine declaration came from the Sovereign voice reverberating across the hills of Glory, Jesus. In the context of the Great Commission passage, Matt 28:18 reveals the Son of Man speaking authoritatively as a King, reminiscent of the prophet Daniel’s epic vision of God (Dan. 7:13–14, 18, 22, 27). One author explains the transcendent authority of Christ as shown in this text by saying, “The commission to the Apostles arises out of the power claimed = all power has been given to me on earth, go ye *therefore*, and make the power a reality.”⁵⁹ Therefore, the Great Commission is the call to make disciples, declaring and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with others, wherever and whenever a door of opportunity opens. John Phillips explains the divine commission to evangelize, “The unbelieving may challenge our right to take the gospel to other lands, but we have every right. We have a mandate that transcends that of any human political, religious, or economic power. We are commissioned to go, and go we must, for Satan holds the nations in darkness.”⁶⁰ The Christian’s “going” (i.e., their readiness to yield to spiritual obedience with missional involvement) demonstrates their “growing” in spiritual maturity. Like a warrior trained for battle, the disciple is ready to struggle with the darkness that permeates the world to make disciples for Christ.

⁵⁹ Alexander Balmain Bruce, *The Synoptic Gospels: The Expositor’s Greek Testament: Commentary*, vol. 1. (New York: George H. Doran Company, n.d.), 339.

⁶⁰ John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch, 2014), Mt 28:19–20a. 547–48.

Baptism is a visible outward manifestation of the inward transformation of one who believes in Christ. It is a public confession by the believer that they have repented of their sin and placed saving faith in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9–10, 13). Believer’s baptism denotes that the believer’s sins have been forgiven (Acts 2:38). According to Allen C. Willoughby, baptism represents the believer’s communion with the Triune God. Willoughby explains, “Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” means, therefore, “causing them to submit to a rite which results in their becoming disciples of, and confers upon them fellowship with, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁶¹ When baptized, believers declare to the world that they have become a disciple of Christ and identify with His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3–4). Baptism illustrates dying to the old nature and being raised in the newness of life as a follower of Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). While various denominations use different modes of baptism, the researcher is convinced that biblical baptism is completed by immersion and does not include infant baptism. Salvation is not gained by baptism; instead, baptism is a sign of having placed one’s trust in Christ for salvation. A definition of baptism is provided by Bruce A. Ware, who writes, “The root meaning of the word *baptō* is ‘to dip,’ ‘to submerge,’ ‘to immerse,’ or more explicitly, ‘to dip in or under.’ The usages of *baptō* in classical Greek, in the LXX (e.g., 2 Kings 5:14), and in the New Testament all evidence this prevailing meaning.”⁶²

By analyzing the Great Commission passage in Matthew 28, Ware further argues against baptizing infants. Ware writes,

The Matthean Great Commission text, likewise, commands followers of Christ to ‘make disciples’ (aorist imperative, *mathēteusate*) through the dual means of “baptizing” them and “teaching” them (both present participles) all that Christ has commanded them. This,

⁶¹ Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1907), 306.

⁶² Bruce A. Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View,” in *Baptism: Three Views*, ed. David F. Wright, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 21.

likewise, seems to indicate that those baptized are also able to be taught—hence, they are at least young children or adults, but not infants.⁶³

Therefore, the Great Commission passage clearly assumes that the baptized and taught people are old enough and mature enough to be publicly baptized and learn about the Christian faith.

The Gospel of Matthew contains five of Christ’s inspiring sermons; the Sermon on the Mount is the longest and most researched by academics since it epitomizes Christ’s ministry.

1. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7)
2. The Sermon on Mission (Matthew 10)
3. The Sermon on the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13)
4. The Sermon on Life in the Kingdom (Matthew 18)
5. The Sermon on Judgment and Last Things (Matthew 24–25)

Christ delivered the greatest sermons because He was, and will forever be, the most influential preacher in the history of the world (Matt. 7:28–29). The divine words of Christ amazed scholars, astonished royalty, and appealed to the young and old. The Gospel of Matthew emphasizes the importance of Christ’s teaching ministry and mission by providing His sermons. In the words of one author: “Teaching has also been an important aspect of Matthew’s Christology; Jesus is portrayed as the consummate teacher (e.g., 7:28–29).”⁶⁴ Christ entrusts spiritual instruction to His followers in the same manner that Elijah gave leadership of the prophetic ministry to Elisha so that future generations may learn of God’s great power.

Believers are instructed by the Apostle Paul to “speak thou the things which become sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). The original Greek for “sound doctrine” is *hygiainō didaskalia*. To

⁶³ Ware, “Believers’ Baptism View,” 124.

⁶⁴ Jeannine K. Brown, “Matthew,” *Teach the Text Commentary Series*, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2015), 318.

paraphrase John MacArthur, our English term hygiene is derived from the Greek word *hygiainō* and carries the idea of “being well healthy.”⁶⁵ According to authors Kent R. Hughes and Bryan Chapell, passing on doctrinally sound teaching is a part of our shared spiritual heritage. Hughes and Chapell explain, “The words ‘sound doctrine’ are used by Paul to refer to the teachings passed on and approved by Christ’s apostles, teachings meant to guard and guide the church (cf. 1 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:9).”⁶⁶ Thus, we find that a consistent theme in Paul’s pastoral letters is the desire for God’s people to cling to “sound doctrine/healthy teaching” (1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:2). The world may proclaim and promote lies, silly ideas, and hollow truth, but the believer is required to defend the truth and teach the Word with spiritual integrity and vigor (1 Pet. 3:15). When sound biblical teaching is absent from the life of the church and discipleship ministry, the Great Commission becomes the great omission that results in a tremendous spiritual tragedy in the world.

Great Commission Intergenerational Discipleship

As noted above, the Great Commission is God’s command for His church to engage in spiritual warfare by fighting with the sword of the Spirit for the eternal souls of mankind (Eph. 6:10–18). A robust discipleship program that links the hearts of Christians of all ages in a powerful bond of biblical unity in the church is an impeccable strategy to counteract the spiritual influences that promote compromise, corruption, and carnality. The author defines intergenerational discipleship as intentional dialogue and interaction among the generations. The appeal emanates from Scripture as seen in the lives of various biblical characters who forged an

⁶⁵ John F. MacArthur Jr., “Titus,” *MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 71.

⁶⁶ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 324.

unbreakable bond to maximize their potential in achieving God's missional plan for their lives. Individuals like Moses and Joshua, Naomi and Ruth, Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and John all experienced intergenerational interaction while being commissioned by God to advance His kingdom purposes.

The researcher sees within the relationship between Elijah and Elisha a generational principle. The context of 2 Kings 2:1–12 makes it clear that God foretold Elijah about his departure to heaven, albeit we are never informed when or how the revelation was provided. However, according to verses 3 and 5, his departure became general knowledge among the school of prophets. The context makes it apparent that Elijah knew that his time was ending, and that the location would be Jordan. Elijah wants to mentor his friends one final time before taking the magnificent chariot ride that will usher him into the world of God's glorious kingdom. Elijah's objective is to demonstrate his respect for the students by engaging them in conversation and highlighting foundational theological concepts that will influence their future ministries.

While discussing the value of mentoring relationships, Garry Collins stated: "Often, dreams are formed, clarified, and strengthened through a relationship with a mentor. A mentor is a teacher, model, advisor, guide, sponsor, or discipler who usually is at least several years older than the young adult and experienced in the world into which the young person is entering."⁶⁷ Elijah's last days are occupied with intentional intergenerational discipleship with the students as their spiritual mentor. The prophet Samuel is believed to have founded the "schools of the prophets." However, the origins and history are uncertain. Schools were established at Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Rama (1 Samuel 19:18–24), Jericho (2 Kings 2:4–7), Gilgal (1 Samuel 10:5–10), and

⁶⁷ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 265.

maybe other locations (2 Kings 6:1-2).⁶⁸ It is safe to say that the students were probably Levites who worked in the tabernacle or with rituals associated with worship. Before departing this earth, Elijah wanted to invest in and support the future generation of prophets. Elijah deliberately brought his young protégé Elisha along with him on the journey. Elijah, as the elder prophet, is shown here mentoring the younger as the latter advances along his path toward heaven. A powerful principle is formed in this text. The principle depicts Elijah and Elisha as a model for intergenerational ministry where the younger generation is not pulling to be contemporary in worship, and the older generation is not pushing to be traditional in worship.

The essence of intergenerational relationships is echoed in the worship of the Old Testament when the psalmist David declares, “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (Ps. 145:4, KJV). Allen P. Ross notes that “This psalm of David is titled ‘A psalm of praise’—the only one in the Psalter with that title.”⁶⁹ The words of Psalms 145 exemplify the intergenerational nature of worship by proclaiming gratitude to God for His magnificent accomplishments. By elucidating Psalm 145’s incredible historical significance, Daniel J. Estes argues, “Psalm 145 has had a long liturgical history; the Babylonian Talmud states that it was to be recited three times daily. In the Jewish prayer book, it appears most frequently of all the psalms in the Psalter.”⁷⁰ Therefore, the economy of Old Testament worship serves as a sterling example of the scriptural call for worshippers of all ages to draw closer together in purposeful worship and service unto God.

⁶⁸ James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 256.

⁶⁹ Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 895.

⁷⁰ Daniel J. Estes, “Psalms 73–15,” vol. 13, *New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray. Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2019), 598.

Probing deeper into the worship details of Old Testament living, Deuteronomy 6:4–9 provides an excellent illustration of the obligation parents had to teach their children the things of God within the setting of the home. However, parents were not the only ones tasked with instilling in their children a love for God and adherence to His Word. Earlier in Deuteronomy, Moses introduced an important intergenerational process of biblical discipleship. Moses declared, “Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons’ sons” (Deut. 4:9, KJV). The obligation of this commandment is not limited to the nuclear family. Still, it encompasses the whole religious community as mentors (disciplers) who teach future generations about God’s purposes. Sarah Flannery summarized it this way, “God addresses Israel, the entire community of people. This is not parenting advice; this was ‘people of God’ advice.”⁷¹ Paul’s emphasis on caring for church members of all ages (1 Timothy 5:1–4) and how generational mentoring is necessary (Titus 2:3–5) is one way this intergenerational principle goes beyond Old Testament living and enters the New Testament teaching of the church.

Josh Mulvihill captures the essence of intergenerational ministry in his journal article by stating, “Just as the older generation has a responsibility to spiritually (*sic*) nurture younger generations, the younger generation has the responsibility to honor and care for the older generation (1 Tim. 5:1–2, 8; Lev. 19:32; Exod. 20:12).”⁷² Ministering across generations is a common theme in Paul’s writings in the New Testament. In his epistle to Timothy, for example,

⁷¹ Sarah Flannery, *Children and Family Ministry Handbook: Practical, Tested Backed by Research* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020). Chapter 1. Logos Electronic Addition.

⁷² Josh Mulvihill, “A New Way of Life for the Old,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry: Intergenerational Faithfulness* 3, no. 2 (2013): 24.

Paul exhorts Timothy to “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12, KJV). This verse demonstrates that younger individuals were expected to labor and serve in church ministry, even in positions of leadership. It must be noted that Paul uses the term “youth” in the text. Irenaeus, the famous early bishop and Christian theologian from the second century AD, defined youth and old age as follows: “But that the age of thirty years is the prime of a young man’s ability, and that it reaches even to the fortieth year, every one will allow; but after the fortieth and fiftieth year, it begins to verge towards elder age...”⁷³ Timothy had joined Paul while he was quite young (Acts 16:1–3), and even after eleven to fourteen years later (based on the date of the writing of 1 Timothy), he was still considered a youth, particularly in comparison to Paul’s age.⁷⁴ While Timothy’s exact age cannot be known, he was obviously younger than Paul and probably younger than many of his subordinates. Therefore, it is possible that Timothy began working with Paul in his late teens/early twenties and then started to care for the church in a pastoral position in his mid to late thirties. Even though he is a younger church leader, he is expected to be “an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12, KJV). It is worth repeating that the text illustrates that young people were encouraged to work and serve in church ministry, including in leadership capacities. Because of this, intergenerational discipleship is effective not just from older to younger but also, as in the example of Timothy, from younger to more senior.

⁷³ Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 554.

⁷⁴ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible: Philippians to Hebrews*, vol. 8 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 169.

Furthermore, Paul also emphasizes the importance of women in the church by charging older women with the task of discipling younger generations. Paul specifies how this should work as follows: “That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children” (Titus 2:4, KJV). Last, Paul’s intergenerational ministry is reflected in his letter to Philemon, where he refers to Onesimus, a renegade fugitive slave whom he converted to the Lord, as his “son” (Phlm. 1:10). The Apostle Paul was exemplary in his commitment to intergenerational ministry. He understood that the gospel message had value to offer people from all walks of life, regardless of age. This is why he traveled extensively on his missionary journeys throughout the Mediterranean world, preaching the good news to both Jews and Gentiles, young and old. Paul’s ministry was distinguished by his attention to the needs of the elderly and young converts, seeking to incorporate them into the body of believers as soon as possible (Titus 2:1–8).

The Old and New Testaments make it clear that intergenerational discipleship and cross-generational relationships have deep theological roots in God’s Word. One writer contends, “Our congregants need to experience healthy cross-generational fellowship in their own lives so that they may walk in the fullness of the Spirit of Christ and feel the gravity of being grafted into a people comprised of multiple socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, and generations.”⁷⁵ Instead of engaging in an either/or contentions debate, churches must focus on finding common ground between age-specific ministry and intergenerational discipleship. One author advises,

At the structural level, the church must be a community in which relational interdependence is allowed and even fostered. The church must be structured so that it

⁷⁵ Raymond Johnson, “Equipping the Generations: Cross-Generational Fellowship and the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry: Intergenerational Faithfulness* 3, no. 2 (2013): 87.

can respond to the developmental needs of persons at all lifespan stages—infants, toddlers, teens, young and middle adults, and the elderly.⁷⁶

Intergenerational reciprocity is essential in terms of spiritual formation within the church ministry. The body of Christ benefits when it actively engages in intergenerational activities; it encourages all people to use their gifts and talents, regardless of age. Things as simple as “Small groups allow and foster the development of friendships across age barriers and provide for an opportunity of reciprocity.”⁷⁷ Every effort should be made to create opportunities for this kind of connection, not just in one-off situations or special events but on an ongoing basis. In doing so, the church can create a space where all generations can come together and learn from each other’s unique perspectives and experiences.

Theoretical Foundations

Authors, Cavin Harper and Josh Mulvihill express a powerful truth as they write, “God made us relational creatures. We are made for relationship with other human beings and our Creator. He wants us to experience the blessing and strength of living in relationships where we actually practice the ‘one anothers’ of the Bible—love one another, bear one another’s burdens, exhort one another, encourage one another, build up one another.”⁷⁸ The values of the “one another” passages of the Bible come to life in the context of intergenerational discipleship by passing on one’s faith to future generations. Intergenerational discipleship is a critical

⁷⁶ Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, Second Edition., Christian Association for Psychological Studies (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 343.

⁷⁷ James M. Houston and Michael Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 158.

⁷⁸ Cavin Harper and Josh Mulvihill, *Raising Your Grandchildren (Grandparenting Matters): Encouragement and Guidance for Those Parenting Their Children’s Children* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House, 2020), 68.

component of Christian ministry and necessary for the church's long-term health. There are several methods for intergenerational discipleship, but they all strive to guarantee that the biblical faith is transmitted from generation to generation. Intergenerational ministry, like the sunshine on autumn leaves, displays the vivid multigenerational beauty and spiritual richness of cross-generation biblical discipleship.

Research on the Community of Faith

In recent years, the church's attention has been drawn to fostering intergenerational discipleship. This emphasis is based on the notion that the Christian faith is designed to be carried out in the context of a community of believers rather than as an individual matter. Cory Seibel and Malan Nel contend that research has revealed "the need to integrate the different generations intentionally (because the separation of families according to age and life stages has a direct impact on the passing on of the faith between the generations), and pragmatic ways of implementing an intergenerational ministry."⁷⁹ Holly Catterton Allen interviewed forty youngsters from two distinct religious contexts. The interviews were conducted as part of her dissertation. The first group was made up of intergenerational churches where children gathered regularly in small generational groups. The second category consisted of non-intergenerational congregations where children were separated by age. Questions were asked to the kids, such as: "What about that person makes you think they know God? What does it mean to know God? Do you know God?"⁸⁰ Additional questions were posed, and based on the responses, Allen offered the following analysis of the interviews:

⁷⁹ Cory Seibel and Malan Nel, *The Generative Church: Global Conversations about Investing in Emerging Generations* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2019). 136.

⁸⁰ Holly Catterton Allen, *Forming Resilient Children: The Role of Spiritual Formation for Healthy Development* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2021), 83.

Children in both settings (intergenerational and non-intergenerational) spoke of prayer frequently, said they knew God, and described knowing God similarly. However, the children from the intergenerational settings were more aware of their relationship with God—that is, a larger number of them spoke more frequently and exhibited relationality in more of their discussions of prayer than did the children from non-intergenerational settings.⁸¹

The family should be the primary locus for passing on the truth of Scripture. Parents and grandparents should take an active role in teaching and modeling the Christian life for children and grandchildren. If the church fails to fulfill its responsibility as a community of cross-generational believers, a navigational strategy aimed at generational spiritual socialization must be implemented to establish a resilient congregation. According to authors Edward H. Hammett, Paul L. Anderson, and Cornell Thomas, people are living longer. They claim, “For the first time in history, most churches face the challenge of ministering to five or more generations at one time.”⁸² This means that the church is on diversity overload. The church should strive for unity amid diversity. When people generationally come together, they can learn from each other and grow as a community. Unity is more than having similar beliefs; it is about engaging with different people and learning to appreciate one another despite differences. Diversity should encourage conversation, understanding, and acceptance, which leads to a vibrant church environment of acceptance and belonging.

Intergenerational Research and Youth Ministry Practices

Intergenerational ministry is receiving much attention, although it is not a new ministry approach. A few researchers blazed new ground during the previous two decades, but mainstream scholars overlooked their contributions. In the past, youth ministry often operated in

⁸¹ Allen, *Forming Resilient Children*, 83.

⁸² Edward H. Hammett, Paul L. Anderson, and Cornell Thomas, *Reaching People Under 30 While Keeping People over 60: Creating Community Across Generations*, First Edition. (Danvers, MA: TCP, 2015), 38.

silos, excluding adults. The church often sought out younger leaders to work with young people in isolated environments. However, a different emphasis on youth ministry emerged and was captured in Wayne Rice's 1989 book, *Up Close and Personal: How to Build Community in Your Youth Group*. After giving Rice's study a careful and thorough examination, Chap Clark concluded that "Rice's thinking, which still pervades youth ministry today, is that being a follower of Christ is not a solitary journey but a communal one. This was a major step forward for understanding a theology of discipleship. Community matters."⁸³ When it comes to helping one another grow in their faith, discipleship across generations is among the most powerful methods to strengthen the church's dynamic. Chap Clark continued by saying, "In churches where parent and child relationships are being encouraged and strengthened and where older generations are more connected to emerging generations, the youth ministry itself has become healthier, and deeper faith among the young is often a result."⁸⁴

Research from the field of Sociology of Religion

Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton claim that researchers in the field of sociology of religion have discovered that religious groups play a significant role in helping people to exhibit their faith. Christian Smith, a sociologist, has argued persuasively for the value of congregations that welcome people of all ages and stages of life. Smith interviewed 267 teens for the National Study of Youth and Religion. The teens shared their experiences, but one story stuck with Smith more than the others. Kristen, a sixteen-year-old girl, was devastated to learn that her father had taken his own life. However, her mother was determined to point the kids to Christ in their season of grief. As a result, they became deeply involved in the life of the

⁸³ Clark, *Adoptive Church*, 64.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

church, and Kristen took on various responsibilities serving in the church intergenerationally with others. She loved her adult teachers at school and had a connection with the older generation at church. Smith's interview with Kristen was recounted by authors Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton, who came to the following conclusion:

Kristen's story illustrates some of the key features of religious socialization...deep involvement with a faith community, regular spiritual practices with others in the community, strong community relationships (with family, peers, and nonparental adults), congruent lifestyle with beliefs and values of the community...a cross-generational group of believing people uniquely fosters healthy spiritual growth and development among its constituents.⁸⁵

It should be noted that when studying the role of religious socialization in shaping religious and spiritual beliefs, values, and practices, sociological studies of religion find their closest point of intersection with studies of intergenerational relationships.⁸⁶

Conclusion

In sum, there is much more to learn about the practical manifestations of intergenerational discipleship in the life of the church. But the present data show a rising propensity toward actual implementation rather than age-based segregation. There are many positive outcomes from ministering across generations. Research studies demonstrate that this practice may help ease tensions between various age groups, foster friendships, and provide doors for mentoring and discipleship. Furthermore, intergenerational ministries may assist churches in serving their members and community. This paper's purpose is to address Parkway Baptist's lack intergenerational spiritual socialization opportunities that lead to generational discipleship, resulting in a spiritually detached culture among the members. Therefore, this

⁸⁵ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 123.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

DMIN action research project aims to develop a biblically sound intergenerational discipleship strategy to move Parkway Baptist closer to the Elijah/Elisha principle of discipleship. If biblical discipleship between all generations mediates spiritual socialization, Parkway Baptist will demonstrate the Elijah/Elisha principle by developing a biblically balanced intergenerational discipleship model that will set it apart from many other ministries.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Parkway Baptist's multigenerational ministry model has operated for many years in a world where the intergenerational model rules the day. Hence, it is critical to clarify what a multigenerational ministry model means. Here it means that no matter what stage of life someone is in, members will find a peer group place to belong at Parkway Baptist. The challenge with this conventional practice is that it creates silos within the church leading to a compartmentalized method of ministering exclusively based on peer group environments. This compartmentalized method of ministering can be beneficial, but it can also lead to isolation and the lack of a genuine connection between generations. Churches need to remember that all members are part of one body in Christ, regardless of age (1 Corinthians 12:12). On the other hand, intergenerational ministry brings the ages together into spiritual socialization that improves the spiritual health and vitality of the church. Therefore, the author's research methodology was developed to address the problem raised in the first chapter; more specifically: Parkway Baptist lacks intergenerational spiritual socialization opportunities that have produced a culture of spiritual detachment among the members. Therefore, Parkway Baptist church is the focus of this action research intervention. Interviews with participants formed the basis for gathering data for the intervention strategy. Additionally, surveys revealed whether people were more interested in age-specific or generational ministry environments. The author's study focuses on qualitative research.

