

FOSTERING EFFECTIVE INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH
PASTORAL CARE IN THE BLACK CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis develops strategies for fostering intergenerational relationships in the Black Church by means of intentional pastoral care, informed by qualitative research conducted in two congregations: Living Water Baptist Church of High Point, North Carolina, and St. John's Congregational Church of Springfield, Massachusetts. In response to congregational feedback obtained through generational cohort forums, I outline three primary ways in which pastors can facilitate authentic and valued intergenerational relationships: through preaching that highlights intergenerationality, biblical teaching that demonstrates how the value of intergenerationality is found in the biblical text, and pastoral care that attends to key moments of congregants' lives and relationships. The distinct needs of generational cohorts are emphasized throughout, drawing upon data gleaned through the research project.

The thesis begins by defining intergenerational ministry. It differentiates intergenerational ministry from a multigenerational church in that intergenerational ministry involves multiple generations interacting between and across the generations, with each generation contributing to and learning from the others. After highlighting the distinctive history, cultural function, and intergenerational challenges of the Black Church, I summarize the distinctives of each contemporary generational cohort. I then draw upon research on pastoral care in the Black Church to describe the context for how preaching, teaching, and pastoral care can foster intergenerationality.

The final section of the thesis describes the application of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care to developing intergenerational relationships, detailing the ministries I conducted in my own churches as a pastor and researcher, and the feedback provided in generational group forums. In this section I outline different preaching styles and emphases which are favored by each generational cohort. I also describe a Bible study I taught the church on the book of Ruth, highlighting how intergenerational relationships drive that narrative and encourage them in the church. Then I describe various modes of pastoral care which are distinct to church size, and how these different modes address the needs of each generational cohort. Finally, I analyze congregants' responses to questionnaires which gathered authentic perspectives from each generational cohort regarding their perception of activities among the various generations and how church ministries address those needs.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my late grandmother, Mrs. Dorothy F. Battle, June 9, 1933–March 5, 2009. Always trying to make you proud!

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Thirdly, I must acknowledge the two congregations listed in this paper. For eight years, God allowed me the privilege to serve, lead, and love the wonderful people of the Living Water Baptist Church of High Point, NC. At the age of nineteen years old, this congregation heeded the voice of God and took a chance on me, and from our time together, only God receives the glory for what happened. Because of what I gained from serving Living Water, God graced me with the opportunity to relocate to Springfield, Massachusetts, to serve St. John's Congregational Church. Though I have only been here since November 2022, I have realized that this was the Lord's doing. The work for this project was initiated at Living Water, but it was carried out at St. John's; therefore, both churches will always hold a special place in my heart.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BTU: Baptist Training Union

SJCC: St. John's Congregational Church

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION, DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXTS, AND SOCIAL LOCATION

There are some churches that would identify themselves as multigenerational congregations, meaning they have more than one generation represented in their membership. Moving from that description to an intergenerational congregation—a congregation where the generations interact with and contribute to one another—is vital for sustainability and success. One of the ways intergenerationality can be cultivated is through pastoral care, which would assist individuals with learning how to communicate effectively with multiple generations. This ability is indispensable because “generations have their own language they prefer to hear from communicators.”¹ The aim of this research project was to highlight methods that pastors can use to foster effective intergenerational relationships that intentionally create intergenerational congregations. Intergenerational congregations promote and produce more inclusive congregations.

The substance of pastoral care often includes, but is not limited to, pastoral preaching, teaching, and presence within a pastor’s context that will help bridge relationships between generations. The African American pastor serves the Black community as a figure of leadership. Throughout slavery, Jim Crow, the Civil Rights Era, and through today, the African American pastor’s presence has been at the forefront, providing valuable and unique services for the church and community. Unfortunately, their role and functions have often been overlooked by most scholarly research.

¹ Darrell E. Hall, *Speaking across Generations: Messages That Satisfy Boomers, Xers, Millennials, Gen Z, and Beyond* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 7.

Initially, the context for my research project was at the Living Water Baptist Church of High Point, NC. I had the privilege of serving this congregation for eight years, during which I was granted the opportunity to cultivate an intergenerational culture over time; however, on Sunday, October 9, 2022, I delivered my last sermon as Senior Pastor. This came about because on Tuesday, September 13, 2022, I was called to pastor the St. John's Congregational Church (SJCC) of Springfield, Massachusetts—also a predominantly Black congregation. St. John's prides itself on being one of “the oldest and active Black Churches in New England,” whose history dates back to 1844.² This new assignment shifted my context but not the content of my project. In fact, this transition in both context and culture gives me greater experience with seeing how a pastor can foster effective intergenerational relationships in the Black Church through pastoral care. Moving to a different context with a project as such is quite beneficial. While acquainting myself with the members of this congregation as their new pastor, I embraced this opportunity to learn how to foster effective intergenerational relationships through this research project. Initially, I sought to center this project on building intergenerational relationships within the Black Baptist Church. However, I am no longer pastoring in that particular denomination; therefore, the project draws data from both Living Water Baptist Church and St. John's Congregational Church, while continuing to use the practice of pastoral care to foster effective intergenerational relationships.

This body of work seeks to answer questions such as, beyond the spiritual ethos of the members, what might be their social, psychological, and emotional state of being

² “St. Johns Congregational Church—Home,” St. Johns Congregational Church, accessed November 14, 2022, <http://www.sjkb.org/>.

with regard to fostering intergenerational relationships? How does the pastor aid in fostering a sense of belonging within the church among the members without showing partiality to one generation? What components of pastoral care within the Black Church would allow for mutuality among generations ranging from Builders to Generation Z, and why are relationships important in a spiritual context?³ I will answer these questions by arguing that pastors of Black Churches serve as bridges, connecting members of all generations spiritually and relationally through pastoral care that promotes interconnectional relationships. By doing so, pastors aid in fostering not just a multigenerational church but an intergenerational church that allows members to have a sense of belonging.

This project will cover a seven-year pastorate within a medium-sized, multigenerational Black Baptist congregation in High Point, North Carolina, and the first six months of pastoring the St. John's Congregational Church of Springfield, Massachusetts, and will describe and analyze how both churches experience the same connectional issue among generations.⁴ It will accomplish this by conducting a series of focus groups with the various generations. This project will pinpoint what was discovered

³ Michael Dimock, "Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins," Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

⁴ According to National Congregations Study, "size is one of the most important characteristics of any organization, including congregations. It affects everything." Chaves, Mark, Joseph Roso, Anna Holleman, and Mary Hawkins. 2021. *Congregations in 21st Century America*. Durham, NC: Duke University, Department of Sociology. When reading Gary L. McIntosh's, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, "using worship attendance, rather than membership statistics, is generally thought to be more reliable for measuring church size." Churches between 201–400 worshippers would constitute that to be a medium size church. Churches with an attendance of 400 or more is considered as a large church. Gary L. McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All Bringing out the Best in Any Size Church* (F.H. Revell, 1999), 17–18. These numbers are may still be varied seeing that the church has been forced to make several changes due to the global pandemic. Attendance in most churches is based on in-person and virtual worshippers.

during the years related to the challenges of effectively doing this kind of pastoral work, with the desire to help other pastors foster such relationships and ministry. This form of relationship building consisted of a pastor-to-people relationship that encouraged intentional people-to-people interaction with members of different generations.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MULTIGENERATIONAL MINISTRY VS. INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRY

Pastoring multiple generations in today's time is quite different and, in some regards, more difficult than in times past. As the primary leader of the congregation, pastors serve as bridges, connecting people in a myriad of ways. Pastors don't just serve as theological bridges, getting people to connect the biblical narrative and spiritual components of their faith to everyday living; they also find themselves linking individuals socially and relationally. In most cases, having a mixture of people from various generations, pastors would classify that they lead a multigenerational church. They are labeled as such because generations coexist within a congregation because of a shared location, familiarity, or family tie; however, this term can be problematic. Though these generations worship together, this is not always because of a shared mission or intention to develop meaningful and purposeful connections.

Consequently, these churches often result in siloed generational cohorts with only limited interaction, resulting in some of the generational issues pastors see in ministry. Though multigenerational ministry might seem favorable, the goal is to move from this multigeneration state to becoming intergenerational. But what is the difference? Is there a difference? How do we move from multigenerational to intergenerational ministry?

The idea of intergenerationality is used “to differentiate between people on the basis of perceived differences directly attributable to chronological age.”⁵ Thus, “intergenerational” refers to the interaction that takes place between at least two different generations. This is juxtaposed against multigenerationality, which is simply the presence of multiple generations rather than the generations interacting together. For example, a multigenerational church function would be a church event in which the different generations self-segregate by section. An intergenerational church function would consist of having multiple generations interacting between and across the generations, with each generation contributing to and learning from each other. To better explain this concept, Robyn Burns-Marko uses the framework of a cheeseburger. Multigenerationality is the stacking of the bun, condiments, burger, and cheese in a stack on the plate. When each component of the cheeseburger exists together, but is not intertwined with the others, intergenerationality is not present; however, when “a bite is taken from the sandwich, one can taste the elements in the cheeseburger, and even upon reflection, identify the individual flavors, but the sum of the entire cheeseburger creates its own unique taste.”⁶ Intergenerational ministry shifts from the idea of ministry with multiple people ranging in age, as multigenerational ministry does, to something more significant.

Intergenerational ministry involves intentional interaction. Liz Perraud, Executive Director of *GenOn Ministries*, a nonprofit organization that equips Christian communities for discipleship through intergenerational relationships, defined intergenerational

⁵ Allan G. Harkness, “Intergenerationality: Biblical and Theological Foundations,” *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (2012): 121.

⁶ Robyn Burns-Marko, “Intergenerational Ministry: Bringing the Generations Back Together” (PhD diss., Azusa Pacific University, 2017), 10.

ministry as ministry that “brings together any combination of at least two generations in planned and purposeful settings, empowers multiple generations to mutually invest in each other and in their faith community, and intentionally encourage Christian relationships among multiple generations.”⁷ Intergenerational ministry is a choice for churches and pastors. It can be challenging; however, it can be done! Through intentional programming, intergenerational ministry and relationships can be generated by connecting members with shared interests, celebrating shared birthdates amongst congregants, and much more. Nonetheless, beyond programming, intergenerational church also requires intentional pastoral care. The areas of pastoral care that will be specifically lifted in this project will be pastoral preaching, teaching, and presence.

⁷ Liz Perraud, “Disciples of All Generations,” GenOn Ministries, December 17, 2017, <https://www.genonministries.org/blogs/blog/disciples-of-all-generations>.

CHAPTER TWO
DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTEXT

**DESCRIPTION OF FIRST CHURCH CONTEXT: LIVING WATER BAPTIST
CHURCH**

The Living Water Baptist Church is a forty-two-year-old congregation nestled in the inner-city of High Point, North Carolina, established on March 23, 1980. Though positioned within the city, the founding pastor and members of the congregation were not natives of NC. Originally, those persons migrated from the rural area of South Carolina, and with that transition, they brought along with them the tradition, customs, and culture of that region. Under the leadership of its founding pastor, the late Reverend Adolph Thomas, Living Water, though younger than some of the other prominent Black religious institutions within the city, flourished numerically. Beginning in the Carl Chavis YMCA before moving to its present location, Living Water has always been a place that has served as a church for all generations. Before the multigenerational church was ever a comprised ideology in their minds, this was the makeup of Living Water.