Intervention Design

The intervention design created a learning and sharing environment where intergenerational discipleship, mentoring, and spiritual socialization occurred. The intervention went far beyond the typical church potluck gathering, where members eat, clean up, and go home afterward. Instead, the objective of the intervention fostered biblical fellowship in the context of a faith community through intentional interaction and meaningful conversation cross-generationally. Therefore, since spiritual socialization was mediated by biblical discipleship between all generations, Parkway Baptist exemplified the Elijah/Elisha principle defined in Chapter 1 and explicated in the theological section of Chapter 2 that produced a biblically balanced intergenerational discipleship model.

Method for the Research

This project utilized action research. This research is more than simply gathering and evaluating data; it is also about taking action to expose issues, enhance practice, challenge presumptions, and give data for colleagues to assess within their social context. Action research was the method that helped the researcher to create new techniques and approaches that better served the needs of people and environments researched. This was accomplished by gathering and analyzing data, running an intervention, and evaluating that data. The data was obtained using various methods, including interviewing participants at different points. While working with participants, Ernest T. Stringer says, “[W]e need to ensure that information is gained directly from the participants and is not tainted by the perspectives, biases, or experiences of research facilitators. When we frame research questions for interviews or questionnaires, for instance, we need to be very careful that we do not inadvertently incorporate our own views or

ideas.”¹ Therefore, the interview questions were not leading or loaded with the researcher’s presumptions. The questions were constructed to allow participants to express their thoughts without fear or hesitation. While action research can be time-consuming, the benefits of using this method to improve awareness and learning were well worth the investment. There are a few reasons for this action. First, since action research is typically conducted within a community or organization, those who are part of that group are more likely to be directly affected by the findings. For example, if the Parkway Baptist action research study leads to improved operations for a ministry, the members of that congregation will personally benefit from the reforms discovered through the research. Second, participants in action research often have a substantial personal stake in the study’s outcome. Parkway Baptist was affected by the issue the study attempted to address and benefitted from a successful resolution. Last, the members of Parkway Baptist, rather than the researcher, gained the most from the study’s findings. It allowed them to think more biblically about intergenerational discipleship. Thus, in the context of Parkway Baptist, the return on the investment of action research improved spiritual socialization, generated discipleship through mentorship, and fostered an intergenerational church culture.

Participants

The eligibility of all who were interviewed was based on their active membership of Parkway Baptist for at least six months or more. These adult congregants were selected because they have membership longevity and can offer input on the church’s efforts to develop intergenerational engagement. Some participants were selected to participate in a mixed-age focus group. A minimum of four or five and a maximum of ten participants was desired for the

¹ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*. Available from: Liberty University Online Bookshelf, (4th Edition). SAGE Publications, Inc. (US), 2013. 101.

focus group meetings. A maximum of one hour was allotted for the focus group session. Since some participants requested a Zoom video conference for the sake of convenience, an interview was held virtually. However, the researcher favored in-person meetings to see the facial expressions of participants and level of enthusiasm for the topic at hand. To maintain integrity and to stay above reproach, female participants were never interviewed alone with the researcher; instead, they were always accompanied by their spouse or other people (Romans 14:16). Interviews were scheduled to meet members' weekly schedules. The participants were divided into four groups based on age ranges and stages of life, as shown in figure 3.1.



Figure 3.1. Participant's age for action research

When meeting with participants, the researcher was mindful that these individuals lead real lives. Just because they agreed to be interviewed does not obligate them to divulge every detail of their lives. Each person's right to privacy was respected, and the researcher did not make unnecessary intrusions into their lives.

With deacon approval, recruitment for participants in the action research project was announced during the morning Sunday service at Parkway Baptist. The researcher briefly

introduced the project and gave a heartfelt “thank you” for considering participating. Plus, a message was sent to the church to announce recruitment for volunteers who would like to participate in the research survey. To facilitate the recruitment of willing participants for interviews, focus groups, and surveys, a QR code was created and posted on the church volunteer board, as shown in Appendix C. The QR code is linked to a registration form where willing participants register all their contact information. The information is populated through Planning Center, a software program designed to organize data and send reminders for interview meetings.

Permissions

At present, Parkway Baptist has seven men serving in the role of deacon. As of this writing, the oldest deacon is 92 years old and was born on October 9, 1930, while the youngest is 43 and was born on October 16, 1979. This group is a wonderful illustration of what a healthy intergenerational connection in the ministry should look like. The deacons of Parkway have an intergenerational leadership bond that promotes mentoring and discipleship, unlike Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, highlighted in Chapter 1, who did not share a mentoring relationship during critical issues pertaining to the nation.

As shown in Appendix E, the chairman of the deacons of Parkway Baptist approved the research project to be carried out at Parkway Baptist. In addition, the congregation of Parkway Baptist has offered prayer and support in completing the research project, and the staff has partnered with the researcher in prayer as the research is worked.

Hybrid Model of Small Group and Sunday School

Sunday school has been around for quite some time. Robert Raikes (1725–1811), an evangelical Anglican from England, was a major proponent of the Sunday school movement to

educate children. Some even argue that Raikes was the founder of Sunday schools.² There is a lot of enthusiasm about Sunday school, and with good reason: it is an excellent experience for kids and adults alike. In addition to learning about God’s love and salvation plan for mankind, Sunday school is designed to impart important values and morals in the heart of children.

Children learn about vital topics such as honesty, kindness, respect, prayer, and worship through stories, songs, and other activities. These are lifelong values that can serve them well. Elmer Towns argues that “Sunday School is not an agency separate or apart from the Church but is, perhaps, the best-structured agency in the local church for carrying out most effectively the teaching ministry of Christ.”³ Sunday school is an excellent place for kids to begin exploring their spirituality and experience God’s love through the affection and kindness that Sunday school teachers shower on each child.

It can be argued that Sunday school is an integral part of the church experience for many believers. But what do you do when the salt of Sunday school loses its zesty flavor? A weakness in Sunday school is highlighted by one author who says, “Sometimes, half the hour is taken up with fellowship and prayer requests. Unprepared leaders rush through the lesson. The discussion can be awkward, the curriculum can be shallow, or the leader might deliver a long and boring lecture without leaving any room for discussion and personal engagement of the truths being presented.”⁴ But despite its flaws, Sunday school helps foster spiritual growth and intergenerational cooperation when done right. However, some will argue that Sunday school is

² Samuel Macauley Jackson, ed., *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge: Embracing Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology and Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Biography from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New York; London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1908–1914), 383.

³ Elmer L. Towns, *What Every Sunday School Teacher Should Know* (Ventura, CA: Regal; Gospel Light, 2001), 41.

⁴ Trevin Wax, “Sunday School and Its Rivals,” *9Marks Journal* (2012): 22.

used more for church growth than producing transformed lives. According to Ed Stetzer, Sunday school has lost sight of its original purpose, and he thinks this can be seen by looking at the institution's historical background. Stetzer said, "From their inception around 1780, Sunday schools existed for the sake of cultural and personal transformation. The first Sunday schools were parachurch organizations. So no church growth agenda drove the beginnings of the movement."⁵ In the current form, Stetzer claims that Sunday school is led by professionals who teach a dwindling percentage of churchgoers with fewer volunteers of gifted lay leadership and, hence, less involvement in a faith community.⁶ The author argues that creating a hybrid paradigm that combines small group dynamics with Sunday school instruction is preferable to outright banning any form of Sunday school. Thus, the intervention strategy incorporated the best practice of Sunday school and small groups into a hybrid model (seen in fig. 3.2.). Discipleship emphasized the Elijah/Elisha concept described in Chapter 2 by connecting, teaching, and transforming the educational atmosphere of the church and the lives of members.

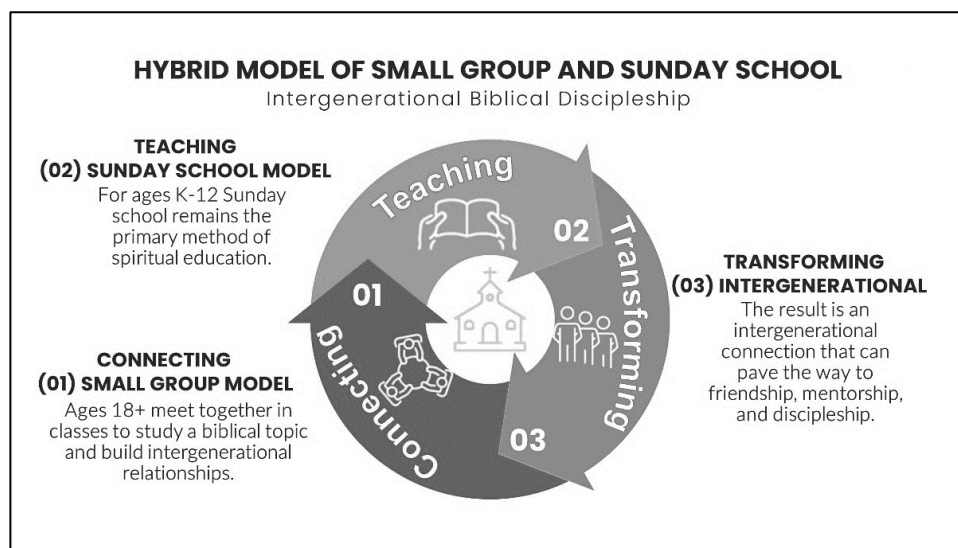


Figure 3.2. Hybrid model of small group and Sunday school

⁵ Ed Stetzer, "Why Sunday School Lost Its Edge," *9Marks Journal* (2012): 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

One reason the age-segregated ministry model is not an idyllic church practice is that it isolates people of different ages. This may result in tension and conflict instead of unity and acceptance. In the worst circumstances, different age groups compete against one another. Authors Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother reported that one unintended consequence of age-segregated ministry was that “Members from one generation rarely saw members of another generation, and different generations certainly were not growing together spiritually. In some cases, ministries to different age groups were competing for space, resources, and attention.”⁷ Creating ministry silos in the church restricts the potential for intergenerational connections and cooperation. In addition, people separated by age lose out on the crucial insight and experience that others may provide. Therefore, given the age-based segregated nature of the adult Sunday school ministry, the intervention plan phased down the age-specific educational ministry, starting with those in college and older, as seen in figure 3.3.

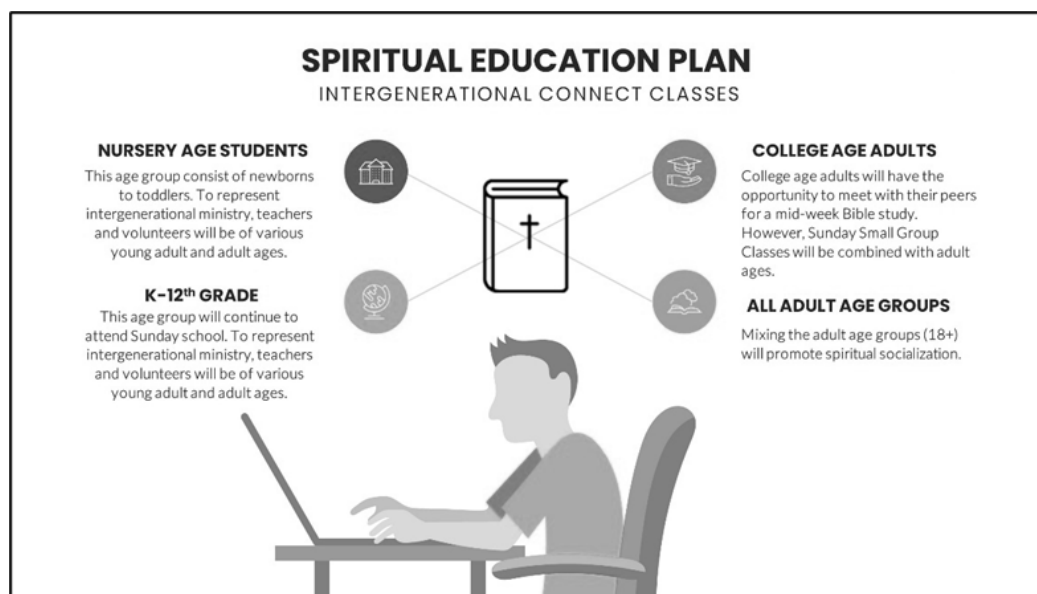


Figure 3.3. Spiritual education plan

⁷ Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother, *Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 146.

Students eighteen and older were placed in educational environments where intentional dialogue, learning, and interaction occurred cross-generationally. Peer-related classes, such as those on raising families, getting married, being a grandparent, or dealing with grief, were included in the rotation. The hybrid model worked by integrating some of the best characteristics of Sunday school and small groups to maximize educational potential and better fulfill the objective of becoming an intergenerational ministry and a faith community of members, staff, and lay leadership. To do this, K-12 remained in the traditional Sunday school model. However, K-12 volunteers and teachers were recruited from a mixture of young adult and adult age groups, creating an intergenerational environment for kids and teachers. Since Sunday school has been a cornerstone of Parkway Baptist's educational ministry for the past 47 years, a delicate approach will allow flexibility. For example, a long-running women's Sunday school class remained and will continue to do so until the members decide to dissolve. This choice was made so that the intergenerational method would have time to marinate in the minds of everyone who experiences the difference it can make rather than being forced upon them.

All courses strived for intergenerational connection in all areas. However, that is not to say that all age-specific environments were unproductive. The author concurs with Eric Mathis, who wrote, "While I advocate for intergenerational worship and activities, I am not denying that age-specific ministries are vital, necessary, and can contribute to the spiritual well-being of all ages, particularly teenagers."⁸ While most classes met on Sunday mornings from 9:30 to 10:15 a.m., there were also weekday and monthly class options. Midweek youth ministry for students in grades 6-12 and college-level classes were offered each week. The student-age ministries

⁸ Eric L. Mathis, *Worship with Teenagers: Adolescent Spirituality and Congregational Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), 9.

provided intergenerational opportunities for mentorship and discipleship. Parkway Baptist considers this crucial, as many youth and young adults in the United States are lost to worldly influences pushing them away from the church. David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins made a soul-stirring observation when they wrote,

Young adults describe their individual faith journeys in startlingly similar language. Most of their stories include significant disengagement from church—and sometimes from Christianity altogether. But it is not just dropping out that they have in common. Many young people who grew up in church and have since dropped out do not hesitate to place blame. They point the finger, fairly or not, at the establishment: *you lost me*.⁹

Thom Rainer believes local churches struggle to relate to the community and the youth. Rainer warns, “While some peg this irrelevance as the major underlying factor of declining churches, we believe that it is merely symptomatic of a much greater issue: the church is no longer essential to people’s lives. Unless a dramatic change occurs, the American church will continue down the same path as the European church, which is all but dead.”¹⁰ While it is true that naysayers will persist no matter what the church does, the church should avoid fueling the fire by failing to disciple the next generation of students. Through the intervention of intergenerational discipleship, Parkway Baptist extended a lifeline of discipleship before dropouts decided to swim in the deep waters of worldly pleasure.

Rotation of Teachers

In the model most often used for Sunday schools, the teachers remain in position indefinitely. Additionally, in contrast to the skilled laity leadership inside the church, professional personnel often teach on Sundays, as indicated by Ed Stetzer above. For the most

⁹ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church. . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 9.

¹⁰ Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church? Reclaiming a Generation of Dropouts* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010). 8.

part, the only way someone leaves a teaching position is if they retire, resign, or are called home by the Lord. The issue with having permanent teachers is that it prevents others with the spiritual gift of teaching from ever having the chance to do so. To use sports terminology, they stay on the bench and never get into the game. As writers Charles Swindoll and Roy Zuck eloquently put it, “Each Christian has at least one spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:11), though no one has all the spiritual gifts (Rom. 12:6). We are responsible to God and fellow believers to exercise our spiritual gifts.”¹¹ Although individual Christians ultimately must make the most of their spiritual gift, the intervention provided members of Parkway Baptist with an appropriate outlet for doing so. The collaborative work of Jack O. Balswick, Judith K. Balswick, and Thomas V. Frederick suggests that “The church must create (or re-create) roles for all its members. Working together as multigenerational teams (young and old) to focus on spiritual formation, worship, hospitality, peace, justice, and so on is a good example of using a diversity of gifts (differentiation) to serve the whole body.”¹² Therefore, when the intervention framework was implemented, younger and older spiritually gifted lay teachers and staff members shared their knowledge, strengthened their faith, and developed an atmosphere of spiritual socialization in their classrooms.

The intervention strategy rotated qualified teachers every ten weeks, around five rotations a year. In addition to instructor rotation, students rotated by selecting a ten-week class of their choice. There were three distinct stages to this procedure (week one: meet and greet; weeks two-nine: lesson teaching; and week ten: sharing what has been learned). In the initial meeting, the instructor and the students introduced themselves to one another. The meet and greet time

¹¹ Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 1065.

¹² Jack O. Balswick, Judith K. Balswick, and Thomas V. Frederick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 340.

sparked intergenerational dialogue, spiritual socialization, and emphasized the Elijah/Elisha principle explained in Chapter 2. The instructor followed by summarizing the learning outcomes for the remaining weeks.

The project required teachers and instructors to complete a teacher questionnaire, as seen in Appendix C. Course content was determined by the teacher but was sanctioned by the senior pastor. The approval process began after the instructor submitted a Course Teaching Request (CTR) form, as shown in Appendix B. Once the pastor reviewed the CTR and approved it, the course became a part of the rotation.

Rotating the teachers was an essential part of the intervention plan. Therefore, unlike the Sunday school paradigm, which locks in a fixed group of teachers, the intervention plan built a team of teachers of varying ages who were spiritually qualified to expound on God's Word. As a result of recruiting a teaching team, older and younger teachers were given the opportunity to present theological presentations about pressing social problems with scriptural remedies from their respective biblical worldviews and understanding of Scripture. One writer said,

The most effective way to teach and lead is by example. If the teacher is well prepared and enthusiastic about the lesson, that excitement will carry over to the pupils. If the lesson taught does not follow their action, then that truth will not be discovered. The teacher must know the message—but, more than that, the teacher must *be* the message.¹³

The teaching team met with the senior pastor at various times to discuss theological topics to explore, implement, and assign teaching objectives. The team members took on the role of accountability partners to ensure that teaching integrity and doctrinal consistency were upheld. This was done in a concerted effort to maintain the highest standards of excellence in the educational environment.

¹³ John Mark Terry, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson, *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 555.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

This section provides a comprehensive account of the intervention’s implementation, including the organization of intergenerational learning environments, digital registration for classes, the generational rotation of teachers, the management of intergenerational outreach, the implementation of study courses, and the collection of qualitative data. Tim Sensing said, “The central purpose of the methodological chapter in your thesis is to describe to readers how the research was accomplished.”¹⁴ Collecting qualitative data is essential in researching because it allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of their focus community than would be possible with only quantitative data.