When I first accepted the call to pastor the church, I was a nineteen-year-old sophomore in college. Although I had been reared in the Black Church and knew that “leadership always mattered for African American families and communities,” the undertaking of being the primary leader was a challenge, especially during the first two years of my pastorate.⁸ Aside from the external struggles I had inherited, such as decreases in congregants and a tarnished reputation around the church community due to

⁸ Lee N. June and Christopher C. Mathis Jr., eds., *African American Church Leadership: Principles for Effective Ministry and Community Leadership* (Kregel Ministry, 2013), 32.

high pastor turnover and one particularly disreputable former pastor, there was also the presence of an internal battle. The more seasoned members were at odds with the younger ones, and my age at the time of my appointment did not improve the situation. Though being nineteen was an unchangeable factor, what benefitted me was the gravitas I had with older people; however, there was still trepidation among some of them related to my ability to lead due to their interactions with some of the congregants from my generation.

When I began pastoring, I discovered both fear and hope within the ministry. Some of the older influential members feared that I would initially come in and partner with the very few younger members, totally disregard their desires and change everything that had been established over the last thirty-four years. The younger members had hoped that an immediate resurgence would take place and that the church would become a young and thriving church because they had a nineteen-year-old as their pastor. Placed in the middle of this tension, I had to conclude that if there was going to be a connection among the membership, my first assignment was to cultivate an authentic relationship with those I had been privileged to serve. I realized that the older members of my congregation—who were having a rough time understanding and perceiving the need for transformation within themselves, the church, and how the church was viewed—first needed to have some type of connection with their young pastor. On the other hand, the younger parishioners needed to regather an appreciation for the transition and an empathy for the culture of the older generation. I had an obligation to foster inter-connectional relationships, meaning mutually joined relationships between generations in any capacity.

DESCRIPTION OF NEW CHURCH CONTEXT: ST. JOHN'S CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The St. John's Congregational Church of Springfield, Massachusetts, has served as a spiritual, social, and political institution concerned with building relationships with people locally and nationally. According to its history, it has maintained relationships with other nationally known human rights advocates for over 178 years. In fact, Abraham Lincoln knew one of the church's founding members personally:

John Brown, the celebrated abolitionist, and hero of Harper's Ferry, was a member of the church during a period of time when he lived in Springfield. Brown and members of the church were actively involved in efforts to aid the escape of fugitive slaves. Springfield became a major stop on the Underground Railroad due in part to the abolitionist activities of this historic church. One of the most prized possessions of St. John's is a Bible once owned by John Brown. Brown's Bible remains on display at the church.⁹

Other respected guests and visitors to the church have included Sojourner Truth, James Baldwin, Langston Hughes, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Deval Patrick, and more.

St. John's impact over the course of their existence can be credited to skillful, committed, and invigorating pastoral leadership. Having been called as the fourteenth Senior Pastor, I stand on the shoulders of those who have challenged and transformed the church, community, and country. A few of those pastors include the Reverend Samuel Harrison, Dr. William N. DeBerry, Dr. Charles E. Cobb, and the Reverend Dr. Howard-John Wesley. What is notable in their pastoral prowess was their concern for civil and social matters. During Samuel Harrison's tenure (1866–1870), his work for racial equality placed him in the national spotlight during the Civil War. He served as an officer

⁹ "St. Johns Congregational Church—Home," St. Johns Congregational Church, accessed November 14, 2022, <http://www.sjkb.org/>."

and chaplain of the renowned 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment, which was known for “its service leading the failed Union assault on Battery Wagner, a Confederate earthwork fortification on Morris Island, on July 18, 1863.”¹⁰ Succeeding in his debate with Abraham Lincoln over equal pay for Blacks serving in the Union army, Reverend Harrison’s argument caused Congress, in June 1864, to grant equal pay for the 180,000 Blacks who fought on the side of the North.

The work of Reverend Dr. William N. DeBerry, who served from 1899 to 1930, is still visible even today. Outside of leading the St. John’s Church in erecting a new sanctuary which still stands today at the corner of Union and Hancock Street, formally known as the Legacy Building, DeBerry is noted for establishing several ministries benefiting the community, including a parish home for working women, girls’ and boys’ clubs, a summer camp and classes in domestic sciences. These ministries developed into long-standing institutions that continue to serve the community’s needs, including the Dunbar Community Center, the Springfield Urban League, and Camp Atwater, the oldest and most prestigious African American summer camp in the country. Because of his community and civic engagement, the city of Springfield named a school after him in his honor.

During the turbulent Civil Rights era, St. John’s repute as a center of justice was carried through the pastoral vision of the Reverend Dr. Charles E. Cobb. From 1951–1966, Dr. Cobb earned a reputation as “a highly educated man with a universal perspective that influenced and directed our church, cultivated relationships locally,

¹⁰ “54th Massachusetts Regiment,” National Park Service, February 13, 2023, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/54th-massachusetts-regiment.htm>.

nationally, and internationally.”¹¹ When most ministers and church leaders objected to uniting with other religious communities of faith, particularly the Nation of Islam, Dr. Cobb fostered a connection that offered him the opportunity to welcome Malcolm X into his home. His efforts to tackle the debauchery of environmental racism and other systemic ills aligned with the mission of St. John’s, in that the church itself became one of the leading institutions in dismantling those ills. Then in 1996, while St. John’s had consistently been blessed with strong, sensible, and stable pastors, the calling of the Reverend Dr. Howard-John Wesley catapulted the church into the present age. With its reputation and Dr. Wesley’s leadership, charisma, and vision, St. John’s membership expanded to nearly three thousand members during his tenure. For twelve years, the pastoral leadership of Dr. Wesley can be viewed as transformative and transitional, both for the congregants and himself. The pastoral work that was being exemplified while at St. John’s was the propelling force that catapulted Wesley to the historic Alfred Street Baptist Church of Alexandria, VA.

After two years of being without a pastor, the call was extended to the Reverend Dr. Calvin J. McFadden. From 2010 to 2020, St. John’s was again led by pastoral leadership that brought about unique skills and talent. It was under Pastor McFadden’s leadership that St. John’s was able to construct a new state-of-the-art worship edifice, and many other enhancements and additions were initiated during his tenure. Between Dr. McFadden’s transition and COVID-19, after two years, the call to pastor was extended to me. Having time with the members and engaging in meaningful conversations made it

¹¹ “St. Johns Congregational Church—Home,” St. Johns Congregational Church, accessed November 14, 2022, <http://www.sjkb.org/>.”

quite obvious that some form of intergenerationality existed before COVID-19 throughout the history of the church. Thriving intergenerational ministries and small groups created space for belonging; however, because of the global pandemic, for three years, ministry as such ceased. Therefore, coming into a new ministry context, I saw that lack, but I also saw the desire for it to be resurrected.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE BLACK CHURCH

Although my call to a new congregation caused a shift in my research context, I still recognized that both Living Water and St. John’s shared a common identity in that they both were a part of the larger Black Church. As a religious institution possessed, populated, and supported by Black people, the Black Church has served as a foundation and center of the Black community. In his work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois alludes to the Black Church as the epicenter for spiritual development and social and civic engagement. He states:

various organizations met here—the church proper, the Sunday-school, two or three insurance societies, women’s societies, secret societies, and mass meetings of various kinds. The black church was and continues to be a place where “considerable sums of money are collected and expended here, employment is found for the idle, strangers are introduced, news is disseminated and charity distributed.”¹²

The term “Black Church” represents the “collective Christian religious experience of Black people in America and serves as an umbrella for all the variety of Black Christian religious communities of faith.”¹³ This term further denotes the “collective

¹² W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1994), 117.

¹³ Henry Louis Gates, *The Black Church: This Is Our Story, This Is Our Song* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021), 117.

religious identity, shared religious history, and spiritual culture joining and undergirding Black people which individual Black churches share.”¹⁴ Described as the “most important and dominant institutional phenomenon in African American communities,” the Black Church was the cultural kettle that Black people created to fight a system designed to crush their spirit.¹⁵ Collectively they rejected the systems at play, to build that counter-culture of resistance. “And the culture they created was sublime, awesome, majestic, lofty, glorious, and at all points subversive of the larger culture of enslavement that sought to destroy their humanity.”¹⁶ In *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya shared:

The black church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low-income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development.¹⁷

For many Blacks, especially those who lived through segregation, Jim Crow, and the (ongoing) struggle for justice and equity, the church was one of the few if not only places where people were allowed to acquire and express identity, power, community and, thus, belonging. However, there are persons who consider themselves products of the Civil Rights era and prior who hold tightly to their position and belonging, thus preventing subsequent generations from developing as leaders and using their gifts and

¹⁴ Robert C. Rogers, “The Stressors Black Pastors Experience: A Counseling Perspective” (PhD diss., Montclair State University, 2022), 37,” <https://digitalcommons.montclair.edu/etd/1067>.

¹⁵ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 92.

¹⁶ “How the Black Church Saved Black America,” *The Harvard Gazette*, March 9, 2021, <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2021/03/the-history-and-importance-of-the-black-church/>.

¹⁷ Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, 8.

talents to propel the church into a new phase of ministry. Placing emphasis on the Black Church and the need for intergenerationality is necessary because of all of the injustices within society—injustices of race, exclusivity, and more. If there is one place where Black people can believe, become, and belong, that place should be the church. Black Churches without intergenerational relationships continue promoting the trauma of not being an inclusive institution and are thus hardly any different than the rest of society.

Humans are social creatures who long to feel appreciated, respected, valued, and supported, and therefore find themselves gravitating to people and places that promote a sense of belonging. Despite the drastic decline in affiliation over the past twenty years, the permeating presence of COVID-19, and other factors, it can be argued that religious African Americans continue to view the church as a place where persons can procure that sense of belonging. Though the “Black Church was born fighting for freedom,” freedom that has always been “both internal and external, expressing itself politically and spiritually, embracing black bodies and souls,” somewhere within its four walls, a community was being established to the point where its members found it to be a place of acceptance.¹⁸

Since practical theology starts with “human experience,” the aim of this work is centered on one of the components of the pastor’s duty: pastoral care.¹⁹ Among the more visible components of pastoring like sermon and study planning, administration, and staffing, the pastor engages themselves in the process of relationship-building within a

¹⁸ Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 13.

¹⁹ Warnock, 18.

faith community. However, this process is easier said than done in most congregations, particularly churches that identify as multigenerational churches.

As both a faith leader and a Millennial who is responsible for leading young people of my own generation, I realized that this generation of young adults has unique spiritual outlooks, assumptions, family dynamics, and cultural norms that require me to approach ministry differently than toward those in previous generations. I discovered that most books and research on various generations and the church were centered around the norms and make-up of white perspectives that differ in some ways from those in African American communities. As a product and a leader of the Black Church, it is important that I get a better understanding of the vast nuances and needs of every generation, not just my own, that will create effective intergenerational relationships in the church, thus the motivation for this research project. The building of these relationships is necessary because there is a reality at play if they are not fostered—the church faces the potential of withering away. White churches are certainly facing this reality as well; however, I see it firsthand in the Black Church, specifically. Black churches are dying at alarming rates because they are either full of the older generations who possess history but no future, seeing that there are no young people; or they are full of the younger generations who lack the history that comes from the older generations.