Intergenerational Learning Environments

The Connect classes created by the researcher offer a ten-week biblical class designed to foster intergenerational connection and faith community-building. People over 18 were encouraged to join a Connect class. By starting at 18, adult church members across different generations formed connections with each other by sharing their faith and knowledge. Each Connect class followed a topic selected by the teacher and approved by the pastor, covering many theological topics. The sessions are informal yet intentional, with conversations guided by the teacher. The teacher had the liberty to choose a variety of formats utilizing PowerPoint, videos, or simply lecturing. The class time for Connect classes was 45 minutes. At the end of each session, the teacher provided a talking point and students were encouraged to ask questions and share their thoughts about the subject. Class discussions provided a platform for open dialogue, spiritual socializing, and mutual learning.

¹⁴ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 62.

By connecting different generations through shared faith-based experiences, Connect classes provided a unique opportunity to foster generational connection through the medium of shared biblical observations. Through the sharing of personal experiences and stories, members were able to cultivate meaningful relationships with one another. This approach was highly effective in establishing deep connections and lasting bonds between individuals. Such an environment was essential in building authentic connections between different generations, enabling individuals to understand each other better and become more unified as a faith community. One author tells the story of a young adult who longs for intergenerational opportunities. He said, “As a 29-year-old, I want a small group led by a 45-year-old with 60-year-olds and 15-year-olds and both genders. I want to learn from a high school freshman and an 80-year-old grandmother and everyone in between.”¹⁵ Discipleship and mentorship can flourish when environments are created for people to share their faith and confidence in God’s Word. The Connect classes are essential to the researcher’s goal of creating meaningful intergenerational relationships. Through the Connect classes, individuals united to build a stronger, more interconnected faith community. In addition, participants gained knowledge through biblical studies and benefited from forming unique bonds generationally. Thus, the Connect classes were an excellent way for individuals from young emerging adults to older adults to learn from each other, develop relationships, and foster a sense of community. Ivy Beckwith said, “It is shameful that the generations are so separated in our churches. And it is even more of a shame that most churchgoers in this country seem to prefer it this way. Those of us interested in facilitating the spiritual nurture of children need to think seriously and intentionally about how we can bring our

¹⁵ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and B. Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016), 175.

churches more in line with God’s ideal of a covenantal community of faith.”¹⁶ The Connect classes are thus an excellent way for individuals, from young emerging adults to older adults, to learn from each other, develop relationships, and foster a sense of community.

Digital Registration for Classes

The researcher organized the registration links for Connect Classes on the church website to make it easier for students to find important information about each class. The website is designed by Monk Development and powered by Ekklesia360. The registration program is called Planning Center, a church management system. At a glance, students can easily see the topic of each class, along with details about the teacher and how to register for the class, as seen in figure 3.4. Therefore, students interested in attending a class easily registered online through the church website without signing up physically at the church Welcome Center. However, the Welcome Center at Parkway Baptist was the perfect place for those without internet access to register for a class. An assigned staff member assisted individuals in registering and enrolling in a class appropriate for their needs. The staff member answered any questions about attending a class and how to get started. Furthermore, to ensure that no one class received the majority of students, each class was limited to 30 students. When a class reached its maximum capacity, Planning Center automatically disabled further registrations. However, no one was turned away who did not register.

¹⁶ Ivy Beckwith, *Formational Children’s Ministry (ēmerision: Emergent Village Resources for Communities of Faith)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 141–42.

The management system allows for efficient registration organization and ensures that all classes remain at optimal size. Using this effective registration system, the researcher successfully organized the church's Connect classes, making it easier for students to find and sign up for the classes that interest them. Furthermore, online registration provides a convenient link that teachers can share via email or text, making it easy for potential students to find and join a class. With the digital registration system, teachers can quickly increase student enrollment by sharing the link with minimal effort. The first registration landed 210 participants cross-generationally 18 and older. The younger generations continued with the traditional Sunday school system in their learning environment.

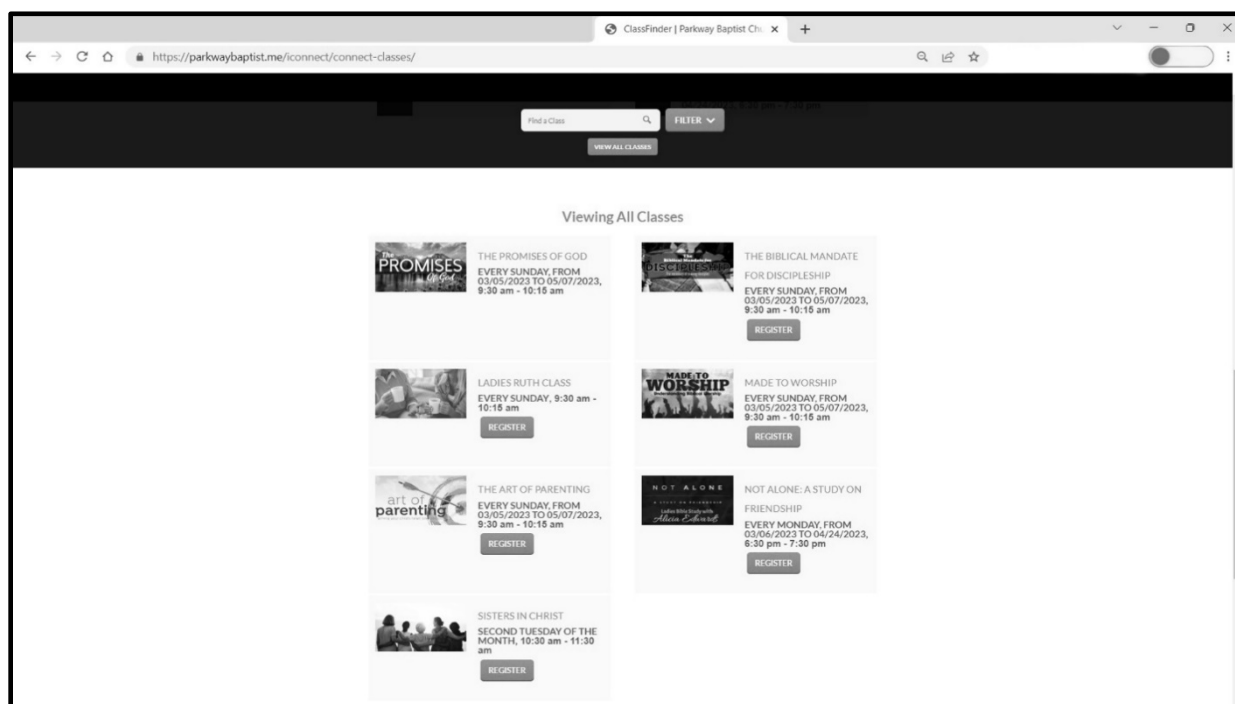


Figure 3.4. Parkway Baptist connect web page for class registration

Generational Rotation of Teachers

The Connect class instructors represented an intergenerational model, with a wide range of ages among the teachers. The current teaching team consists of 20 people aged 26 to 84.

Combining various ages brings incredible diversity and perspective to the classes. Every teacher had their own unique and valuable knowledge to share. The younger teachers brought enthusiasm, energy, and fresh ideas to the group, while the older teachers supplied years of experience, wisdom, and insights. The combination of youthful exuberance and seasoned skills made the Connect teaching team unique. Participants in the Connect classes benefitted from the collective knowledge of the diverse cohort of instructors. The diversity of ages among the teachers was an invaluable asset, as it allowed Parkway Baptist to create an environment that promoted learning, growth, and generational understanding. Furthermore, building relationships and empowering church members to interact generationally while demonstrating mutual respect and learning from one another further strengthened intergenerational collaboration.

Rotating teachers within the church was essential to utilizing those with the spiritual gift of teaching. Believers with the spiritual gift of teaching were given the opportunity to use their gifts. When churches have a rotation system, each gifted teacher can use their talents, skills, and knowledge to instruct members about God's Word and how it applies today. Rotating teachers at Parkway Baptist kept the teaching atmosphere fresh and provided a variety of perspectives to consider. Moreover, rotating teachers opened the way to explore new ideas and approaches, which can help prevent stagnation in the church's growth and development. Therefore, rotating teachers was essential to maintaining a healthy church life and educational growth at Parkway Baptist. Rotating teachers also created an atmosphere of community within the church. Therefore, encountering various instructors cultivates more profound bonds within the congregation as members learn and progress collectively.

Management of Intergenerational Outreach

While intergenerational ministry is an excellent way to grow a ministry, it should not be overlooked that peer group interaction is also critical for establishing a healthy church. One writer said, “We do need each other. God intended it that way. He made us to be in relationship with him and with each other. Much of our growth is dependent on the quality of such relationships. These can often be best built within the context of small groups of committed Christians.”¹⁷ The researcher established a ministry called Focus InReach to allow peer groups to engage with one another and build relationships. The Focus InReach ministry encourages peers to build relationships with one another while also deepening their faith through discipleship opportunities and activities. This ministry is an attempt to satisfy the desire of peer groups to meet for discipleship and spiritual socialization. An opportunity for peer group socialization is there, but participants will have to take the initiative to connect. Through this program, church leaders fostered an environment in which peer groups enjoyed a fulfilling atmosphere of spiritual socialization. The Focus InReach is designed to be a faith-filled and fun opportunity for peers to come together, build relationships with one another, and at the same time, learn more about becoming closer to God. The researcher implemented a leader who selected a committee to work with to form a budget, plan activities, and promote opportunities.

The Implementation of Study Courses

Each instructor diligently curated the course subjects for the ten-week program. Once the CTR (Course Teaching Request) form was submitted and approved, eager students were free to register and commence their educational expedition when the course was posted. Teachers were

¹⁷ Steve Barker, *Good Things Come in Small Groups: The Dynamics of Good Group Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 13.

asked to consider their intergenerational audience and the goals they hoped to achieve when choosing course content. The pastor and teacher discussed the content of each course to ensure the teaching aligned with the church's vision and the truth of Scripture. While some of the courses are designed by the teacher based on the teacher's wisdom, experience, and handling of God's Word, others were at liberty to use outside sources such as videos, books, and study guides. Furthermore, teachers were asked to avoid teaching topics that cause contention and endless debate, as well as those that do not provide meaningful insight into the Bible. Exposition of the Bible is expected to take place within its proper historical, grammatical, and theological framework, with practical application offered and intentionally discussed.

The Collection of Qualitative Data

The collection of qualitative data is an essential process for conducting research. It involves gathering and analyzing information gathered through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The data helped the researcher to understand the perspectives and experiences of individuals within the study population of Parkway Baptist. Tim Sensing said, "Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the complicated mass of qualitative data that the researcher generates during the research process."¹⁸ In order to collect qualitative data effectively, a few key steps were necessary. First, the researcher identified the research problem and developed a plan for collecting the data. Next, the researcher selected the appropriate method(s) for gathering participant information, such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Last, the researcher analyzed the collected data to draw meaningful conclusions.

¹⁸ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 194.

Conclusion

In sum, it is essential to acknowledge that this implementation is the first step of an ongoing process. It is crucial to approach these issues from a biblical and pragmatic standpoint, considering the spiritual and practical implications. Ultimately, this approach will enable Parkway Baptist to navigate intergenerational discipleship with greater clarity and wisdom.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

As has been posited throughout this action research thesis, embracing the premise of the Elisha/Elijah principle will bring the body of Christ together generationally for maximum biblical discipleship opportunities at Parkway Baptist. However, some Parkway Baptist members maintain that the best way to teach and disciple people is to separate people by age. Therefore, this action research thesis aims to demonstrate the need for influential cohesiveness in a biblical worldview of ministry that dissuades a silo discipleship mentality. Through an examination of Scripture, it was shown that God plans to create a unified body of Christ in which members cooperate and work together in reciprocal love (1 Corinthians 12:12). It was also shown that the Elisha/Elijah principle enables all generations to come alongside one another and share a common vision of discipleship. Additionally, intergenerational discipleship's potential for broadening ministry horizons, enlightening perspectives, and strengthening generational fellowship is a worthy spiritual pursuit. By implementing the principles discussed herein, Parkway Baptist can create a more unified body of believers with maximum generational impact.

As the biblical Elisha and Elijah taught us, it is possible to learn to share our gifts and find a joint mission in Christ from one another regardless of age or experience. With this understanding, Christians can disciple a unified family of believers to work together to advance God's kingdom here on earth. Christians are God's chosen spiritual witnesses for the gospel, motivated by a spiritual desire to honor Christ, and intergenerational discipleship is a physical manifestation of God's love in the world. Thus, this action research thesis is based on the

premise that understanding and implementing the Elijah/Elisha principle will help people see how vital intergenerational ministry is to biblical discipleship.

Survey Participant Demographic

The participants claim church membership with 52.48% attending for more than 11 years or longer. Membership includes trusting Christ as Savior, following the Lord in baptism, and adhering to the Baptist faith and practice. The researcher agrees with the opinions of authors John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, who said, “To neglect—or refuse—to join a church as a formal member, however, reflects a misunderstanding of the believer’s responsibility to the body of Christ. And it also cuts one off from the many blessings and opportunities that flow from this commitment.”¹ The Bible is evident that believers are communally interdependent and should seek like-minded people with whom to assemble (2 Tim. 2:22). Church membership encompasses more than just congregating with individuals who share similar beliefs. It entails assuming the duty to assist and encourage the broader community of Christ—the Church (Eph. 1:22-23). When someone becomes a part of a local church, they take on the responsibility of supporting and serving the community of believers, as well as contributing to financial support for missions across the globe. The writer of Hebrews emphatically said, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:25, KJV). It is hard to imagine how this instruction could be fulfilled apart from formal church membership.

¹ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 797.

AGE RANGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS		
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 18	0.00%	0
18-24	3.96%	4
25-34	12.87%	13
35-44	19.80%	20
45-54	14.85%	15
55-64	17.82%	18
65+	30.69%	31
TOTAL		101

Figure 4.1. Survey question 2

Church Survey Data Ministry Approach

Data from the church survey consisted of 101 participants who answered a confidential survey of 36 questions. The male respondents totaled 32.67%, and the female participants totaled 67.33% with 82.18% reporting as married. Approximately 51.48% were between 18 and 54, while 48.51% were 55 and older. The survey asked participants to rate their level of agreement or disagreement about intergenerational interest, along with some multiple-choice questions. One question asked participants to define four different approaches to ministry. The four approaches, as seen in figure 4.2. are as follows: *Multigenerational* (Something for everyone based on age-specific learning environments); *Intergenerational* (Cross-generational learning environments); *Attractional* (Ministry based on events, concerts, revivals, conferences, etc.); and *Missional* (Focusing on age-specific outreach efforts). Each type of ministry has its strengths and weaknesses, so it is essential to assess the needs of the congregation and determine which kind of ministry will be most beneficial.

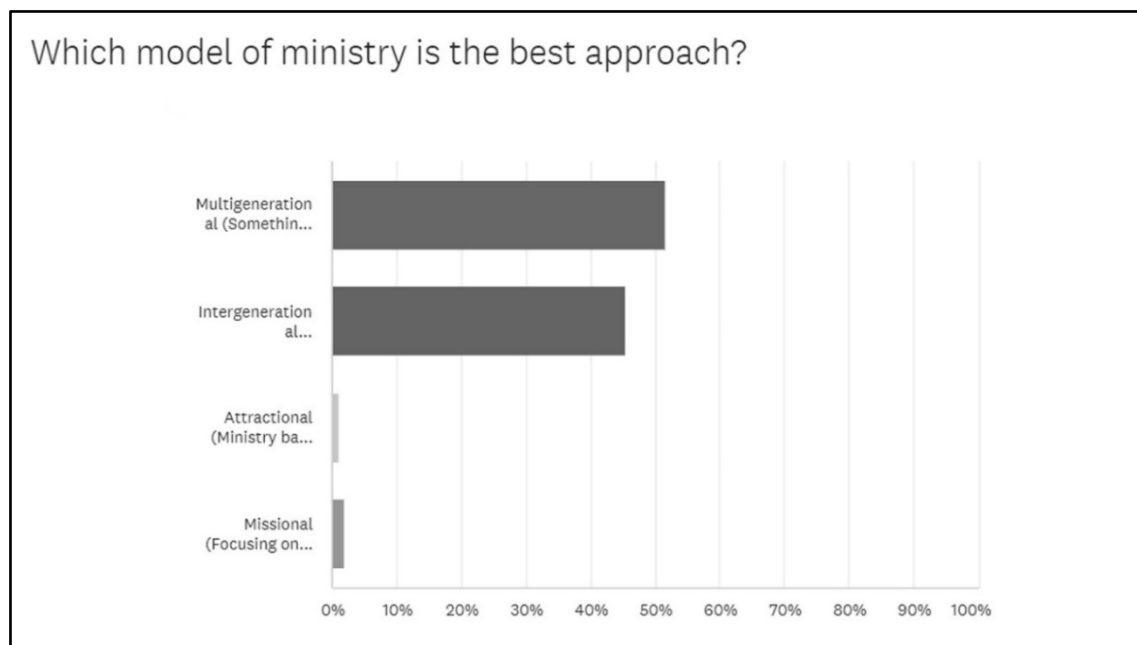


Figure 4.2. Survey question 6

The multigenerational strategy was the largest, with 51.52%, followed closely by the intergenerational approach with 45.45%. The other two options represented only 3% of respondents. This provides excellent insight into the mindset at Parkway Baptist. Approaches such as the multigenerational and intergenerational strategies typify how Parkway Baptist desires to engage with its members. With a large percentage of the congregation indicating they prefer these two models, it is clear that deepening relationships between members of different generations is a priority. Members hope to foster a strong sense of trust and mutual respect between parishioners from diverse backgrounds. Members would like the church's ministry to expand and provide meaningful fellowship. However, according to the data, members surveyed want to foster educational development in environments tailored to various ages, as seen in figure 4.2. The survey findings shed light on the analysis by showing a slight majority agrees with the age-segregated ministry, as seen in figure 4.3. However, the neutrality of 31% and opposition of 19% suggest there is room for diversity at Parkway. Therefore, it is essential that

the leadership engage in thoughtful dialogue about these issues and seriously weigh the pros and cons while spending time in prayer before choosing a long-term course of action.

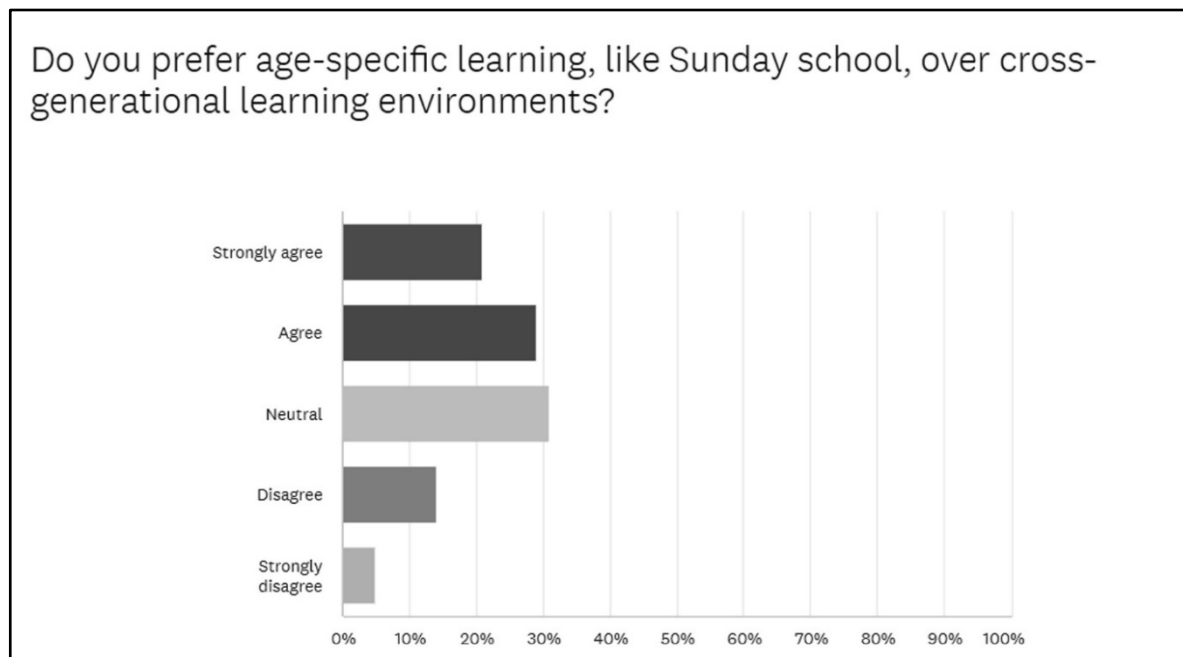


Figure 4.3. Survey question 31

Parkway Baptist wants to bridge the gap between its different generations so that each group can connect and form a stronger faith community. The data shows that respondents believe that intergenerational ministry can break down generational barriers, with 66% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the implication of intergenerational reciprocity (see fig. 4.4.). Also, 68.31% agree that an intergenerational approach is worth pursuing (see fig. 4.5.). To this end, Parkway Baptist has revealed their desire to promote intergenerational ministry. Their aim is to create opportunities for various age groups to engage in significant ways through worship services, small groups, special events, and service projects. Their purpose is to foster interaction and build connections between members of different generations, ultimately deepening their understanding and appreciation for one another.