CHAPTER THREE

DISCUSSION ON GENERATIONS

CONGREGATIONAL DISCONNECTIONS: THE PROBLEM OF GENERATIONAL BARRIERS

In some Black churches and white churches alike, generational barriers exist that prevent members within the congregation from engaging in effective inter-connectional relationships that foster intergenerational ministry. Inter-connectional relationships deal with the connection of persons that are related to each other, either by genetics, or as it relates to the church, as siblings of faith, joined together in a community of faith. This community is a much larger tapestry and body than an individual's local place of worship; however, there are some factors that are preventing the molding of this type of relationship. These generational barriers derive from cultural, technological, educational, social, and theological differences. These barriers are not just manifested during the worship experience on Sunday but they are evident throughout the social and community outreach activities of the church.

The growing cultural disparity between generations has contributed incalculably to this matter. The traditions and beliefs of older congregants are no longer suitable for younger congregants, especially with them being eager to make more radical and contemporary moves toward things like technology and inclusivity in leadership. While some from each generation gravitate towards the other generations' preference in various aspects of the church, the prevailing theme is that each generation would rather conduct church in their own way. The older generation is becoming fearful that even the idea of

church growth is excluding them while targeting a younger generation, and this is unhealthy for the people who profess to have a close relationship with God.²⁰

The congregation at St. John's had trouble relating to one another due to the absence of a pastor and a global pandemic. There was a strong need for what French sociologist Émile Durkheim calls "collective effervescence."²¹ This collective effervescence describes a feeling of ecstasy and harmony when people are involved in a shared purpose. For the church, this term would describe the shared emotion and psychic power that can be experienced only in communal worship. It doesn't always happen, but when it does, those who share in this ecstasy keep coming back for more. It can be described as a *joie de vivre* that comes when we share moments with others such as being in a stadium that explodes in simultaneous applause when a football player makes a touchdown. This mutual feeling can, at times, promote the development of strong relationships among members of a congregation; however, when generations are at odds with one another for whatever reason, this feeling is weakened. Conversations with various members at St. John's reveal *joie de vivre* was absent, and revealed the desire for the presence of a 'collective effervescence.'

Effective intergenerational relationships are key to having that sense of collective effervescence; however, in his work, *The Durkheimian Movement in France and in the World Sociology*, Randall Collins asserts that individuals tend to participate and connect with others that "match up" with their cultural capital and emotional energy. If the person

²⁰ Carol Howard Merrit, *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2007), 21.

²¹ Emile Durkheim and Joseph Ward Swain, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Eastford, CT: Martino Publishing, 2012).

and situation mismatch, “the interaction ritual does not reach a high level of intensity, and the EE [emotional energy] payoff is low. Individuals are motivated to move away from such interactions.”²² Unfortunately, St. John’s lacked ecstasy, harmony, and a mutual purpose because none of the generations matched up in those crucial factors. Elisabeth A. Nesbit Sbanotto and Craig L. Blomberg, in their work, *Effective Generational Ministry*, write about the “worship wars” of the 1990s and early 2000s during which some of the solutions for tackling the generational gap were to “create separate services, different congregations, and homogeneously grouped ministries based on the personal preferences of a church’s diverse cohorts.”²³ However, according to Sbanotto and Blomberg, these factors did not “promote healthy Christian growth that learns from all generations.”²⁴ Looking back on Living Water, it was the work of pastoral care that helped bridge multiple generations to create flourishing relationships, which provided opportunities for all to engage with shared purpose and meaning. Using preaching as a form of mass communication and personal interaction with the members were two models that I heavily used in my pastorate to help create relationships.

Fostering effective intergenerational relationships affects community building.

Additionally, having leadership groups with representatives from various generations adds positively to the entire body. This provides a church the opportunity to showcase

²² Randall Collins, ““The Durkheimian Movement in France and in World Sociology,”” in *The Cambridge Companion to Durkheim*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander and Philip Smith, 101–35 (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²³ 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), 67.

²⁴ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 67.

that its ministries are diverse and open to the insight, energy, and abilities of each group that is involved. With this type of grouping there are challenges because “when cultures collide, there is always friction,” yet that friction can be minimal when there is a mutual understanding of why that culture is the way it is.²⁵ Within a church, if generations are going to add positively to the body, each generation must be willing to learn what makes each generation who and what it is, and the distinct value they offer to the community. Pastors and congregations must recognize, “each generation has its own language, culture, and life stage needs. The language and culture of a generation are static; they go with them through life.”²⁶ This understanding reveals faith communities to be ideal spaces for effective intergenerational relationships. Churches may be one of the few places in our society where cultures collide, but because of this interaction they may become more unified than separate. Congregational life provides individuals with opportunities to care for one another from the cradle to the grave.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF GENERATIONAL DIVIDES

If churches are privileged with multiple generations, the problem of building community and relationships becomes cumbersome, especially when trying to connect the generations. During the 1990s and early 2000s, churches found themselves in what Elisabeth Nesbit Sbanotto and Craig Blomberg labeled the “worship wars” in their work,

²⁵ J. Paul Nyquist and Carson Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian: Dealing with the Generational Baggage of Our Faith* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 11.

²⁶ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 16.

Effective Generational Ministry.²⁷ Church leaders thought that one way to handle the generational issue was to create separate worship experiences, “different congregations, and homogenously grouped ministries based on the personal differences of a church’s diverse cohorts.”²⁸ Though this approach tackled the issue of infighting, it did not promote healthy growth within a Christian community that learns from all generations.

The conflict that arises among generations in a ministry stems first and foremost from the lack of interaction. Though some churches may suppose that subdividing their membership into various sorts of homogeneous groupings is beneficial, some recognize that humans, not just Christians, should as often as they can interact with people from different walks of life, races, genders, and ages. Without this interaction, the conflict between the generations continues to rise and produces, secondly, the “lack of understanding about the core of the generations.”²⁹ Because etymologically, the term “generation” is derived from the Latin word *generāre*, which means “to bring”, one can denote that it should be the purpose of every generation to produce something by way of their existence. They are called to illuminate the formation of societal stability, the purpose for its groups, and each generation often provides grounding for the vision of the next generation; however, this goes unnoticed when the previous generation fails to interact and thusly pass on their understanding.