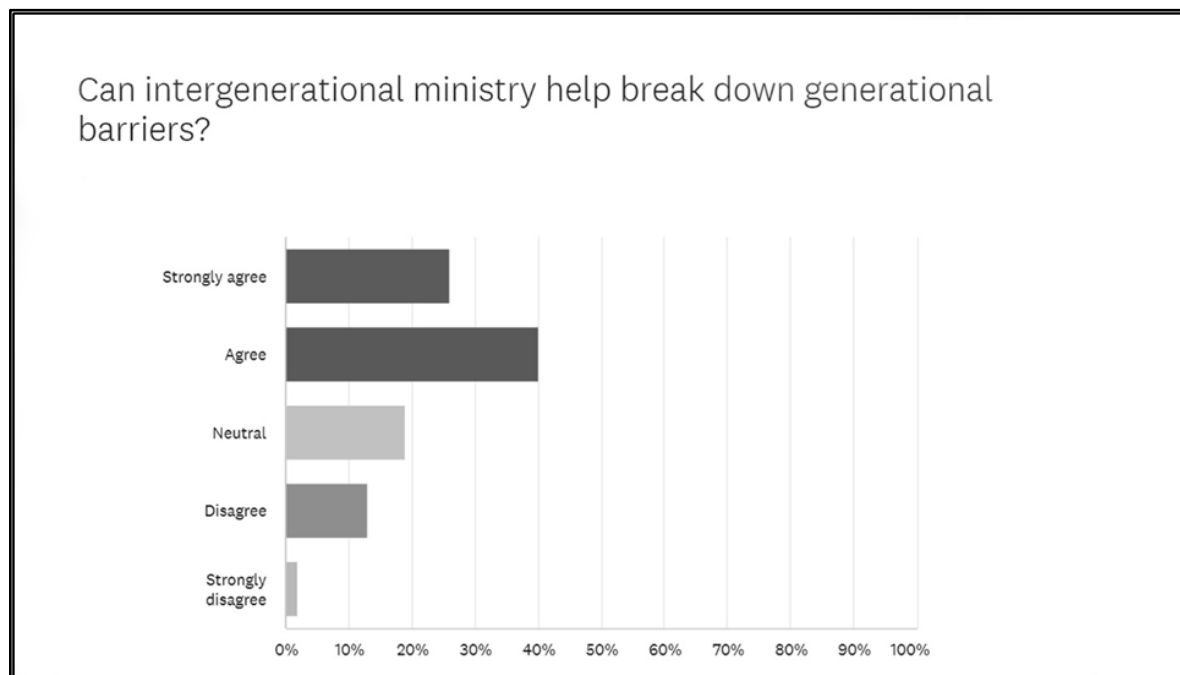


Figure 4.4. Survey question 28

Parkway Baptist offers opportunities for members of all ages to unite in fellowship and grow as a church family. Throughout the year, activities like Bible studies, senior luncheons, children's events, and family outings create opportunities for members to enjoy spiritual socialization. Furthermore, Parkway Baptist actively involves its members in outreach projects to the community and foreign countries. During the summer, volunteers participate in VBS and serve in missions locally and globally. In addition, members volunteer at local nursing homes and other organizations providing benevolent services. By participating in outreach activities together, members build relationships with one another and gain a sense of purpose by serving others. However, serving in the ministry is not the problem; shouldering the responsibility of discipleship and mentorship opportunities is. Although respondents agree intergenerational reciprocity may help break down generational boundaries (see fig. 4.4.), a slight majority feel it is necessary to separate the ages of adults for discipleship learning.

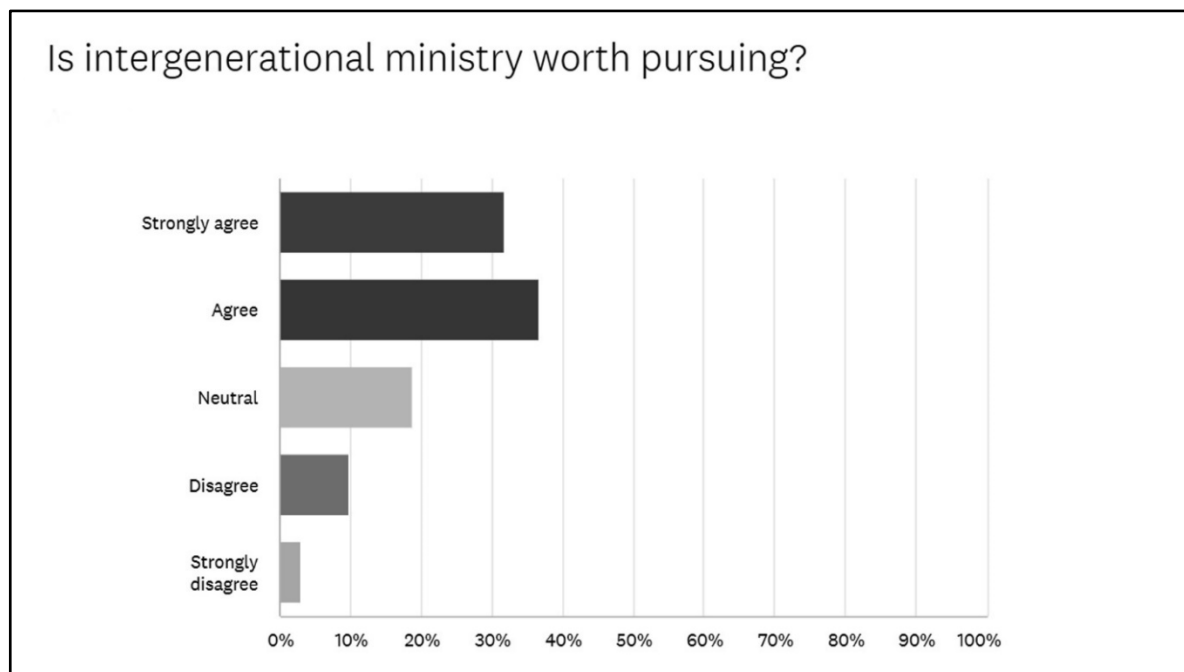


Figure 4.5. Survey question 25

Believers must break down the walls of generational isolation and open their hearts to people both older and younger than themselves. When this happens, the church can become a place that celebrates every generation. Warren Wiersbe said, “Unity without diversity would produce uniformity, and uniformity tends to produce death. Life is a balance between unity and diversity... God’s desire is that there be no division (‘schism’) in the church. Diversity leads to disunity when the members compete with one another; but diversity leads to unity when the members care for one another.”² That is God’s desire for His church is unity in diversity.

As previously stated, figure 4.5. shows that 68.31% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that intergenerational ministry is something to pursue. In contrast, 12.87% strongly opposed or disagreed with this viewpoint, while 18.81% remained neutral. One would assume that since 51.52% of respondents prefer a multigenerational approach to ministry, there would be

² Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 609–10.

greater disagreement with the issues in figures 4.4. and 4.5. However, surprisingly, this was not the case. Although some respondents were against intergenerational ministry and others were ambivalent, the vast majority believed it was a worthwhile ministry focus area. According to the survey, most Parkway Baptist members understood the significance of intergenerational ministry. Still, their long-standing practice of age-segregated discipleship made it harder for some to accept the ministry approach. The data shows a clear desire to bridge the gap between younger and older generations so that both can benefit from serving. However, discipleship learning leans a little toward a silo-centered environment.

Church Survey Data Leadership

The leadership must recognize the subtle differences in Parkway Baptist's ministry mindset. Parkway Baptist is not divided based on love, respect, service, or doctrinal practice but rather on methodological objectives. As a result, the church leadership must try to bridge the divide and lead God's people toward a united spiritual emphasis. The church's spiritual leadership should strive for unity and harmony by looking for ways to connect and avoid segmentation. Leaders must be godly examples who show they can be trusted, are strong in their faith, and humbly walk with the Lord. Ultimately, spiritual leadership should lead by example and draw its members closer to Christ (1 Timothy 4:12). By doing so, Parkway Baptist will be a vibrant spiritual community that stands as a pillar of truth and an example of God's love (1 Timothy 3:15; 4:12). With each member supporting the leadership, Parkway Baptist will keep members focused on the spiritual vision of ministry, which is leading others to Christ and making disciples (Matthew 28:19–20, Acts 1:8, and 1 Peter 2:9). Spiritual leadership must lead with love and compassion, understanding that spiritual growth and maturity is a lifetime journey. Leaders should strive to provide spiritual guidance, prayer, and encouragement while providing

discipleship opportunities for spiritual growth through biblical discipleship. Lastly, Parkway Baptist leaders must maintain their grasp of God’s Word and give thorough Bible training to members. Through these spiritual practices, members can be strengthened in their faith, walk confidently in the presence of God, and grow in the richness of spiritual maturity (Ephesians 4:11–16, 2 Timothy 3:16–17, and 2 Peter 1:5–8; 3:18).

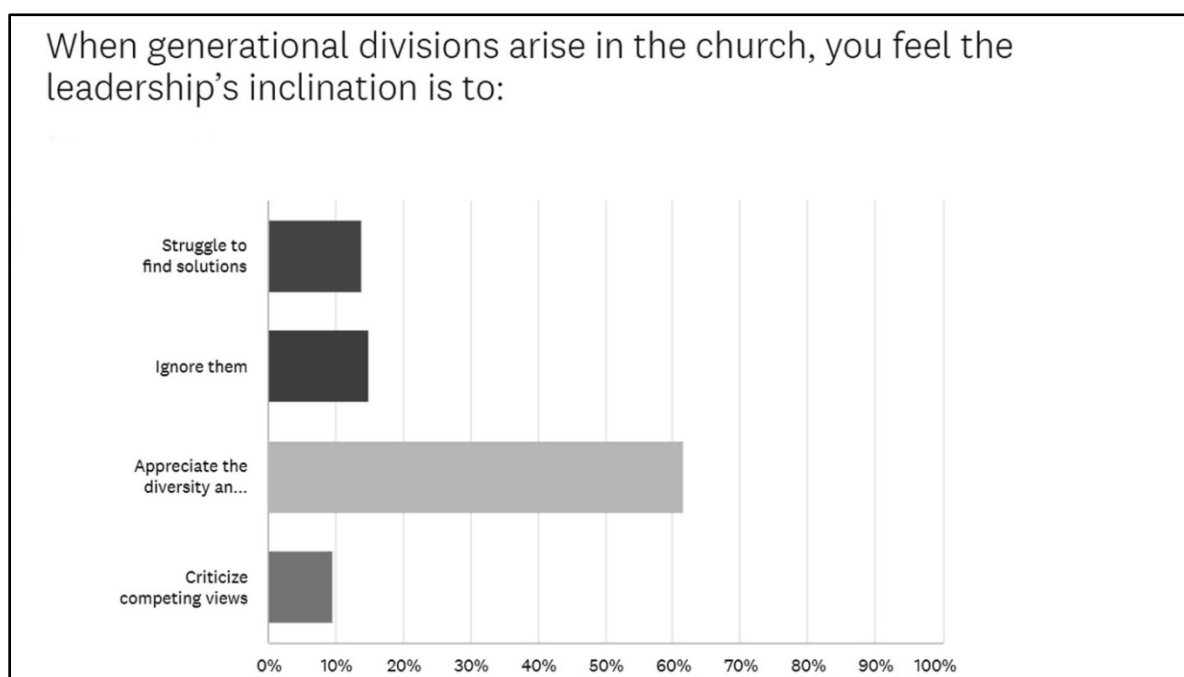


Figure 4.6. Survey question 10

The data demonstrate that Parkway Baptist’s leadership seeks solutions to narrow the divide of the generational gap issue. Authors David Kinnamen and Aly Hawkins contend, “The generation gap is growing, fueled in part by technology, so it takes extra effort to be on the same page. Frankly, deep relationship happens only by spending time, and big chunks of it, in shared experiences.”³ When posed the question in figure 4.5., a solid 61.70% responded that the leadership appreciates the diversity and implements solutions for closing the generation gap.

³ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church. . .and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 205.

However, the other three categories, “struggle to find solutions, ignore them, and criticize competing views” is worth noting. A total of 38.29% of respondents have the impression that the leadership is not attempting to find solutions to the generational gap. Although criticism of opposing viewpoints is just 9.57%, it is problematic when members feel their voice is not heard when communicating with leadership. For an effective ministry to thrive, it is essential that each member of the church feels like their voice and opinion matter. When church members feel like their communication with leadership is not taken into consideration, it can lead to low morale and a lack of motivation and trust. This could have serious implications for the productivity and success of the ministry. The apostle Paul said, “...Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor. 5:6, KJV). The principle here is this, a small bit of negativity may snowball into a big issue if solutions are not prayed about, developed, and placed into action.

When asked, “Point out any preconceived notions you think members of the church have bought into without questioning their validity (check all that apply).” The research showed, based on the response of 96 people, that 26.04% thought the older generation is cliquish and has no desire to fellowship with the younger generation. As opposed to 51.04% who claimed the younger generation is cliquish and has no desire to fellowship with the older generation (see fig. 4.6.). This finding comes as a bit of a surprise since it implies that members have a preconceived notion of how generations interact with one another, regardless of the reality. Perhaps more importantly, it highlights the need for church leadership to implement initiatives that counteract this perception by promoting, educating, and fostering more intergenerational understanding and connection. Additionally, providing a platform for youth to share their creative ideas with more experienced church members will help bridge this divide. In the end, it is crucial for Parkway

Baptist to acknowledge that every member is valuable and should be included in the overall work of the ministry.

POINT OUT ANY PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS YOU THINK MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH HAVE BOUGHT INTO WITHOUT QUESTIONING THEIR VALIDITY (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY).	
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
None of the above	30.21% 29
Senior citizens are neglected	27.08% 26
Children are not mature enough for ministry	18.75% 18
Older people do not understand the younger generation	37.50% 36
The older generation is cliquish and has no desire to fellowship with the younger generation	26.04% 25
The younger generation is cliquish and has no desire to fellowship with the older generation	51.04% 49
Pastors are the primary influencers of faith in children	3.13% 3
Spiritual formation is best done in age-specific learning environments for people 18+	17.71% 17
Total Respondents: 96	

Figure 4.7. Survey question 9

Parkway Baptist believes hearing the leadership’s vision for current and future progress is essential to fostering unity. For example, when asked, “What leadership strategy can best manage generational tension?” 50.53% of the 95 respondents chose, “The leadership should emphasize the shared mission between the generations,” as seen in figure 4.7. While discussing the culture of a church in the context of its mission, Aubrey Malphurs argues it is important to keep in mind that “The core values of a culture must be shared. If people don’t share them, they’re not core. Another term for this is “common cause.” Shared values become the common cause is so vital to realizing a ministry culture’s vision. However, if congregants don’t share these values, the mission and vision will not happen.”⁴ By living out the common cause of making disciples and glorifying God, Parkway Baptist creates an environment where members

⁴ Aubrey Malphurs, *Look Before You Lead: How to Discern and Shape Your Church Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 40.

are encouraged to develop their faith and deepen their relationships. The commitment to a common cause is evident in their motto, “Changing Lives ONE Verse at a Time.” This means members should hold the same biblical values based on the Bible and manifest the power and presence of Christ through active ministry. This will continue to lead Parkway Baptist into an exciting future of reaching people for Christ and making a difference in the world with the gospel of Christ (Jude 1:22). Thus, the best unifiers in ministry are worship and mission.

“WHAT LEADERSHIP STRATEGY CAN BEST MANAGE GENERATIONAL TENSION?”	
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ The leadership should emphasize the shared mission between the generations.	50.53% 48
▼ The leadership should hold generational meetings to discuss the value of diversity.	9.47% 9
▼ The leadership should create different ministries to meet the needs of every generation.	36.84% 35
▼ The leadership should retain the status quo since no one generation will be satisfied.	3.16% 3
TOTAL	95

Figure 4.8. Question 11

Church Survey Data Discipleship

True discipleship does not take the form of a weekly Bible study or a short-term seminar. Being a disciple of Christ is a way of life in which the believer commits to follow Christ and live in humble obedience to His Word. As a result, believers are called to share their faith and faithfully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. A believer may sometimes have the chance to speak to the multitudes, but more often than not, God places specific individuals in their path with whom they are tasked with sharing the gospel. Philip’s ministry in the book of Acts exemplifies this concept as he interacts with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26–40). Life-on-life

discipleship, therefore, is something every believer should strive to undertake. David Mathis argues that discipleship is not based on attractional events or shortcuts but on a commitment to life-on-life interaction. Mathis writes, “Defaulting to the easier, often more single-event, hype-oriented methods doesn’t produce the same depth of gospel transformation and then gospel transmission and multiplication as intentional and deeply relational life-on-life disciple making.”⁵ Making disciples is more than just a single event; it is a way of life. In a nutshell, authors John Mark Terry, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson wrote, “An ever-expanding discipleship base is the only effective way a church can continue to mature spiritually and grow numerically.”⁶ When believers invest in people, relationships and meaningful conversations are established that will serve as launching pads for further growth in Christ. As Rod Dempsey eloquently states, “Disciple making in its purest form is helping people find Jesus and then helping them to grow and become all they can be for Christ. In turn, they will become committed to following His commands and obeying the Great Commission.”⁷ The task of discipling others is entrusted to believers, who are responsible for taking up this challenge and sharing the gospel with everyone they meet (Matthew 28:19–20).

Believers must remember that being a disciple-maker does not mean the Christian lives a sinless life (1 John 1:8–10). However, as believers mature in sanctification, they should sin less, albeit they will never be faultless until the return of Christ. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 1:27–29 are a persuasive reminder of the power of God and how He works in the believer’s life to

⁵ David Mathis, “Appendix: What next? Disciple a Few,” in *Finish the Mission: Bringing the Gospel to the Unreached and Unengaged*, ed. John Piper (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 178.

⁶ John Mark Terry, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson, *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 509.

⁷ Rod Dempsey, “Discovering an Organizing Principle,” in *Disciple Making Is . . . : How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 16.

bring about His sovereign will. It is a comfort for Christians to know that God can use even the feeblest among them to accomplish His divine will. Knowing God can transform the believer's weakness into a weapon to fight the enemy is a tremendous assurance of God's blessing and favor. Those who surrender their frailties to God in humble submission will no doubt rise in the robust righteousness of Christ as mighty warriors of the Cross (2 Timothy 2:1–4). The believer can face the challenges as a follower of Christ because God has provided all they need for a life of godliness (1 Corinthians 1:5 and 2 Peter 1:4). Therefore, discipleship making is not just the task of the so-called “professional Christian” trained and educated in theology, but the spiritual responsibility of all who call on the name of the Lord.

Additionally, being a disciple of Jesus is about being part of a community of faith where believers can grow together in their knowledge and understanding of God's Word. In his letter to the Christians at Philippi, the Apostle Paul admonished them as “striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27). Paul sees the believer living in a community of faith. As one writer explains, “Paul gives a succinct, radiantly clear description of our common life in Christ. Thus, he underscores the challenging fact that the Christian life is always a shared life: *With one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel*” (1:27).”⁸ That is how the bond of unity shows itself: in a disciplined, dedicated life of following Christ's commands lived out in the context of a community of faith. The believer must conduct their lives in a manner that incorporates accountability to one another and mutual support (1 Thessalonians 5:11). Disciples of Christ should encourage one another to live a life of faithfulness and obedience to the Lord. As

⁸ Maxie D. Dunnam and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, “Galatians / Ephesians / Philippians / Colossians / Philemon,” vol. 31, *The Preacher's Commentary Series* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1982), 272.

believers study His Word, share testimonies of answered prayer, and bear one another's burdens, we can experience authentic community in Christ.

Although Parkway Baptist recognizes discipleship as essential to Christianity, statistics show that some fall short in this area. For example, when asked, "Are you currently involved in discipling or mentoring someone other than family members?" The data revealed that 31% of the one hundred respondents said, "none at all," and only 15% expressed "a lot or a great deal." To dig a little deeper, the question was reworded to focus on the years that had lapsed since discipling someone—"In the past five years, have you been personally involved in discipling or mentoring someone other than family members?" According to the collected data, 25% of the one hundred persons who participated in the survey responded, "none at all," and only 16% said, "a lot or a great deal." This is just a 1% increase in those actively participating in discipleship in the past five years. In addition, the question included two alternative choices: "a moderate amount" and "a little." According to the survey's findings, the combined overall score for the other two options was 58%. The command of Christ to make disciples is emphatic and demands a lifestyle approach. While the researcher is grateful for the "moderate and little," it is not the way Jesus expects believers to live out their faith. Believers are called to be a radiant light in a dark world (Matthew 5:16), where every person can have the opportunity to believe and receive the gospel message. The Christian's responsibility is not only to be a living testament to the gospel but also actively share the gospel message with others (1 Peter 2:5). Each believer must live with the purpose of showing people the truth of who Jesus is. Christians must strive to show God's love is real, reliable, and ready for all who call on His name (Romans 10:13). There is no room for little or moderate discipleship (1 Corinthians 15:58). Christ's return is imminent, and believers must actively work the ministry of discipleship until He returns (Titus 2:13).

The Great Commission is the main business of the church and must be the spiritual objective of every believer. Author Jim Putman said, “Too often Christians focus rightly on the gospel message of the Cross but forget about the discipleship process Jesus revealed and modeled. Again, He came not only to die but also to give us a model for disciple-making that trains Christians so they can accurately represent Him and deliver His message to the world.”⁹

A study of Jesus’ strategy for disciple-making involved four main components: modeling, teaching, equipping, and sending. First, Jesus modeled a balanced life of prayer, ministry, and relations with others. Second, He daily taught spiritual principles and precepts from God’s Word and the world around Him. Third, He taught His disciples to pray and trust God’s sovereign plan. Fourth, He sent them out into the world to share the good news of the gospel, and to that end, the church is to be an instrument of God’s grace in a hurting, sinful world. The calling of the church is not simply inwardly focused but outwardly directed. It should embody and demonstrate the truth of God’s love in its message and mission.

Church Survey Intergenerational Worship

Regarding modern-day worship, it is increasingly evident that the average Christian does not have a clear understanding of the objective of worship. This is largely because many churches have adopted a culture of entertainment-based worship that has more in common with the secular world than it does with Scripture. David Jeremiah said,

Of all the things we’ve bungled over the years in the Church, worship is maybe the biggest. If giving glory to God is mankind’s chief purpose, somehow Satan has gotten us caught up in other agendas. What goes on in lots of places in the name of worship is not really that at all. We’ve lost the sense of what it means to truly [*sic*] worship God.”¹⁰

⁹ Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 20.

¹⁰ David Jeremiah, *What the Bible Says about Angels: Powerful Guardians, a Mysterious Presence, God’s Messengers* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 170.

It is sad to say, but many Christians are drifting away from a deep relationship with God and settling for shallow substitutes. Many worshipers are, as the Apostle Peter says, “blind and cannot see afar off” (2 Pet. 1:9, KJV). Worship that deviates from the Bible tends to focus more on the secular than the sacred, trendy than the truthful, and some cases, radical more than the spiritual.

The motive of biblical worship is spiritual intimacy with God. Biblical worship is more than just hyped euphoria; it expresses spiritual intimacy and connection with God that acknowledges His glorious worth (Revelation 4:11 and 1 Chronicles 16:28-29). The believer’s connection with God in worship should promote awareness of their need to humble themselves before God and do as the writer of Proverbs said, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov. 3:5–6, KJV). At its core, biblical worship acknowledges God’s sovereignty as the source of blessing, grace, mercy, and justice. Worship, when understood biblically, is not simply an act of compliance, with God twisting the arm and making one bow before Him; worship is the recognition of God’s presence and power, demonstrated through prayer, praise, and devotion to God. Through the act of worship, believers encounter the presence of God, which fosters a desire to place Christ first in all things (Colossians 1:18).

The survey question, “Is worship expressed in your preferred style of worship” produced an overwhelming majority either in agreement or in strong agreement. Positive feedback was supplied by 85.86% of the 99 people who responded. Of those surveyed, just 12% were undecided, and only 2% strongly opposed. This is encouraging data for an intergenerational approach, given Parkway Baptist is an inclusive church embracing individuals of all ages. In fact, 87.13% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that individuals of all ages are welcome at

Parkway Baptist. Only 2.97% of the 101 respondents disagreed with the question, while 9.90% remained impartial. The survey results show the church can unify its worship style and preferences while respecting everyone's biblical expression of worship. However, digging deeper into the persona of Parkway's music ministry, the question "Pertaining to Parkway Baptist's music ministry, is the worship music expressed in your preferred style of music?" The percentage of respondents who expressed that the music style was not their preference was 9.90%, while 75.24% either agreed or strongly agreed, leaving 14.85% who had no opinion. While there is always room for improvement, the data reveals that Parkway Baptist's music ministry can generationally capture the congregation's attention and lead them more deeply into worship. The song selection is biblical in nature and points to the exaltation of Christ (Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16).

Parkway Baptist is distinctive in that it actively seeks to include members of all ages in worship. Children's church, dramas, small groups, and an intergenerational choir are just a few examples of how people of all ages can participate in worship at Parkway Baptist. Statistics clearly show 76.24% of the 101 respondents either agree with or strongly support the statement of whether members of different generations are involved in the preparation of worship. Respondents who disagree/strongly disagree total 6.93%, while 16.83% remain neutral. Thus, most members believe the ministry actively ensures no age group is excluded from worship. However, 18.81% of the 101 respondents believe the style of worship caters to one generational group, with 30.69% being indecisive. This starkly contrasts the 50.49% of respondents who disagree or strongly disagree with the assertion that the style of worship caters to one generation but instead reaches out to all generations. Howard A. Vanderwell's description of intergenerational worship is insightful. He said,

Intergenerational worship is worship in which people of every age are understood to be equally important. Each generation has the same significance before the face of God and in the worshiping congregation. Each and all are made in the image of God. Each and all have worth. It is only a half-truth to make statements like “Our children and youth are the church of the future,” or “Our seniors are the church of the past.” Each and all are the church of now.¹¹

The intergenerational model allows members to share in the worship experience with hearts united with a common goal to magnify and glorify the King of Glory. Every believer, regardless of age, is encouraged to participate in worship and proclaim the wonderful attributes of God. This means Parkway Baptist members of all ages are encouraged to work together to implement worship services and other congregational events aiming to foster a faith community. Corporate worship can unite a multifarious congregation when everyone works towards one common goal, the exaltation of Christ (1 Timothy 1:17). Through an intergenerational approach, Parkway Baptist can achieve remarkable unity and generational cohesiveness among congregants.

When believers dedicate their lives to worshipping Christ, they are transformed into living witnesses of Christ. Being a witness in the early church, as recorded in Acts, took on a different meaning than today. Present-day witnessing, especially in North American churches, is more of an evangelistic program as opposed to the biblical days, which was met with severe persecution. John Butler said, “The word ‘*witness*’ give us via transliteration our English word ‘martyr.’ It suggests the cost of witnessing. Most of the disciples were martyred because of their faithful witnessing for Christ.”¹² Many followers of Christ paid the ultimate price for the furtherance of the gospel. At great risk, however, the early believers showed mercy and compassion to outcasts as they shared the love of Christ, even with those who brutally opposed

¹¹ Howard A. Vanderwell, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshiping Together* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007). 11.

¹² John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: Acts* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2009), 13.

them (Acts 7:54–8:1). They sacrificed all and invested their lives, resources, and abilities in the mission of Christ (Matthew 28:18–20). The self-serving narcissistic ways of some Christians today never entered their mind. There was no celebrity status with early believers, just humble servants of Christ (Acts 2:44). The believers in Acts honored generational unity as they worshipped communally and shared compassionately as a community of faith (Acts 4:32). Modern society has become so focused on self that sacrificing to meet another’s needs is foreign in today’s self-absorbed culture. However, the believer is called to a life of sacrifice, service, and surrender to Christ (Romans 12:1). This sort of biblical submission empowers the believer to valiantly share the truth of Scripture in a culture of chaos (Acts 5:29).

The beauty of intergenerational worship is manifested each week at Parkway Baptist. With people of various ages participating, the church demonstrates there is room for all believers to work, worship, and witness for Christ. For example, the Psalmist David said, “And he hath put a new song in my mouth, *even* praise unto our God: many shall see *it*, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD” (Ps. 40:3, KJV). Note that David did not say, “many shall hear it,” he said, “many shall see it.” David sees his worship as a means of witnessing and declaring the might and majesty of God. The text says, “many shall see it, and fear.” Thus, through the act of worship, many will come to reverence God. The Lord deserves the praise of the redeemed. John Phillips said, “There is not much we can give to God. He does not need our money...He does not need our service. He has countless angels far stronger, swifter, and superior to us. What He wants is our *praise* and our *thanks*. In other words, He wants our *worship*.”¹³ True worship unifies generations, and this is beautifully illustrated in Revelation 7:9–12 where all of Heaven stands in

¹³ John Phillips, *Exploring Psalms 89–150: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 2, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2012), Ps 107:1.

jubilant delight in honor of Christ the King. Therefore, when people see the praise of God's people at Parkway Baptist, it becomes a living witness of the glory of Christ.

Teacher Survey Data

As part of this research, Parkway Baptist adopted a hybrid model of discipleship learning. Traditionally, the church maintained a heavy Sunday school age-segregated ministry. However, the action research opened a new way of doing more generational discipleship learning. The hybrid model of discipleship learning was implemented through a combination of Sunday school and Connect classes (i.e., similar to small groups). Each Sunday, the church offered Sunday school classes for age-graded groups K–12 in addition to adult Connect classes of mixed adult ages and genders. This new way allows one to learn about God, grow closer as a church family, and build deeper generational relationships. The action study also demonstrated the significance of assembling a rotating team of teachers. The teacher in traditional Sunday school is appointed in a perpetual position until they retire, resign, or are promoted to Heaven. Unless the church constructs a bigger facility with additional rooms, people with the spiritual gift of teaching will have few, if any, opportunities to use their spiritual gift of teaching. As a result, the action study indicated the need to provide methods to enhance the use of the spiritual gift of teaching in the church. Building a teaching team that rotates every ten weeks was the solution to the problem.

The following data is based on a survey of 19 participants of diverse ages and represents the current teaching team at Parkway Baptist. The survey asked 18 questions to determine if teachers, as shown in figure 4.2., prefer an intergenerational model to a multigenerational model.

Teacher Choice of Discipleship Model

The teachers concurred that intergenerational relationships are evident in Scripture through the lives of people like Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, Ruth and Naomi, Paul and Timothy, and Jesus and John. Those who strongly agree totaled 57.89%, with 42.11% agreeing. This means each teacher can argue that intergenerational discipleship is more than a program but a generational principle rooted in Scripture. As seen in figure 4.8., most teachers prefer an intergenerational education over an age-specific Sunday school. This is in stark contrast to results of the church survey, where a slim majority favored the more conventional age-based approach to education (see fig. 4.2.).

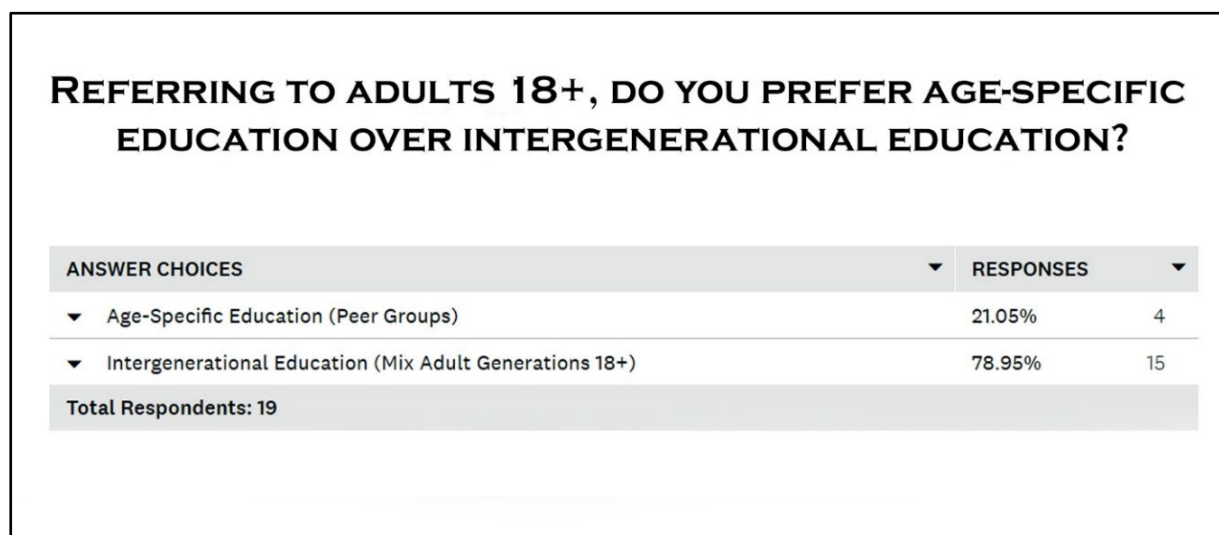


Figure 4.10. Teacher Survey question 8

Also, most teachers, 78.95%, favored the rotation of teachers model over the one-teacher system that conventional Sunday schools use, which only 21.05% of teachers liked. Specifically, the question was asked, as seen in figure 4.10., “Do you prefer traditional, age-segregated Sunday school over the intergenerational mixed-age approach?” Figure 4.10. reveals that most teachers, 73.68%, who selected “probably wouldn’t or definitely wouldn’t,” prefer the intergenerational approach over the way traditional adult Sunday schools operate. This

demonstrates that the teaching respondents concur that an intergenerational approach helps believers grow in faith and makes it more conducive for people of different ages to connect and learn about discipleship. Based on the findings, Parkway Baptist teachers unanimously desired to continue developing a hybrid model incorporating the finest aspects of Sunday school and small groups. Thus, church leaders need to discuss using strategies like a hybrid model. Starting the discussion with the teachers is the best place to start. Teachers are in a unique position that allows them to examine the viability of a hybrid Sunday school and small group discipleship model. In addition, their connection with the students, awareness of spiritual needs, and grasp of classroom dynamics give them a unique viewpoint that provides wisdom in decision-making.

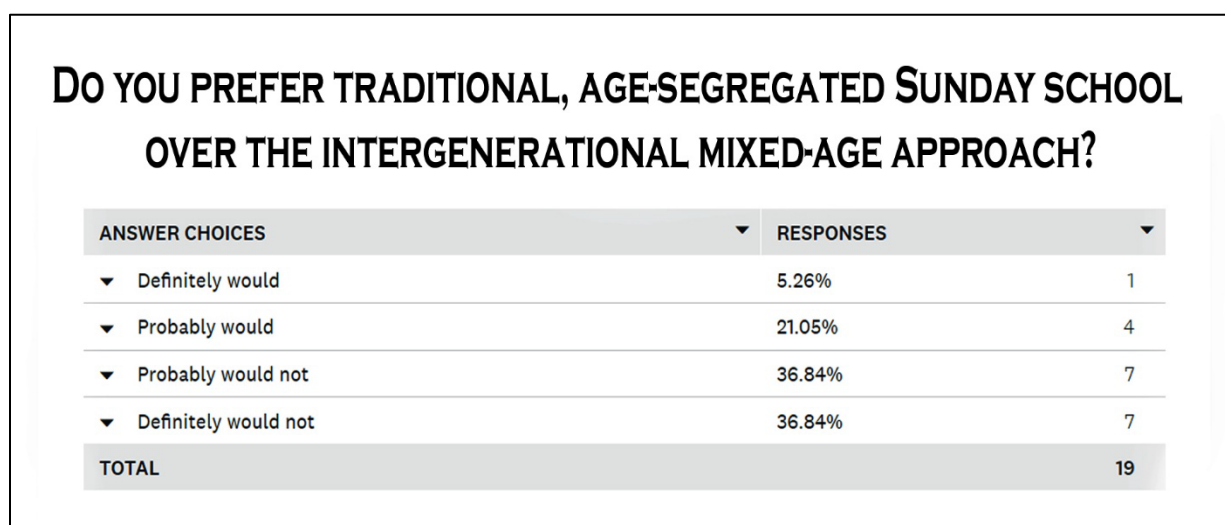


Figure 4.9. Teacher survey question 2

Creating new ways to teach spiritual formation is a conversation worth having. The need is critical to men like David Kinnaman, who said, “With the surging percentage of young adults leaving the faith, we must take an honest and sober look at the fact that what we’re doing to help form people spiritually isn’t working as well as we hope.”¹⁴ The growing number of individuals

¹⁴ David Kinnaman, “The Need to Rediscover: Mentoring as a Crucial Formation Process,” in *Cultivating Mentors: Sharing Wisdom in Christian Higher Education*, ed. Todd C. Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher J. Devers (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2022), 18.

quitting the church is “22 percent of people ages thirteen to twenty walk away from their faith.”¹⁵ Therefore, to maintain the church’s vitality, a fresh approach to discipleship and fostering relationships in the church with each generation is necessary.

This new hybrid model allows teachers to create an engaging and interactive student environment. For example, millennials (born 1981–1996) and tech-savvy Gen Zers (born 1997–2013) prefer more than just a lecture learning model. They want information right away, meaningful conversations, and a digital discipleship curriculum, all of which the hybrid model can give them. Why should spiritual leaders have a conversation about the Gen Z population? James Emery White says, “Generation Z, which now constitutes 25.9 percent of the US population... That’s more than Millennials (24.5 percent). That’s more than Gen X (15.4 percent). Yes, that’s even more than Baby Boomers (23.6 percent). By 2020, members of Generation Z will account for 40 percent of all consumers. They will not simply influence American culture, as any generation would; they will constitute American culture.”¹⁶ As the population expands, so should the mission, message, and method of the church. While the mission and message are timeless, the method by which we share the gospel must be conducive to the culture. Will McRaney summed it up well when he said, “This does not mean that we have to adopt cultural norms that violate God’s commands, but most cultural norms are amoral. Our responsibility is to build as many bridges as possible to the gospel and intentionally limit the number of barriers we erect, save the gospel itself.”¹⁷ Embracing a hybrid approach is ministry

¹⁵ David Kinnaman, “The Need to Rediscover: Mentoring as a Crucial Formation Process,” in *Cultivating Mentors: Sharing Wisdom in Christian Higher Education*, ed. Todd C. Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher J. Devers (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2022), 18.

¹⁶ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Baker Books, 2017), 37.

¹⁷ Will McRaney, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 160.

bridge-building in a post-Christian world. Stephen Lowe, the graduate chair of doctorate programs at Liberty University Rawlings School of Theology, is quoted by James White as saying: “The problem that church leaders or Christian education leaders confront today is that they’re ministering in the digital age, but they’re using an analog model of spiritual formation.”¹⁸ His point is that church ministry methods should be open to change and able to adapt, but the message remains constant.

Believers cannot allow society to surpass them to the point where they can no longer relate and interact. Instead, Christians can reach out to the changing culture and teach others by living a life centered on the gospel and rooted in God’s Word. As believers encounter the culture, their message must be clear and consistent with the truth of God’s Word. The hybrid model could be a powerful way for churches to connect with demographic groups by giving people a place to learn and discuss theological truth for living the Christian life.

Teacher Results of Spiritual Gift Opportunities

Both the Apostle Paul and Peter taught that each believer is endowed with at least one spiritual gift or more after salvation (1 Corinthians 12:4–11, 1 Corinthians 12:27–31, Romans 12:3–8, Ephesians 4:11–12, 1 Peter 4:10). This is emphasized from Paul in Ephesians 4:7 and from Peter who said, “As every man hath received the gift, *even so* minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10, KJV). David Jeremiah underscores this reality saying, “The truth of God’s Word is this: the very moment you and I were born into God’s family we were endowed with a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit...every single believer—at the instant of new birth—is gifted by God to bring a specific blessing and

¹⁸ James Emery White, *Hybrid Church: Rethinking the Church for a Post-Christian Digital Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2023), 122-23.

encouragement to the church of Jesus Christ.”¹⁹ Spiritual gifts are a visible manifestation of God’s power in His church. They are the spiritual resources that God has given believers through His Holy Spirit to help followers proclaim the gospel, honor Christ, and edify the church. Each of these gifts carries particular duties that enable Christians to build up the body of Christ confidently. Since no one person can possess all of the gifts, Christians need one another, and each individual provides a spiritual dynamic required to carry out God’s purpose for His church. Authors Chuck Swindoll and Roy Zuck explain that “The Greek word for a spiritual gift is *charisma*, which builds on the word *charis*, ‘grace.’ Thus, a spiritual gift is a gift of grace. And this grace is ‘measured’ out to each believer by the ascended Christ (Eph. 4:7–8).”²⁰ The gifts are measured out by Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit according to His will (1 Corinthians 12:4). Therefore, each believer should pray and seek the Lord’s will to discover how God has uniquely gifted them to serve in the body of Christ.