²⁷ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 69.

²⁸ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 69.

²⁹ Sir Walter Lee Mack, *Creative Ministry Moves: Inspiring Church Leaders to Innovation* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Publishing, 2017), 111.

Pastors leading congregations that are multigenerational may discover that the generational cycle can consist of persons from the Builders Generation all the way to Generation Z. Peter Menconi, in his book, *Intergenerational Church*, brings to light several critiques of society and culture as it relates to each generation, along with Sbanotto and Blomberg. Works from all three scholars will be addressed shortly. While other research and sources may present slightly different dates for these generations, I used Pew Research's schemata for dating purposes to describe the generations.

BUILDERS (SILENT GENERATION): THOSE BORN BEFORE 1946³⁰

This was the generation born during the great depression. Persons of this generation are responsible for building corporations and institutions and are seen as some of the most philanthropic people in society today. They honor hierarchy, structure, and order. Change for this generational cohort is a slow, systematic, and planned ordeal or something that is not in view at all.

BABY BOOMERS: 1946–1964³¹

Born into this time period are the one who sees their “generational identity as an integral part of their personal identity.”³² These are the ones who made their mark on the world in the decades following WWII. As soldiers returned from war, the boom in births became visible, thus resulting in this generation's name. They provide a “quintessential

³⁰ Dimock, “Defining Generations.”

³¹ Dimock.

³² Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 2.

example of how lived, and shared experiences can shape a generation.”³³ Sir Walter Mack states, “The challenge of the Boomers in the church is critical for transition. They see the past and future and serve as a tremendous bridge for all generations.”³⁴

GENERATION X (“BUSTERS”):1965–1980³⁵

Born to members of the Builders and Boomer generations, these individuals appeared during a time frame when there were so many social, political, cultural, technological, and even theological issues at the forefront. This is the generation that was born in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, the Water Gate Scandal, the AIDS epidemic, computers, and so much more. Gen Xers brought a different meaning to “collective identity.” Sbanotto and Blomberg write:

What a Xer means by a collective identity differs greatly from what a Boomer means by it. For a Boomer, collective identity is broad and generally reflects a macro-level affiliation with their generational cohort, a religious denomination, or some other large-scale social group. For Xers, a collective identity is understood on a much smaller, subcultural scale and is coupled with a fierce sense of individualism.³⁶

This generation is key in any church because this cohort of people “responds to relationships that are valued and authentic.”³⁷

³³ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 3.

³⁴ Mack, *Creative Ministry Moves*, 111.

³⁵ Dimock, “Defining Generations.”

³⁶ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 85.

³⁷ Mack, 111.

MILLENNIALS: 1981–1996³⁸

This generational cohort would be the persons who would have graduated high school in the early 2000s and would be pivoting their way into adulthood in the new millennium, thus the given name. These are the ones who, Menconi states, “worry about everything—grades, getting into the right school, finding the right spouse, choosing the right career, finding the best jobs, staying fit, and taking care of their health, the economy, the environment, and terrorism.”³⁹ The need for individualism and not wanting to be seen as a “continuation or extension of anyone or anything else,” is a poignant characteristic about Millennials that is often neglected. While it appears that both Gen Xers and Millennials crave the same thing as it relates to individualism, they are different. “For Xers, individualism was pursued out of skepticism and was more reactionary in its nature. For Millennials, this individualism comes with less fear of being confined and instead is more a continuation of having been seen and treated unique and special throughout their childhoods.”⁴⁰ To connect with this generation, one must understand the importance of their need for authenticity, expression, technology, and a level of patience that is necessary as they fully process and appreciate the past. F. Douglas Powe, author of *New Wine, New Wineskins*, does work to bring attention to the trends and needs of Black Millennials in the church. Powe shares:

This generation does shift the African American Christian landscape, because many are more comfortable in mega congregations that mimic a celebrity culture.

³⁸ Dimock.

³⁹ Peter Menconi, *The Intergenerational Church: Understanding Congregations from WWII to www.com* (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace, 2010), 42.

⁴⁰ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 171.

These congregations tend to be higher tech and make use of various media formats that have become normative for this generation.⁴¹

GENERATION Z: 1997–2002⁴²

This generational cohort are the grandchildren and, in some instances, the children of Generation X and Millennials. While the previous generation experienced the Great Recession, this generation was in line to inherit a strong economy with record-low unemployment; however, due to COVID-19, social unrest, and more, instead of beholding a world of opportunities, Gen Z and beyond now look into a future of uncertainty.

⁴¹ F. Douglas Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), Kindle.

⁴² Dimock, “Defining Generations.”

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION ON PASTORAL CARE

PASTORAL CARE AND INTERGENERATIONALITY

Historically, the care one offers to the people they have been called to serve has been referred to as support offered by lay and ordained members of religious communities. It is given the adjective “pastoral” because it denotes the image of the shepherd described in biblical texts and many faith traditions. Biblically, the concern and compassion the shepherd has for the flock depicts the love of God in many ways. Pastoral care can take on many forms depending upon one’s cultural, historical, and geographical context. In Carrie Doehring’s work, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, she emphasizes pastoral care that is particular to those in North America. She states, “In a North American context, it often takes the form of crisis intervention in response to a sudden loss or experience of violence, followed by supportive care;” however, there is more to it from the standpoint of the pastor in the Black Church.⁴³

The pastor, who is placed at the forefront of the African American Black Church community, works in what Noelle Witherspoon and Bruce Makoto Arnold, in their work, *Pastoral Care: Notions of Caring and the Black Female Principal*, describe as a “multifaceted, intersectional position in which they seek to maximize congregants’ spiritual, social, and communal fulfillment. If these roles are provided by a pastor in a