With the following question, teachers were invited to examine the opportunity offered to individuals who have the gift of teaching: “Do you feel that traditional Sunday school gives fewer opportunities for others to exercise their spiritual gift of teaching?” The data showed that 31.58% strongly agree and 52.63% agree. However, 15.79% of the 19 surveyed said they disagree. How can the paradigmatic Sunday school model provide opportunities when a single teacher facilitates the class? As with Parkway Baptist, teachers are permanent unless they choose to resign; giving little possibility for others to teach unless occasionally requested. With the

¹⁹ David Jeremiah, *God in You: Releasing the Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998), 185–86.

²⁰ Charles R. Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 905.

rotation, the teachers went from roughly 9-10 to a total of 20 qualified teachers. By introducing a teacher rotation, the potential to utilize one's gift of teaching doubled.

Charles Ryrie said, "Gifts are discovered and developed by active service. If a person is active in doing what he or she can, then other doors of opportunity may open that may bring to light additional spiritual gifts."²¹ Ryrie's notion that gifts develop through active service is correct since spiritual gifts are often inactive until aroused through spiritual activity. As a person starts to utilize their God-given gift to serve others, they might tap into new areas of potential and receive insight into gifts they were unaware they had. Thus, every believer should be encouraged to serve God actively, regardless of age. Nonetheless, some teachers believed that only people of a specific age were eligible to teach. Two similar questions were asked: "Referring to adults, should there be a maximum age limit for who can teach?" There was complete unanimity that no cap should be placed on the participants' ages. On the other hand, contrasting viewpoints emerged when the following question was posed: "Referring to adults, should there be a minimum age limit for who can teach?" The responses revealed that 36.84% of teachers said yes, while 63.16% said no.

In reference to the inquiry, it is crucial to note that the question is discussing "adults" (those aged 18 and above). Assuming 18-30 are considered younger ages, nowhere in Scripture does it say that younger adults are not allowed to exercise their spiritual gift of teaching. Jesus was only twelve years old when dealing with the scholars of His day. He told His parents, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49, KJV). At an early age, Jesus was working for God. Furthermore, although the following were not teachers in a church setting, they were young adults whom God significantly used. In Genesis,

²¹ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, Rev. and expanded. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 129.

God favored Joseph, who rose to a powerful position in Pharaoh's court, where he saved his family from a severe famine.

Daniel was a young man living in captivity in Babylon. He had great spiritual wisdom and courage, which enabled him to live for God in a corrupt culture. Then there is Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The Babylonian names for these three individuals were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Daniel 3:1–30). These three brave young men refused to bow down before King Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol and were thrown into a fiery furnace but emerged unscathed by God's miraculous power.

God also anointed David to be the king of Israel at a young age. One writer said, "We don't know how old David was at this time. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus says that David was ten years old. Others guess he was about fifteen years old. It's safe to say he was in that range."²² David went on to lead a successful military campaign against the Philistines at a young age. He started his reign at 30 years old (2 Samuel 5:4). Additionally, Joshua was a devoted follower of God who began working with Moses at a young age (Exodus 33:11). Mary was a highly favored young Jewish girl whom God chose to bear His son, Jesus Christ, the Savior of mankind (Luke 1:27–28). John the Baptist was just six months older than Jesus, his cousin (Luke 1:26–28). When John was in his thirties, Jesus declared there was no greater prophet than John the Baptist (Luke 7:28). As a young man in his thirties, filled with the Holy Spirit, John publicized Jesus' ministry by baptizing Him in the Jordan River (John 1:29). Lastly, Paul designated Timothy as his protégé and wrote two letters to him in the New Testament urging him not to let anybody look down on him because of his youth (I Timothy 4:12). There

²² David Guzik, "1 Samuel," in *David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible* (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), 1 Sam 16:12–13.

are other biblical examples of young adults working for the Lord. However, it goes without saying that God does not restrict anyone from serving Him based on their age.

Although people's spiritual development may differ throughout this age range, several indicators reveal they are ready to teach. First, a teacher must be of good character (1 Timothy 3:2). This means that they should live according to the standard of Scripture. Secondly, a teacher must know theological doctrine and accurately handle it (2 Timothy 2:15). Finally, a teacher must practice what they preach (Titus 1:9). Therefore, when looking for someone to teach within this age range, look for someone of good character, who is knowledgeable of Scripture, and who does not deny with their life what they say with their lips. Therefore, the Bible does not set specific age requirements for teaching, but it does give us a clear framework to assess potential teachers from any age group, including younger adults.

The results show that Parkway Baptist accepts variety and is not hesitant to test new ideas, provided they glorify the Lord and edify the church. With a teaching team committed to the ideas behind an intergenerational ministry, the congregation will only advance in understanding what it means to become a community of faith united in worship, education, and mission.

Focus Group Survey

The researcher called together a focus group of 10 participants. Five participants graciously showed up, and their feedback was important in deciphering the study's findings. The following section provides their perspectives on the researcher's intergenerational intervention. Each contributor is married with children, and all of them serve faithfully at Parkway Baptist. The discussion lasted for a total of 45 minutes by way of a Zoom meeting.

The first question considered was, “What do you think about an intergenerational ministry that mixes generations for educational discipleship?” One respondent told of their personal experience from years past and claimed that mixing the generations was a good idea. The answer indicated that they had been individually discipled by an older person who, because of their age, could teach the truth of Scripture, which was most important, and encourage them with their knowledge and understanding of life. The same group responder went on to state,

There’s just something about somebody who has been here much longer and has walked a mile in my shoes, not necessarily with every circumstance, but in a much broader way, that they can say—I’ve been there before, and this is what I did to get through it as a Christian, and to me, that is very valuable. So, I think that’s what we’ve done as an intergenerational ministry at the church.

All the participants concurred with the sentiments of the contributor above.

One participant said they joined a few intergenerational Connect classes where the teacher continued to strictly function as a lecture-based method, like the traditional Sunday school style. They said, “Nobody talks, and nobody gets to know anybody, and there is no intergenerational dialogue, and that doesn’t benefit.” However, in addition to their observation, the participant highlighted a contrast between those who are open to dialogue in the classroom and those who are not, noting,

But I have been a part of those that had intergenerational discussions, and I have seen the fruits of that, where people from different generations mingle outside of the class environment in a way I’ve never seen before. So, I’ve seen the positives of it. The struggle, I think, for us is that because it is new, people are learning how to adapt to it, and then also, new people coming into the church who are used to a traditional Sunday school style that is age-based don’t fully know how to fit in yet.

Teachers are taught to integrate thoughtful and purposeful classroom conversations to promote connections and understanding between different generations. Introducing a discussion format to their teaching style may present a minor challenge for teachers accustomed to delivering lectures. Nevertheless, teachers must prioritize these discussions and make them

integral to their lessons. By doing so, they can encourage students to actively engage with one another and develop a deeper appreciation for different perspectives and experiences.

The conversation proceeded with a direct question to one of the participants, who was asked, “Since your child is graduating, how will they feel about going into a Connect class with mixed adults 18 and older, and what are your thoughts on that, too?” The participant replied, “From what I have been able to be a part of, I have really enjoyed being with other people I don’t normally get to connect with, especially with those who take part in the Focus InReach program. Plus, as a parent, I am okay with it. It is good for my kids to start branching out and learning to have those different communication levels with others. As they enter college, they will have to communicate with older folks in the class.” The parent’s point here is worth noting. During discipleship periods, many ministries still have a silo mindset and segregate college-age students from the adult population in the church. However, the secular world does not. When a person reaches the age of 18, they are thrown into the adult world, where they must interact with individuals cross-generationally.

Whether in the workplace, college setting, or marketplace, young people must coexist with people of different generations. While the researcher recognizes the value of peer interaction in learning and fellowship, intergenerational ministry offers coping abilities early in life through the act of communication that is applicable to an adult environment. While insularity is not the intent of any ministry, it is possible that the separation of adults into different age groups has simply served to develop an attitude of exclusivity that impedes generational unity. By way of illustration, one group of writers said that young people who are too inter-reliant on their youth group could overlook the significance of the relationships that are fostered through family ministry. The writers said the following:

Some families whose youth have been in age-segregated ministries sometimes struggle to adjust to family-integrated ministry. In some cases, a young person is so tightly connected to a youth group that he or she is more committed to that youth group than their own family. That's one of the sad results of age-segregated ministry—parents have lost their children's hearts, and we face the challenge of trying to help them to rebuild those relationships.²³

Similarly, some believers can become so dependent on fellowship through Sunday school or some other ministry group that they overlook the beauty and value of connecting to the entire community of believers on an intergenerational level. A healthy balance between peer-related and intergenerational relationships is vital to a dynamic, spiritually healthy church.

Additionally, another issue was raised that shed light on the fact that although many appreciate the intergenerational model, they still long for the fellowship provided in the traditional Sunday school approach. It would be disingenuous to claim that no one ever craves the comforts of the familiar. One participant was open and honest, explaining that although the teaching was trustworthy and reliable in the intergenerational model, it lacked the camaraderie that the Sunday school model used to provide. Even though the Focus InReach program provides a means for peer groups to connect, Sunday school offers a more efficient means for them. They said, "I miss our Christmas parties or just having a game night and food. Having those class couple retreats once a year was something you knew you could depend on—those were things you looked forward to. So, I do miss that." However, many of these things are still a part of the ministry. A marriage retreat, for instance, has been held every year in Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, since returning from the COVID shutdown in May 2020. Plus, the Focus InReach program prepares activities for relationship development; however, some have not viewed it as fulfilling the same goal as the traditional Sunday school event planning paradigm. It appears that there is a

²³ Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother, *Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 74.

communication issue. Although the Focus InReach group organizes events to foster relationships, some members view this approach as different from the conventional planning of Sunday school events. However, an area of concern with conventional Sunday school event planning is the exclusivity of class fellowships, which are accessible to a limited number of church members instead of being accessible to everyone. Focus InReach aims to enhance camaraderie by making fellowship activities accessible to all church members. The Focus InReach staff extends an invitation to peer groups to participate in spiritual socialization with members of the church who fall within a specific age range. The program fosters relational connection throughout the church and strengthens the body of believers as a community of faith.

Furthermore, the participant who said how much they missed the sense of community that traditional Sunday school affords emphasized their argument by stating,

When we came to the church, being in that class with those same people week in and week out, I don't feel like it made us cliquish, but I felt like it helped grow our relationships with each other— you know you shared prayer requests, they updated that, and people were asking you or giving you encouragement...you had this intimate setting where different couples were walking life with you.

There is something to be said for a close-knit community that serves as an opportunity to show the loving support essential to developing healthy, spiritual relationships. Sunday school has done an excellent job of creating a culture of care. However, it would be difficult to argue that the same cannot be accomplished inside the framework of the researcher's implementation.

While many good things can be said about the traditional Sunday school, it must be remembered that it fundamentally exists for the teaching of God's Word. The Word of God must be the primary focus of discipleship ministry like Sunday school.

Event Planning Comparison	
Sunday School and Researcher's Implementation	
Researcher's Implementation	Sunday School Event Planning
Responsibility of the Teacher The teacher's main objective is the exposition of God's Word.	Responsibility of the Teacher The teacher's objectives are divided: (1) Exposition of God's Word. (2) Planning events.
Focus InReach Program Organizing peer-related activities that are inclusive.	Sunday School Outings Organizing class activities that are exclusive.
Connecting with Others Yearly opportunities to meet new people and building a community of faith with all generations.	Connecting with Others Limited opportunities to meet new people and builds a class community of peers.
Intergenerational Activities Activities are designed to place value on every generation and foster intentional generational dialogue & interaction	Age-Specific Activities All activities are designed to place value on age-specific activities for peer groups.

Figure 4.11. Event planning comparison

Thom Rainer organized a survey in which he asked the question, “What are the keys to an effective Sunday School?”²⁴ Over seven hundred people answered this question. The responses were classified into four basic keys: quality leadership, accountability, organization quality, and evangelistic intentionality. Rainer rightly points out that “churches with ineffective Sunday Schools violate the very principles that make Sunday School a viable organization: they dilute biblical teachings, fail to train effective teachers, replace systematic Bible teaching with other types of group activity, and relegate Sunday School to the status of one more church activity.”²⁵ It is interesting that outings and events are not listed in Rainer's highly effective Sunday school survey. While many leaders can testify to the success of Sunday school, such effectiveness loses its power to influence lives when the Word of God becomes secondary.

²⁴ Thom Rainer, *Effective Evangelistic Churches: Successful Churches Reveal What Works, and What Doesn't* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 93.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

Unfortunately, many leaders have used Sunday school as a draw to promote activities. As a result, they have strayed from the fundamental purpose of Sunday school, which is teaching, discipling, and mentoring others in the Word. One of the fundamental principles that the Connect classes uphold is prioritizing the preaching and teaching of God's Word over planning activities. The teacher's attention is exclusively focused on presenting the truth of Scripture and never encumbered with planning activities. Therefore, the Focus InReach will serve the church well in planning, organizing, and implementing faith-filled activities that foster spiritual socialization so that Connect classes can focus on the important matter of teaching God's Word.

All participants in the discussion agreed that making it a practice to invite new people into this new endeavor would make the intergenerational model more successful. One participant humbly admitted that they needed to invite more individuals to the Focus InReach events where they could network with their peers. They said, "I've not been great at this, I haven't tried to invite people personally, I haven't done as well as I could." They suggested creating a solid calendar of yearly events to help remind everyone to invite others. The annual budget guides all the ministry's planning and scheduling. Date planning, however, can be more of a fluid process. The participant explained, "If I have it in my calendar, the more likely we can get there, and then those of us who attend things more regularly can really reach out and invite those, especially new people, joining the church." Another contributor said, "I definitely think that a personal invitation will always carry more weight, whether it is a personal invite to church or an event." A different panelist chimed in with this statement: "This falls on us to be very faithful to go and introduce ourselves. This made a huge difference for our family when we came there." Again, all participants agreed that inviting new individuals into this new venture would make the intergenerational model more effective.

In conclusion, the meeting was fruitful, revealing the intervention's positive and negative aspects. While sentiments for age-segregated ministry persist because of the long-standing history of many, there is an acceptance of a new dynamic, a new method of connecting generationally, and a new dynamic in ministry. While intergenerational ministry is not new, it is for Parkway Baptist. However, with the Holy Spirit's leading and the member's prayerful cooperation, Parkway Baptist is making pioneer advances in intergenerational ministry.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Ministering under the Elijah/Elisha principle, as explicated in Chapters 1 and 2 is a dynamic approach that seeks to forge intergenerational bonds through discipleship and personal connection. This chapter will answer the question “So what?” about the significance of the Elijah/Elisha principle. The researcher will explain how this powerful principle, when used, can build a relational bridge between generations. Using the idea will also assist the church in becoming spiritually strong, primarily by emphasizing the authority of Scripture and making disciples throughout all generations. This chapter will recap the differences between intergenerational biblical discipleship and traditional forms of church education like Sunday school. The researcher will explain how the Elijah/Elisha principle can help ministries grow, especially in the local church context. The goal is to present pastors, leaders, and ministries with a fresh approach that stresses the Elijah/Elisha paradigm in an effective and long-lasting way. The researcher hopes that readers will experience genuine biblical discipleship in their church generationally by studying and using this solid biblical concept. Therefore, this chapter will compare and contrast what was learned in chapters one and two with what happened due to the intervention, which is discussed in chapters three and four.

Research Implications

The action research on intergenerational biblical discipleship holds significant importance for Parkway Baptist. The implications can strengthen connections between different age groups and foster a more robust sense of community among the congregation. In addition,

the results are highly valuable in promoting unity and inclusivity within the church. Establishing connections between diverse age groups is crucial for a flourishing and resilient ministry. However, these bonds can easily be disregarded due to an absence of intergenerational exposure. To foster a deeper understanding and appreciation between different generations, Parkway Baptist must continue to establish relationships that encourage intergenerational friendships. This approach will pave the way for meaningful opportunities for discipleship. By utilizing programs like Focus InReach's fellowship opportunities, Connect classes, and the teacher rotation paradigm, members can improve their ability to establish meaningful connections with individuals of any age, ultimately working towards closing the generation gap. Establishing a vigorous faith community at Parkway Baptist can be achieved by promoting a better understanding and appreciation of diverse generations that can be experienced through participation in intergenerational Connect class.

Confronting the Generation Gap

The effects of the research introduced Parkway Baptist to a new ministry approach that emphasized spiritual socialization and intergenerational discipleship. This fresh form of ministry recognizes that traditional methods of biblical discipleship and the critical connections between generations often fall short of bridging the generation gap in an authentic and meaningful way. According to one source, "The term *generation gap* was coined in the 1960s by *Look* magazine editor John Poppy. He noticed that regarding politics, tastes, morals, and virtually everything else, there was a substantial divide between the young and the old—with the 'old' including

everyone over thirty.”¹ Today, the generation gap is expanding through several factors. According to one author, five things today are contributing to the widening of the generational gap: “rapid changes in culture, increased life expectancy, the mobility of society, shifting economies, new technologies, and media.”² These five factors are worth exploring further. First, consider the rapid changes in culture. The rise of globalization has had an impact on the generation gap. One writer said, “Globalization refers to increasing worldwide interconnectedness. It is a widening, deepening, and acceleration of interaction and interdependence among peoples, companies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and governments.”³ Technology has made it possible for people to connect with others around the world quickly and to gain exposure to a diverse range of experiences and cultures that older generations did not have. The second suggestion for widening the generation gap is higher life expectancy. With increased life expectancy, various perspectives develop, resulting in a plethora of different experiences and expectations that can widen the generation gap between younger and older generations. Since each generation’s worldview most likely derives from the time they were born, differences become apparent. The author also mentioned societal mobility as a third component. The days of raising children in a neighborhood where everyone on the block knew your name are long gone. Instead, many Americans relocate multiple times throughout their lives. Societal mobility has introduced a variety of worldviews derived from distinct cultural

¹ Tim Elmore, “Intentional Influence: Relevant Practices and Habits We Must Cultivate in Today’s Emerging Generation,” in *Cultivating Mentors: Sharing Wisdom in Christian Higher Education*, ed. Todd C. Ream, Jerry Pattengale, and Christopher J. Devers (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: 2022), 109.

² *Ibid.*, 111.

³ David A. Fraser, “Globalization,” ed. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Global Dictionary of Theology: A Resource for the Worldwide Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: 2008), 336.

backgrounds, which can add to the generational divide. The fourth factor the author suggests is the constant problem of shifting economies.

The economy plays a significant role in influencing the attitudes and expectations of each generation. Generations born during prosperous times are characteristically more assured, optimistic, and adventurous. In contrast, those born into an unstable economic climate frequently develop a cautious and conservative disposition. The adventurous versus conservative mindset can further the divide. Last, there is the factor of new technologies and media. While older generations receive their news from reading the local paper or watching the nightly local news, apps for social media platforms are the primary means through which today's younger generations communicate and interact with the world around them. One thing is certain: it is difficult to deny the existence of a generational divide in light of the factors presented here.

Addressing the cultural divide in the United States, Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross said, "Faith communities that intentionally and regularly draw older, middle, and younger generations together provide opportunities for younger members to know the older and to move away from the negative perception that pervades American society."⁴ While neglecting to consider intergenerational ministry is not spiritually fatal, when generations clash, something dies in the church, biblical unity is often the first casualty. It can be challenging to bridge the gap between generations, but it is crucial not to ignore it, as doing so may result in unintended consequences that decrease the unity of the ministry. Failure to bridge the gap may result in a decreased level of societal respect or empathy, which can lead to difficulties and, in severe circumstances, animosity toward a particular age group. When believers come together with a

⁴ Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, "The Benefits of Intergenerality," *Journal of Discipleship and Family Ministry: Intergenerational Faithfulness* 3, no. 2 (2013): 21.

common goal, their actions are multiplied and amplified, and God is glorified. As such, intergenerational approaches are needed to reduce the generational barriers, enabling them to collaborate, learn from one another, and offer mutual respect. When each person's distinct qualities, abilities, and viewpoints are recognized, the church displays the unity Christ desired for His church (John 17:11, 22).

Cultivating Intergenerational Friendships

During the research, one member made their home available to the church for an intergenerational gathering. The lady overseeing the event was 38 years old and had never met the elderly couple in their mid-70s who lived there. After corresponding a few times in person for planning, the big day finally arrived. A devotional from the pastor, member-performed music, delicious food, and lots of fun made the day memorable. The event coordinator spoke at the gathering, and what she said embraced the concept of the Elijah/Elisha principle. Although there was plenty of intergenerational fun and camaraderie, what the organizer said in her opening remarks bridged the generational divide. Smiling, she said, "This family is now my new friends." The splendor of intergenerational friendship emerged like a spring flower, and everyone that witnessed it enjoyed its beauty. Paul's words to the church at Philippi aptly describe what happened: "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18, KJV). Building friendships that span across generations is a key factor in successful ministry. By tapping into the diverse perspectives of different age groups, individuals can establish stronger connections with their community and make a more meaningful impact through their outreach efforts. The connection established among different generations via various relationships can serve as a potent driving force to carry out the Lord's mission continuously. When young and older individuals share love, support, and understanding in a relationship, it creates a unique

spiritual energy that can transform ministry. Ministries need to recognize and appreciate the distinct talents of every individual, as it adds an unparalleled level of dynamism and innovation that cannot be replicated by any other means of engagement.

Connecting with Intergenerational Reciprocity

Intergenerational reciprocity is the practice of passing on and receiving love, knowledge, wisdom, and resources from one generation to another. Establishing a church ministry centered on intergenerational reciprocity can significantly enhance the local church by fostering mutual respect and shared ministry pursuits. In addition, intergenerational reciprocity can serve as a potent mechanism for faith community development. Encouraging communication between various age groups within the church can help cultivate a harmonious and cooperative atmosphere. By doing so, church members can become empowered to make a meaningful impact on their congregation by fostering mutual understanding.

Intergenerational reciprocity is a fundamental principle of faith (Psalm 78:6–7). This sort of mutual benefit emphasizes the importance of caring for and nurturing other believers across generations (Titus 2:1–8). Christians are responsible for learning from the examples of the saints who came before them and finding encouragement in the lives of those who will follow them. According to the Bible, God’s will for each generation is to pass on the story of God’s glory to the next and that people of all ages would work together to declare His glory. The prophet Joel said, “Tell ye your children of it, and *let* your children *tell* their children, and their children another generation” (Joel 1:3, KJV). Israel was to instill in their children and grandchildren a resistance to the world’s temptations by telling them these stories of God’s miraculous strength, judgment, and faithfulness. Thus, the purpose of sharing was for sanctification. Parents and spiritual leaders were to encourage each generation to live righteously, boldly talk about God’s

will and His divine character, and honor Him with their lives. By doing so, they would ensure that future generations will carry on the faith and continue to proclaim the goodness of God, “Sing unto the LORD, bless his name; shew forth his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. For the LORD *is* great, and greatly to be praised: he *is* to be feared above all gods” (Ps. 96:2–4, KJV).

Parkway Baptist has resolved to navigate the rough seas of ministry and sail into new vistas of discipleship by challenging the established concept of educational discipleship that promotes age inclusion among adults. Parkway Baptist shows they are not frightened of new experiences and challenges by halting the comfortable age-segregated silo mindset in favor of the intergenerational reciprocity that nurtures spiritual socialization. Therefore, by accepting the findings of this research and applying the Elijah/Elisha principle, Parkway Baptist desires to give all members a chance to deepen their relationship with God and each other in a way that is based on respect and understanding for each other. They do this by making a commitment to intergenerational spiritual socialization.

Constructing New Opportunities for Teaching

Parkway Baptist introduced a fresh teaching approach that enables members to showcase their spiritual giftedness, which was not feasible with the previous single-teacher method. In addition, the rotating teacher model has successfully inspired current and new instructors, allowing them to enhance their skills and delve into different subject areas. Through the rotating teacher model, Parkway Baptist has fostered an environment of learning and growth that is beneficial for both its teachers and learners. Members with the gift of teaching have had the opportunity to apply their gifts more often and to a wider range of learners. Several have asked to speak with the pastor about teaching opportunities and the approval procedure since the

implementation. As of the time that this study was written, three new teachers volunteered their services, filled out the teacher questionnaire, and submitted their CTR forms. The rotation has not only made it possible for members who have the gift of teaching to grow and develop personally, but it has also given them a sense of leadership and responsibility within the church.

Another distinguishing feature is that members are given a chance to be influenced by various teaching styles. For example, some are expositional in nature, while others are topical or even digital, including media lesson plans. Having a new teacher every ten weeks in a biblical small group can make the class atmosphere more appealing, as it allows students an opportunity to hear diverse viewpoints on both well-known and lesser-known subjects. Teachers of varying ages have been able to take part in leading discipleship thanks to the rotation system. In this way, both the experienced advice of the elders and the fresh perspectives of the younger generation may be heard by the students. Furthermore, since teachers rotate on and off every ten weeks, they can learn from the first time they teach a course and enhance it the following and even the next time.

Celebrating Community with Focus InReach

The researcher recognized the need to improve Parkway Baptist's efforts to create congregational connections beyond the walls of the Sunday service. Thus, the Focus InReach program was implemented to foster a more robust community of faith. Parkway Baptist's various outreach strategies, in conjunction with Focus InReach, showcase their dedication to improving faith community engagement. Focus InReach oversees coordinating peer-related fellowships and church-wide outings so that teachers can focus all their attention on teaching the Bible. However, the research revealed that the program has both positive and negative aspects. Beginning with the positive aspect, the program does an excellent job of living up to its name. It helps congregation

members to build relationships, which is the primary goal for the InReach staff. In terms of creating relationships, the book of Acts reveals: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42, KJV). Since God is never ambiguous, the text’s arrangement of doctrine followed by fellowship is significant.

John Phillips points out that “First and foremost came the apostles’ doctrine. It is no accident that this comes first. It always comes first. In all the epistles, precept comes before practice.

Experience must always be tested by doctrine, not doctrine by experience.”⁵ Even though the dissemination of doctrinal truth is one of Parkway Baptist’s primary focuses, the importance of fellowship in the development of a community of faith cannot be overstated.

Koinonia is the Greek word that is often translated as “fellowship” in the New Testament. However, there are twenty matches in eighteen verses in the King James Version, and they are translated with the words as follows: contribution (Rom 15:36), communion (1 Cor 10:16), distribution (2 Cor. 9:13), communication (Phlm. 6), and fellowship (Acts 2:42). According to one source, “It is used throughout the NT in two different but related ways. First and most commonly, *koinōnia* and its cognate terms describe the unique fellowship or communion believers share in the gospel and ministry.”⁶ The author suggests that the second way the term is used is “to denote a financial partnership (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13; Heb. 13:16).”⁷ The biblical writers were prompted by the Holy Spirit (1 Tim. 3:16) to use the phrase to emphasize the magnificent fact of God’s personal connection with His people and their relationship with one another. As a result, fellowship within Parkway Baptist is an essential theological element of a

⁵ John Phillips, *Exploring Acts: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publications; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ac 2:42.

⁶ Derek R. Brown, *Philippians*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Research Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Php 1:1–26.

⁷ Ibid.

flourishing biblical community of faith. Therefore, the Focus InReach implementation has been a great resource in promoting peer-related and intergenerational church fellowship.

However, there are a few disadvantages of Focus InReach. First, the study revealed that participants in a conventional Sunday school environment were more likely to participate in a class-sponsored activity due to their weekly relationship with one another. When meeting weekly on a yearly schedule, it is much easier to hold individuals accountable and motivate them to be a part of a fellowship event. Second, in a traditional Sunday school setting, plans can be made and then discussed openly months prior to the event. Events hosted by Focus InReach are publicized through the church website, social media platforms, and the church media screens in the hope that people will notice and remember them.

Commissioning a Hybrid Model

Commissioning a hybrid model has shown itself to be an excellent option. The hybrid approach values the long-held tradition of Sunday school. The hybrid model beautifully blends Parkway Baptist's valued history, respected culture, and spiritual traditions with contemporary Christian discipleship methods. The traditional approach is still in place for students in grades K–12. In addition, an older ladies' class will continue until the women decide whether to join the Connect class model or continue as a Sunday school class. The hybrid strategy emphasizes the church's heritage and the parts that have contributed to its development over time. Therefore, taking the most beneficial aspects of Sunday school and merging them with the smaller group discipleship setting is intergenerationally beneficial. By initiating the hybrid strategy, Parkway Baptist can foster an educational environment that is welcoming and inclusive, enabling people of all ages and backgrounds to experience the life-changing impact of faith in Christ.

Research Applications

The research application underscores the truth that creating meaningful relationships between individuals of varying ages can cultivate an environment that fosters spiritual socialization and where biblical discipleship thrives. This section aims to shed light on the power of nurturing solid connections within the church community through biblical education and faith-based fellowship, thereby enhancing the spiritual growth of everyone involved.

The Beauty of Gathering for Intergenerational Worship

Worshiping together at Parkway Baptist, regardless of age, strengthens the idea that believers are one body in Christ (Rom. 12:5) and emphasizes the importance of loving one another as instructed by Christ (John 13:25). When individuals of all ages are encouraged to participate in worship, it creates a setting that is nurturing and compassionate, inspiring shared appreciation. During the action research, the yearly Easter service provided an excellent example of the beauty of gathering for intergenerational worship.

Parkway Baptist's Easter service in 2023 exemplified the heart of intergenerational ministry and the church's desire to become intergenerational. Planning was intentional with the purpose of displaying the benefits and blessings of intergenerational worship. First, during the morning Connect classes, diverse adult generations met in classrooms for discipleship instruction, while the kids met in traditional Sunday school fashion. Second, at the start of the service, the pastor talked to a large gathering of children in the middle of the stage. After that, a young family devoted their one-month-old baby to the Lord as each generation in the family gathered for prayer at the church altar. Fourth, a 14-year-old boy played the violin as the ushers received the morning offering. Last, a 71-year-old choir director conducted the music; a 17-year-old drummer joined by men in their 30s, 40s, and 50s provided the music; and an

intergenerational choir reverberated the sanctuary with songs of Christ's resurrection. Parkway's pastor, who is 54 years old, delivered the sermon. Three young adults in their 20s sang in the invitational while a 57-year-old pianist accompanied them. It was a magnificent display of generations coming together as a faith community for the united purpose of worship and proclamation of the gospel. It is incredible to witness the positive impact that people can have on a worship service when they come together, support each other, and glorify the Lord. The Easter worship and discipleship in Connect classes demonstrate how fostering connections and creating a strong sense of community can embody the Elijah/Elisha principle. Therefore, Parkway Baptist must continue to fortify a discipleship worldview where generations can unite under the Elijah/Elisha principle for worship, discipleship, spiritual service, and fellowship.

Embracing the Elijah/Elisha Principle

The Elijah/Elisha principle throughout this action research speaks of the importance of generational relationships coming together in unity to do the will of God. Further, the Elijah/Elisha principle points to the importance of intergenerational relationships coming together with a unified spiritual purpose. Applying this principle in the ministry of Parkway Baptist holds immense potential for uniting individuals from diverse generations. Therefore, by highlighting the value of generational unity, this research seeks to show how the Elijah/Elisha principle can strengthen intergenerational relationships and create a greater sense of community within Christian churches. As demonstrated by Elijah and Elisha, generations can collaborate and walk in Christian unity.

Elijah blessed Elisha, a picture of passing on spiritual blessings to the next generation. In turn, Elisha recognized the value of learning from the older generation and honoring the man of God. The fact that Elijah blessed Elisha was significant in several different ways. First, it

demonstrated that Elijah was not hesitant to delegate authority to a younger man. Elisha learned the fundamentals of spiritual leadership from his mentor, and now it was his turn to lead.

Parkway Baptist's leadership must follow and fortify this scriptural paradigm illustrated by Elijah and Elisha. Just because someone is younger does not mean they cannot learn and implement biblical truth in their everyday lives. Elijah recognized this principle and was eager to engage Elisha's life as his mentor to prepare him to be a leader. Garry Collins said, "Often, dreams are formed, clarified, and strengthened through a relationship with a mentor. A mentor is a teacher, model, advisor, guide, sponsor, or discipler who usually is at least several years older than the young adult and experienced in the world into which the young person is entering."⁸

The most beautiful aspect of Elijah and Elisha's relationship was the collaboration between two different generations who worked together to bring honor to God. Many of today's younger leaders strive to be trendy while making no place for older generational involvement. On the other hand, some senior leaders strive to be overtly authoritarian, leaving little space for younger individuals to learn from errors that will enhance their leadership skills for future undertakings. The biblical goal of reciprocity across generations requires a balance between caring, mentoring, and discipling. Second, it is important to remember that Elijah's benediction confirmed Elisha's status as God's anointed. Elisha, just like his predecessor, will be known as the man of God (2 Kgs. 4:21–22, 25, 27, 4:42, 5:8, 5:15, 6:6, 6:9–10, 7:2, 17–18, 8:2, 8:4, 8:7–8, 8:11, and 13:19).

Therefore, a true discipleship worldview must include building meaningful relationships between ages for intentional dialogue, learning the value of mentorship, engaging in spiritual socialization, sharing the good news of the gospel, and doing it all for the glory of Christ. For

⁸ Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 265.

older believers to become mentors to younger Christians, a culture of mutual support must be fostered. The experience of both generations is essential to nurturing a Christ-centered community of faith.

Research Limitations

Rotating teachers may have some unintended consequences. After teaching a few courses, some teachers may realize they do not have a following. Before the research implementation was put in place at Parkway Baptist, students had no option but to attend the age-appropriate classroom. Therefore, teachers always had an audience and could easily lean on the Sunday school quarterly to get through the course. With the new approach, teachers must be innovative in their presentations and find meaningful connections, or students will not sign up for future studies with them. It is possible the teacher may come to the realization that they do not have the spiritual gift necessary to teach after all. It goes without saying that keeping the attention and loyalty of students can be challenging, especially for teachers who are only in their classroom for ten weeks. Thus, ensuring a full class throughout a teacher cycle requires both deliberate prayer and meditation on the Word, as well as creative approaches to teaching the material. Furthermore, rotating teachers may disrupt a stable mentoring relationship between teacher and student. Since the student only interacts with their teacher for ten weeks, it may be difficult for them to build trust and form meaningful connections that can continue beyond the classroom. One of the advantages of conventional Sunday school is that it creates a continual mentorship relationship in which students become comfortable asking for spiritual help outside of the classroom environment. The lack of consistency in the student/teacher relationship may be bothersome for some people, making it difficult for them to feel comfortable being transparent in class. Therefore, churches must consider the pros and cons of rotating teachers before

implementing such a policy. This practice can benefit teachers and students with careful planning and thoughtful implementation. However, if not handled properly, this could lead to an environment less than conducive to learning. Therefore, weighing the potential benefits and drawbacks before introducing a rotating teacher policy is crucial.

Another limitation of the research implementation is the structuring of the discipleship curriculum. With the traditional Sunday school discipleship model, the student's study plan is mapped out in advance. However, with rotating teachers and utilizing the CTR form, teachers must organize their lesson plans, which can be time-consuming for some teachers. As a result, teachers who submit a CTR form and gain approval from the pastor may find themselves in an unpleasant position if they continue to delay their course planning. Thus, the quality of teaching and discipleship offered through this model can suffer. To help maintain high-quality discipleship and education, the implementation asks for quarterly teacher meetings to review and discuss upcoming courses, provide accountability, and share team resources.

Lastly, there is the challenge of competing with Parkway Baptist's established Sunday school program, which has been running strong for close to half a century. Each class is based on age-specific material appropriate for each particular age group. Notwithstanding the advantages of intergenerational discipleship, some people still choose this more traditional method of discipleship made available through Sunday school. The traditional classes are well-known and have been running at Parkway Baptist since the 1950s, making them trusted by many in the congregation. In comparison, the intergenerational program is relatively new and may require more effort to be accepted by those who are used to the traditional program.

Further Research

The researcher has formed a passionate and firm conviction that intergenerational discipleship deserves an academic conversation at the ministry table. The researcher expresses appreciation for the contributions made to the subject matter by other people who share a deep interest in the research topic and are eager to share their knowledge and insights with others in the interest of intergenerational discipleship. Intergenerational ministry is more than having different ages gather in a room for worship. The practice of intergenerational ministry produces an environment that is generationally related, which encourages spiritual socialization and places importance on people of all ages. While this paper contributes to the conversation, here are some additional things that are worthy of research.

Discipleship Leads to Greater Evangelism

It is essential to determine the extent to which discipleship leads to greater evangelism. Discipleship of any kind, intergenerational or not, must strengthen the church's evangelistic efforts. There are far too many people passing away in the shadow of the church steeple, lost without God, to accept anything less. Discipleship must not be reduced to a class environment where a certificate of completion is passed out, but lost souls are not brought in. One writer said, "Most churches have two legs on their stool. One is the weekend with all of its services and events, and the other is small groups. There's a third strategic leg that is entirely missing. We feel there needs to be a third leg that is completely devoted to discipleship."⁹ However, the writer is missing one more essential leg to find ministry balance, the leg of evangelism. One writer observed why individuals are hesitant to engage in evangelism. He said, "Evangelism presents an

⁹ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Baker Books, 2017), 152.

offensive picture to people both inside and outside the church. When some hear the word *evangelism*, they equate it with hardline psychological pressure, yelling through a bullhorn, or proselytizing people against their will. Yet those negative connotations express poor stereotypes of an activity that by its very nature means the communication of ‘good news.’”¹⁰ The goal of evangelism is not to intimidate people but rather to bless them with the story of the incredible love that God has manifested in the life of Christ. One writer offers this warning: “Continuing, healthy church growth demands intensive, effective discipleship. Nurturing the Good Shepherd mentality is a must. Discipleship is the handmaiden of evangelism. Evangelism divorced from discipleship is shallow and ineffective. Discipleship without evangelism leads to a sterile and legalistic church membership that will turn in on itself.”¹¹ Rather than seeing evangelism as an afterthought to be carried out on occasion, it should be seen as a savory ingredient that motivates believers to want more. Therefore, further research that examines the extent to which discipleship leads to greater evangelism would help strengthen the theological methodologies of discipleship. An assessment necessitates a thorough look at the many approaches of discipleship, including biblical education, spiritual formation, and serving the Lord in a community of faith. The church will obtain a better grasp of how discipleship leads to stronger evangelism by investigating the various outcomes of discipleship.

¹⁰ Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction*, Invitation to Theological Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2021), 3.

¹¹ John Mark Terry, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson, *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 509.

The Problem of Exclusivity

The role of exclusivity in traditional age-segregated Sunday school classes remains largely unexamined and is an essential area for further research. As a result, researchers must conduct additional academic research to comprehend how exclusivity in traditional Sunday school classes affects the relationship components of faith community building. Exclusive practices like outings, retreats, and fellowships may limit the effectiveness of Sunday school's potential to foster relationships beyond the classroom walls and bring others closer to the community of faith. The following is the researcher's limited observation of the problem.

The issue of exclusivity in adult age-specific Sunday schools has had a negative bearing on individuals. Specifically, enjoyable activities for specific age groups are limited to those who attend the class, leaving other members in the same age bracket feeling excluded and unable to form relationships. The people who do not attend the class are members who participate in worship and support the church through faithful giving. However, since they do not attend, they are excluded from the fellowships. Exclusivity in this environment will produce a schism between people of the same age who do not attend Sunday school, especially when it comes to social activities and events that the class arranges. Geoffrey B. Wilson said, "There is no room in the church for any intellectual, spiritual or social elite which separates itself from fellow believers whom Christ has accepted."¹² Unfortunately, exclusivity extends beyond Sunday school and, according to David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, even into the church. They contend that "When we choose exclusion, the church circles the wagons and becomes a fortresslike, members-only organization overcome by a siege mentality. We bar the door to everyone who

¹² Curtis C. Thomas, *Practical Wisdom for Pastors: Words of Encouragement and Counsel for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 116.

looks scary or asks questions that make us uncomfortable.”¹³ At its core, exclusivity reflects a lack of understanding, respect, and appreciation for diversity. Fostering a spirit of openness, acceptance, and appreciation for all members of the congregation is required to create an inclusive environment.

If not addressed, exclusivity can lead to the formation of cliques. Curtis Thomas expresses concern that “The old saying that ‘people don’t care how much we know as long as they know how much we care’ is certainly true. And if our members ever develop the impression that we have joined a clique with a certain few and that we really do not care about them, our ministry with them is on its way downhill.”¹⁴ Factions are not new to the church; they have existed since Paul’s ministry. The Corinthian church was moving downhill and was filled with spiritual factions who argued, “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ” (1 Cor. 1:12, NIV). The church was divided over personalities, and Paul speaks about this to their shame (1 Corinthians 1:29–31). One writer said, “The Corinthians had allowed such emphases to develop into cliques, who were refusing to share together in fellowship. Selectivity had produced splinter-groups (the word translated *dissensions* is *schismata*, from which we get ‘schism,’ and which literally means to ‘cut apart’). Now there was open strife between the different groups.”¹⁵ Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, the church can still fall victim to the formation of factions based on personal preferences for personalities, worship styles, or teaching methods, thus creating exclusivity. While it is never the

¹³ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church ... and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 180.