⁴³ Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: A Postmodern Approach* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), xxii.

directed, active, and personal manner, they become functions of pastoral care.”⁴⁴ For the most part, as Vergel L. Lattimore, III states, “pastors essentially become caregivers or givers of care who actively attempt to change the world in which their parishioners live, which makes them both personal mediators but caregivers to the larger masses either directly or indirectly.”⁴⁵

Black pastors are placed in the role of caregivers because of tradition, and modes of spirituality and community that are distinct to the Black Church; however, some scholars have conjured up the assumption that models for White or “traditional” pastoral care roles can be altered slightly to reflect the state of pastoral care in the Black Church. This is probably viewed as such because of the most used definition of pastoral care that comes from the 1964 research entitled, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective* by William A. Clebsch and Charles R. Jaekle. Within that research, they identified that the areas of pastoral care were healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. Black theologians such as Dr. Vergel Lattimore have adjusted those four beliefs to make them suitable in the African American context. However, Witherspoon and Arnold state:

the descriptions of care as originally described and modified are inadequate and do not reflect the tradition and historical development of the African American church, which was founded far from the circumstances surrounding the origin of White, Protestant churches and continued through modernity under different circumstances.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Noelle Witherspoon and Bruce Makoto Arnold, “Pastoral Care: Notions of Caring and the Black Female Principal,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 79, no. 3 (2010): 223, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20798345>.

⁴⁵ Vergel L. Lattimore, “Pastoral Care Strategies of Black Pastors” (PhD diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1987), 11.

⁴⁶ Witherspoon and Arnold, “Pastoral Care,” 224.

From their study, six areas of pastoral caregiving materialized that were more closely connected to the Black Church than the previously used models.

1. The pastor is the chief leader of their church, who is responsible for shepherding and holding the community together, passing on its history and traditions, and acting as spiritual leader, wise counselor, and prophetic guide.
2. The pastor is a spiritual guide, who stresses God's eschatology and helps his congregants see the nature and desire of God in the everyday and mundane.
3. The pastor is a healer, who stresses God's presence and omnipotence and tends to those in immediate crisis.
4. The pastor is a counselor and comforter, who stresses transforming, sustaining, and nurturing abilities of God to help the flock through times of discord, doubt, and counsels them to protect themselves against emotional deterioration.
5. The pastor is a social mentor and activist, who stresses God's desire for humans in to afford others interpersonal love and helps congregants understand the social milieu into which one must navigate in the larger world.
6. The pastor is a community organizer and intermediary who stresses God's desire to see humans live together as a community and helps the church and its individuals connect with the surrounding community.⁴⁷

Edward Wimberly offers another perspective of pastoral care in the Black Church in *African American Pastoral Care*, claiming that "black pastors approach pastoral care through narrative."⁴⁸ This involves the personal stories of the pastor, reflections from the practice of ministry, and stories from the Bible to help people and families imagine how and where God is at work in their lives and "thereby receive healing and wholeness."⁴⁹ Though this approach is widely used, Wimberly suggested that this can be problematic because it can become one-sided if other things are not considered. First, it may cause a pastor to tell too much of their story to the point where it will cause one to use it imperialistically and allow one to feel that their way is the only way. It may also cause

⁴⁷ Witherspoon and Arnold, 224.

⁴⁸ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 1.

⁴⁹ Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 1.

the pastor to be less empathetic and “thereby transform counselee/parishioner-centered counseling sessions into pastor-focused counseling sessions.”⁵⁰

This approach is only effective if elements such as empathic storytelling and story-listening are incorporated. By including these elements, intergenerational ministry can take place from pastor to parishioner, and thus parishioner to parishioner. With the inclusion of not just storytelling but empathetic story listening when offering care, one “empathically hears the story of a person involved in life struggles.”⁵¹ With empathy, a pastor can attend to the person with their presence, posture, and even verbal and nonverbal responses. It means that one gives attention to the one seeking care to where that person can communicate that they “have understood and is seeking to understand the person’s story as it is unfolding.”⁵² In any generation, the need to be seen and heard has always been a critical component for relationship building, even in church; therefore, for solidarity and mutuality to coexist intergenerationally within a congregation, the caregiver must show that the people, their struggles, and their voices matter. By attentively listening to people, “one avoids the trap of shifting the focus away from the needs of the person facing the life struggle.”⁵³

Additionally, another form of pastoral care that helps cultivate intergenerational ministry within the Black Church is preaching. The late Reverend Dr. Katie G. Cannon included the thoughts of Isaac Clark in her work, where he states, “Black preaching is a

⁵⁰ Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 1.

⁵¹ Wimberly, 7.

⁵² Wimberly, 5.

⁵³ Wimberly, 8.

fundamentally creative, artistic, cultural form of African American Christian speech that exhibits a distinct expressive style and flavor for communicating religious beliefs and *theoethical* considerations in an articulate oral pattern.” Cannon adds that it is “divine activity wherein the Word of God is proclaimed or announced concerning contemporary issues with a view toward an ultimate response to God.”⁵⁴ Since the global pandemic, COVID-19 has robbed many pastors of the opportunity to build community and nurture relationships. In-person meetings with congregants shifted to a virtual platform or not at all, forcing pastors to find creative ways of offering care to their members. For some, preaching became a passageway, though there were other ways in addition to preaching.