¹⁴ Curtis C. Thomas, *Practical Wisdom for Pastors: Words of Encouragement and Counsel for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 117.

¹⁵ David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 29.

intention of a Sunday school to promote exclusivity, there is a risk that others will perceive it to be true when activities are not open to all.

To summarize, the intergenerational biblical discipleship model can unleash the profound spiritual potential of the local church. Generational interaction produces an atmosphere of grace and acceptance as value is placed on every age. As a faith community, the church becomes a vibrant picture of Christ's love and acceptance, offering inclusivity in worship, service, and fellowship. An excellent display of the Elijah/Elisha principle is manifested as believers walk in unity, do God's will, and utilize their unique gifts for the honor and glory of Jesus Christ

Appendix A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

Title of the Project: Intergenerational Model of Discipleship]

Principal Investigator: David Sampson. Doctoral Candidate, School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be eighteen years of age and a member of Parkway Baptist for at least six months. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to create a biblically sound intergenerational discipleship model to move Parkway Baptist toward an Elijah/Elisha principle. The principle is developed when a generational connection takes place in ministry. As a result, the church will become a place where tolerance triumphs over intolerance, acceptance is warmly embraced, and generational connection impacts the world with the gospel.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Participate in a survey comparing the difference between intergenerational learning environments and age-specific learning environments. The survey should take no more than an hour to complete.
2. After participating in the intergenerational study groups for two rotations (each being ten weeks), participate in a post-participation survey.
3. Possibly be selected to participate in a videoed focus group with 5-10 others. The meeting will take place on Sunday evenings beginning at 5:00 PM and will last no more than an hour and a half.
4. Participate in a personal interview for one hour and a follow-up phone call.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect from participating in this study include understanding the benefits of intergenerational discipleship. For example, learning that discipleship is cross-generational (i.e., age groups can learn from one another). In addition, participants will learn how age-specific learning environments among adults ages can create isolation from the great body of believers. As a result, the survey will benefit our culture by encouraging people of all ages to reach out to one another.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous and kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. However, while discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer/in a locked [drawer/file cabinet]/etc.]. After [three years, all electronic records will be deleted] [and/or] [all hardcopy records will be shredded].
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years/until participants have reviewed and confirmed the accuracy of the transcripts and then [deleted/erased]. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. However, a light snack and bottled water will be provided during the focus group sessions.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as the Senior Pastor at Parkway Baptist. Survey data collection will be anonymous to limit potential or perceived conflicts, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Parkway Baptist. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

- If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey, and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.
- If you choose to withdraw from the study, please get in touch with the researcher at the email address/phone number in the next paragraph. If you decide to withdraw, data collected from you and focus group data will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw. You can contact the researcher at Pastor@ParkwayBaptist.me or by phone.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is David L. Sampson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. Furthermore, I have asked questions and have received answers. Therefore, I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix B

COURSE TEACHING REQUEST FORM (CTR)

Date of request: _____

Teacher's Name: _____

Please provide your contact information:

- Email: _____
- Phone: _____
- Can you receive text messages? Yes | No

Course Description: Please provide your study's main idea and key theological doctrines, concepts, or keywords.

What resources will you use? (e.g., books, videos, curriculum).

- Are you confident that your resources and point of view will be consistent with Parkway Baptist's theological doctrine and faith practice as described in our bylaws? Yes | No
- Knowing our pastor is the under-shepherd (Acts 20:28), are you confident that your resources and point of view will support the pastor's teaching? Yes | No

Please sign: _____

Appendix C

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE
PARKWAY BAPTIST TEACHER AND VOLUNTEER QUESTIONNAIRE

EDUCATION

1. Do you hold a degree from an institution? Yes No
2. Have you ever had any formal training in a Bible college or online seminary? Yes No
3. Are you currently enrolled in any educational training? Yes No

EXPERIENCE

1. List positions you have held in church ministry.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

2. What duties have you performed in previous ministry positions?

3. Besides the ones listed in questions 1 & 2, what other ministry jobs have you held?

4. Please provide two people (not family) who can provide a reference letter or phone call on your behalf.

Reference One: Name: _____
 Address: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email: _____

Reference Two: Name: _____
 Address: _____
 Phone: _____
 Email: _____

5. Why do you feel led by God to take on this ministry-related opportunity?

6. Do you understand the requirements for this position, and do you believe that you can adequately perform the duties required? Yes No

GENERAL BACKGROUND

1. How long have you been a Christian? _____.

2. Have you been licensed by a Baptist church for ministry? Yes No

3. Have you ever been ordained by a Baptist church? Yes No

4. Have you ever served on a church staff? Yes No

5. Have you ever been the leader of a ministry? Yes No

5. Are you married? Yes No

6. Have you been married before? Yes No

If yes, please tell us about yourself and what you are comfortable sharing about the relationship.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND

1. Have you ever been charged with committing a crime? Yes No

2. Have you ever been convicted of committing a crime? Yes No

3. Have you ever been investigated by a governmental agency for any form of abuse?
 Yes No

4. Has your driver's license ever been suspended? Yes No

5. We will check the criminal record of all workers and volunteers. Are you willing to sign an authorization form to check your background? Yes No

CHRISTIAN VALUES

I. Relationship to the Local Church

1. How do you define faithful church attendance?

2. What would be the reason(s) for you to skip a regularly scheduled church service?

3. Have you been an active and faithful member of our educational ministry (i.e., Sunday school, Connect Groups, Bible Studies, etc.) since joining Parkway Baptist? Yes No

4. Have you been a faithful member of all scheduled services since joining Parkway Baptist? Yes No

5. What area of ministry do you find the most rewarding? Check all that apply to you.

- Music
- Teaching
- Missions
- Greeting
- Hospitality/Cooking
- Nursery
- Drama Team
- Security
- Outreach
- Kids Ministry
- Usher
- Student Ministry
- Preaching
- Leading
- Cleaning
- Organizing
- Other: _____

6. Do you believe that deacons, staff, leaders, teachers, and volunteers should be loyal in helping the Pastor carry out his vision for the church and ministry? Yes No

II. Relationship to the Denomination

7. How long have you been a member of the Baptist denomination? _____.

8. Have you ever been a member of another denomination? Yes No

If so, what made you change?

9. Have you ever left a church in disagreement with the leadership? Yes No

If so, please explain:

10. Have you ever been under church discipline? Yes No

If so, please explain:

III. Relationship with the Ministry

11. Are you willing to volunteer over and above the duties you are responsible for?

Willing Not Willing

12. In your ministry setting, are you willing to help with the janitorial duties?

Willing Not Willing

13. If you are requested to do a task outside of your ministry description, would you be willing to do so?

Willing Not Willing

14. If another pastoral staff member asked you to do a ministry task that was not your job, would you do it?

Willing Not Willing

15. Do you wholly agree that Parkway Baptist's pastor and deacons have full authority to define the terms used in the bylaws, statements of faith, standards of conduct, etc.?

Yes No

16. While we have no influence over which translation of the Bible is used in Bible videos, study guides, and books, we have power over our decisions. That said, Parkway Baptist strives to use the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible in all teaching environments. Will you follow the church's guidelines by teaching, preaching, discipling, and instructing from the KJV within our ministry?

Yes No

IV. Relationship with the General Public

17. What are your convictions regarding the use of alcohol?

18. What are your convictions regarding the use of pornography?

19. Have you ever illegally abused prescription or nonprescription drugs?

Yes No

20. Do you consider your temperament a problem? Yes No

21. Have you ever physically struck anyone in anger? Yes No

22. Have you ever been accused of improper conduct toward a member of the opposite sex?

Yes No If yes, please explain.

23. Have you ever been accused of any improper conduct toward a member of the same sex?

Yes No If yes, please explain.

24. Have you ever been accused of improper conduct toward a child?

Yes No If yes, please explain.

Please Read Parkway Baptist's Standard of Conduct

PARKWAY BAPTIST STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Leaders of Parkway Baptist are required to abstain from any inappropriate lifestyle that would hinder the mission, message, and ministry of Parkway Baptist (*inappropriate social media posts, pornography use, vile profanity, smoking, vaping, or drug abuse*). We believe anyone who participates in the preceding practices is not living the separated, dedicated life we deem essential for our children to pattern their lives.

Leaders of Parkway Baptist are required to be members of Parkway Baptist. In addition, our employees, staff, and long-term volunteers are expected to attend all Parkway Baptist services regularly and fully support all Parkway Baptist services and programs. The only exception, if approved by the pastor, is if you are a full-time worker or the wife of a full-time worker in a Bible-believing church.

1. Do you agree with the Parkway Baptist Standard of Conduct and agree to uphold a lifestyle that honors Christ and the testimony of the church? Yes No

2. Do you agree with the church policy that a person who commits fornication or adultery should be released from their staff position because of the improper role model they present?
Yes No If not, why not?

3. Do you understand that if you are found taking part in an illicit sexual relationship, you will be relieved of your position? Yes No

CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

I. Salvation and Walk with the Lord

1. Have you trusted Christ as your personal Lord and Savior? Yes No

2. Have you been baptized by immersion? Yes No

3. Should you set an example to others as a leader in soul-winning? Yes No

4. Do you make it a habit to pray each day? Yes No

5. Do you believe that as a leader, you should set an example in giving and tithing? Yes
No

6. Do you believe you should continue studying God's Word to continue spiritual growth?
Yes No

If you answered "no" to *any* of the above six questions, please explain:

7. What are your convictions regarding Calvinism?

8. Do you hold to a Calvinistic view of salvation? Yes No

9. Do you hold to and practice any Pentecostal Doctrines or Charismatic views?
If so, please explain:

II. Personal Standards

7. What are your convictions regarding watching inappropriate Hollywood movies?

8. Describe your convictions concerning the way a Christian should dress. For example, what would your definition of modest apparel be for a woman, and what are your beliefs regarding the appearance of a Christian man? e.g., Hair? Modesty? Piercings? Tattooing?

9. What are your convictions regarding secret society organizations like the Free Masons, Eastern Star, Scientology, and other New Age movements? Do you believe they are compatible with Christian teaching?

IV. Relationships with Others

12. Do you believe it is okay for a believer to date an unsaved person? Yes No

13. Do you believe it is okay for a believer to marry an unsaved person? Yes No

14. Do you and your spouse believe this ministry position is God's will? Yes No

15. Does your spouse believe that her faithful participation is vital to the success of your ministry? Yes No N/A

16. Does your family, living under your parental guidance, understand that their support and active church attendance reflect your ministry leadership? Yes No

17. Do you believe a person should continue to lead others even though their family does not submit to their leadership? Yes No

18. Do you and your spouse agree with biblical headship in the home as outlined in Ephesians 5? Yes No

PARKWAY BAPTIST MINISTRY AGREEMENT

I, the undersigned, _____, for and in consideration of being awarded the position of _____ by the Pastor and Deacons of Parkway Baptist, do at this moment accept the such position and the duties and responsibilities entailed therein; further, it is

AGREED by the undersigned that Parkway Baptist's Pastor and Deacons shall have the right to terminate this agreement for the failure of the undersigned to satisfactorily comply with the position's requirements or the requirements of as set forth in the bylaws and standard of conduct; further, it is

AGREED by the undersigned that he/she will become a member of Parkway Baptist, faithfully attending all public services and taking an active part in the total church program and will be loyal to the pastor and the program of the church in word and deed. The administration desires

that every person feels they are a part of the overall work of the Church as well as of their specific ministry. However, we cannot allow any person who is out of fellowship with the church to remain on the staff or leadership position since we believe the ministries are inseparable; further, it is

AGREED that since complaining leads to dissension and unrest, the undersigned will refrain from complaining about differences and problems concerning the church, other staff members, and/or his particular ministry. If you have a legitimate complaint or problem, you are encouraged to discuss it with the pastor or your supervisor; further, it is

AGREED that the undersigned subscribes without reservation to the articles of faith and the standards of conduct as set forth in this agreement and that the church shall have the right to terminate this agreement for the failure of the undersigned to comply with the standards of conduct satisfactorily.

**Please identify if you are an Employee or a Volunteer
by signing the Ministry Agreement**

Date _____

Employee Signature: _____

Volunteer Signature: _____

Pastor/Church Representative: _____

Appendix D

QR CODE FOR REGISTRATION FORM

JOIN PASTOR DAVID'S RESEARCH TEAM!
Pastor David Sampson invites you to take part in an interview for his research project.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO REGISTER AS A VOLUNTEER

SCAN ME

Appendix E

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT PARKWAY BAPTIST

This appendix includes the researcher's letter requesting permission to conduct the action research thesis intervention at Parkway Baptist. In addition, this section contains written authorization from the Chairman of the Deacons at Parkway Baptist, granting the researcher permission to conduct the proposed action research thesis intervention within the church facilities and seeking volunteer participants from among the congregation's members.

October 3, 2022

Michael Lea
Chairman of the Deacons
Parkway Baptist | Fort Oglethorpe, GA

Dear Michael,

I'm pursuing another Doctoral degree, this time at Liberty University. As a student enrolled in the DMIN program at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry degree in Biblical Studies. The title of my research project is "Intergenerational Biblical Discipleship." The purpose of my research is to focus my investigation within a local context. Therefore, I want to investigate the presence (or absence) of intergenerational discipleship within the framework of Parkway Baptist in Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, by means of focus groups, interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and a study of relevant historical data.

To that end, I'm writing to ask permission to conduct my research at Parkway Baptist, utilizing my office and various rooms for interviews, and reach out to members to see if any of them might be interested in participating in my study. To clarify the following:

- Participants will be given an informed consent form before participating in the research.
- Taking part in the research is voluntary, and participants can discontinue at any time.
- All names will be anonymous in the study so members can speak freely.
- Focus groups will contain no more than ten individuals.

As to the interviews:

1. I will ask questions that are pertinent to my research topic. This will prevent my participants from feeling as though I am prying into their personal lives.
2. I will be clear about the subject and the information needed to finish my research. Being explicit will allow them to consider what information they are comfortable revealing.

Thank you for considering my request to do the research at Parkway Baptist. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on an official church letterhead indicating your approval and support. An example of a permission letter is attached for your convenience.

Missional Until He Comes,

Dr. David L. Sampson
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
Liberty University

65 STUART ROAD
FORT OGLETHORPE
GA 30742

Senior Pastor:
Dr. David L. Sampson

Deacon Chairman
Michael Lea

Church Secretary:
Melissa Sampson

Minister of Music:
Butch Green

Youth Pastor:
Justin Williamson

Missions Pastor:
Joey Edwards

Men's Pastor
Matt Hulsey

Children's Administrator
and MDO Director
Robin Flanagan

AWANA Director:
Todd Barnes

Nursery Director:
Emily Wysong

WEB SITE:
www.ParkwayBaptist.me



Parkway Baptist



Instagram

@ParkwayBaptistGA



PHONE:
706.866.0325
FAX:
706.861.9208



Parkway
BAPTIST

Changing Lives ONE Verse At A Time

October 5, 2022

David Sampson
Graduate Student
John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
1971 University Blvd
Lynchburg, VA 24515

David,

Thank you for sharing your research proposal details regarding intergenerational biblical discipleship. After review and discussion, you are granted permission to conduct your study at Parkway Baptist. We appreciate the points you have made regarding:

- Informed consent for member before participating
- Voluntary participation that can be discontinued at any time
- Anonymous study for privacy
- Consideration for female participants—no one questioned alone without spouse or significant other
- Keeping questions to the research topic
- Allow participants good understanding of material for a comfort level needed for any information they are sharing

Our very best to you in your quest and we look forward to how this investigation with help to prosper and guide better interaction and growth at Parkway Baptist.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Lea
Deacon Chairman / Parkway Baptist
Mobile: [REDACTED]

Appendix F

PROMOTIONAL FLYER

Research Participants Needed

Intergenerational Model of Discipleship

- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Are you curious how Christians might become more intergenerational in their discipleship and mentoring relationships?

If you answered **yes** to each of the above questions, you might be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to create a biblically sound intergenerational discipleship model to move Parkway Baptist toward an Elijah/Elisha principle. The principle is developed when a generational connection takes place in ministry; the church will become a place where tolerance triumphs over intolerance, acceptance is warmly embraced, and generational connection impacts the world with the gospel.

Participants will be asked to participate in a survey, spend an hour and a half in a focus group, and participate in a personal interview.

If you would like to participate, scan this QR code and register.



A consent document will be given to you one week before the interview/focus group.

David L. Sampson, a doctoral candidate in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact David Sampson at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] for more information.

Appendix G

SURVEY QUESTIONS

These survey questions were given to all individuals who participated in the intergenerational discipleship model, and they have been included in this appendix.

Indicate your gender:

- Male Female

How young are you?

- 18-24 25-29
 30-39 40-50
 51-60 61-70
 71-80 81+

What is your marital status?

- Single: Never Married Single: Divorced Married Remarried Widowed

How many children do you have?

- None One Two Three Four Five or more

I have attended Parkway Baptist for:

- Less than six months
 7-12 months 1-2 years 2-4 years 5-10 years 11+

Which model of ministry is the best approach?

- Multigenerational (Something for everyone based on age-specific learning environments)
 Intergenerational (Cross-generational learning environments)
 Attractional (Ministry based on events, concerts, revivals, conferences, etc.)
 Missional (focusing on age-specific outreach efforts).

To what extent are you familiar with the concept of intergenerational ministry?

- Very Somewhat Not at all

Please select which one below represents intergenerational ministry.

- Age-specific Sunday school
 Church picnics
 Family activities
 Blended worship music of both contemporary and traditional genres.
 Diverse ages connecting in fellowship and discipleship
 A churchwide fellowship dinner for all ages
 All ages involved in the ministry

Point out any preconceived notions you think members of the church have bought into without questioning their validity (check all that apply).

- Senior citizens are neglected
 Children are not mature enough for ministry
 Older people do not understand the younger generation
 The older generation is cliquish and has no desire to fellowship with the younger generation

- The younger generation is cliquish and has no desire to fellowship with the older generation
- Pastors are the primary influencers of faith in children
- Spiritual formation is best done in age-specific learning environments for people 18+

When generational divisions arise in the church, you feel the leadership's inclination is to:

- Struggle to find solutions
- Ignore them
- Appreciate the diversity and implement solutions
- Criticize competing views

What Leadership plan can best address generational tension?

- The Leadership should emphasize the shared mission between the generations.
- The Leadership should hold generational meetings to discuss the value of diversity.
- The Leadership should create different ministries to meet the needs of every generation.
- The Leadership should retain the status quo since no one generation will be satisfied.

How inclined are you to seek advice from someone OLDER than you?

- Very inclined
- Somewhat inclined
- Not inclined at all

How inclined are you to seek advice from someone YOUNGER than you?

- Very inclined
- Somewhat inclined
- Not inclined at all

Is it important to you that the leadership characterizes the ministry approach as generational?

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not important at all

Do you feel that Parkway Baptist is an intergenerational church where intentional dialogue between generations often occurs?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Do you think that the church tries to bridge the generational gap?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Do you think that the church welcomes all ages or caters to one generation?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Is worship expressed in your preferred worship style of music?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Is the style of worship targeted at a specific generational group?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Are multiple generations involved in the preparation of worship?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Do you feel that our current ministry approach is discipling each generation to carry out the mission of the church?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Do you think that intergenerational ministry is challenging?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Are younger generations encouraged to discover their spiritual gifts alongside adults through service and community outreach activities?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Parkway Baptist provides discipleship mentoring for children and youth.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Is intergenerational ministry worth pursuing?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Can intergenerational ministry create a sense of belonging?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Can intergenerational ministry foster generational understanding?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Can intergenerational ministry help break down generational barriers?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Are you currently involved in discipling or mentoring someone other than family members?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

In the past five years, have you been personally involved in discipling or mentoring someone other than family members?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Do you prefer age-specific learning, like Sunday school, over cross-generational learning environments?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Is worship expressed in your preferred worship style?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Are children and youth used in the worship service throughout the year?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Are adults of retirement age involved in the nursery?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Are adults of retirement age involved in the children's ministry?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

Are retirement-age adults involved in the teen youth group or college and career?

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

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IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 3, 2023

David Sampson
Michael Eiras

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY22-23-679 Intergenerational Biblical Discipleship

Dear David Sampson and Michael Eiras,

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your project is not considered human subjects research because it will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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