Pastors can communicate a message through their preaching that creates a bridge for their congregants to cross over and connect with other individuals. Depending upon the size of one’s ministry, along with social distancing and other factors, fostering relationships between generations could easily be done through strategic and creative sermons that each generational cohort could relate to. This would encompass intentional sermon planning that would require conversations with parishioners. For instance, during the month of February, I took Living Water through a sermon series entitled “Sundays with Motown.” For four weeks, I preached sermons using the song titles and lyrics of some of the most famous songs of the 1960s and 70s. From that, I noticed that those sermons allowed me, as a twenty-seven-year-old, to show my older members that I have an appreciation for the songs of their day and the meaning behind those songs, but it also gave those in my generation an opportunity to realize that the message that was in those

⁵⁴ Katie G. Cannon, “Womanist Interpretation of Preaching in the Black Church,” in *I Found God in Me: A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Mitzi J. Smith (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 60.

songs, still speaks today. It's also nothing out of the ordinary within my preaching to use the vernacular of my generation, along with that of my grandparents' generation, to help form some kind of bond between generations.

From storytelling to story-listening and preaching, pastoral care serves as the bridge connecting people to Christ, the work of the church, and each other. Bridges are connectors. Pastors are connectors. When a pastor works with a couple that can't seem to relate to one another—they are bridging the relationship. When they talk with a parent about communicating with an estranged child, they are building a bridge. Harold W. Neighbors, Marc A. Musick, and David R. Williams propose that “the African American minister occupies a truly unique place in the conceptual scheme of help source.”⁵⁵

The interaction between Paul and Titus in the Epistle of Titus could very well speak to how pastoral care will have an effect on cultivating relationships among generations. Before diving into the work of Titus at the church in Crete, the two of them are prime examples of generational cohesiveness, respectability, and collaboration. Paul, being more seasoned in life, tells the younger Titus that he is confident in his ability to build community in Crete, thus being the reason Paul says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking.”⁵⁶ With the preaching of the gospel, Paul had seeded this community, but that was not the end. The members of this congregation needed tending—in essence, cultivation—by Titus. Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson, in their work, *The Unnecessary Pastor*, describe cultivation as hard

⁵⁵ Harold W. Neighbors, Marc A. Musick, and David R. Williams, “The African American Minister as a Source of Help for Serious Personal Crises: Bridge or Barrier to Mental Health Care?” *Health Education & Behavior* 25, no. 6 (1998): 760, <https://doi.org/10.1177/109019819802500606>.

⁵⁶ Titus 1:5 NKJV.

work. Peterson writes, “In a way, seeding is the easiest part—cultivation is the hard work of farming. Planting seed is fine, but the hard work of cultivation and harvest is what pastors are called to do (and this includes suffering).”⁵⁷

In cultivating a Christ-centered community that includes all generations, “we have to deal with people the way Jesus deals with them.”⁵⁸ In doing so, pastors must consider that within the church, people are not treated the way culture deals with them. Culture processes people organizationally and functionally; however, the church should think of people relationally and personally. Throughout culture, people are thought of, used, and identified by their tasks and talents. In some regards, these descriptors have trickled their way inside the church. Peterson writes:

More often than not, we identify the people in our congregations in terms of what they can do: tithers and non-tithers, leaders and followers. Many of us develop systems for identifying skills and experience, which are computerized these days so that when you want someone who can paint a Sunday school room, you pull up a file; likewise, for potential youth leaders, people who have vans, secretarial skills, financial experience, flower arranging, singing voices, etc.⁵⁹

By thinking about and treating people, in any generation, not by what they can do, but rather by who they are, as Jesus did, we can understand what building relationships and community looks like. “Building community is not an organizational task; it is relational—understanding who people are in relation to one another and to Jesus and working on the virtues and habits that release love and forgiveness and hope and

⁵⁷ Marva J. Dawn and Eugene H. Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor: Rediscovering the Call*, ed. Peter Santucci (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 185.

⁵⁸ Dawn and Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor*, 191.

⁵⁹ Dawn and Peterson, 200.

grace.”⁶⁰ The communal aspect is crucial, especially if a pastor is going to foster relationships with Millennials. Sbanotto and Blomberg state, “Community for this cohort involves choices and options, allowing them to identify with various smaller groups simultaneously—and without long-term commitment, if they so choose.”⁶¹ Within community, Millennials often describe themselves as a “tribe.”⁶² Millennials are initially not found associating community with large organizations or institutions like the previous generation. Instead, they lightly connect with various more diminutive, more intimate groups in which they have some shared interest. A relationship-centered approach to pastoral care will assist in integrating the Millennial generation into any of the church’s intergenerational efforts.

PASTORAL CARE FOR THE PASTOR

As pastors offer care to their members with the hopes of forming solidarity between generations, one must understand that there is a need for the caregiver to find care themselves. Just as bridges need repair, maintenance, attention, and care, so does the pastor. Over the past two years, pastoring in a pandemic was unlike anything one could have ever endured. After virtual services, countless losses, profound interpersonal tension, and personal isolation, undoubtedly one may have reason to feel bone-tired. With so many urgent shepherding needs, it is easy for pastors to have little time to attend to their own souls, resulting in fatigue, exhaustion, resignations, and even death. Carroll

⁶⁰ Dawn and Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor*, 200.

⁶¹ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 186.

⁶² Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 185.

described the work of pastors as a “tough, demanding job, one that is not always very well understood or appreciated and ‘more complex’ than what pastors do during the Sunday worship service.”⁶³ Carroll acknowledged that ministry, regardless of denomination, can be both challenging and satisfying work. It is impossible to be that bridge that assists in helping people cross over various sectors of life, relationally and spirituality, when they are depleted. What does the pastor do to offer his/herself pastoral care? This is a question that is often overlooked, but it is crucial to the success of both the pastor and their congregation. If the pastor is to function as a conduit, effectively fostering relationships within the congregation, the expectations for what this pastoral work looks like and functions in the congregational setting must be clear, or the pastor may become burnt out. Below is a non-exhaustive list of ways that pastors can attend to their own pastoral needs as they continue to provide care for their parishioners.

BUILDING HEALTHY BOUNDARIES AND SEEKING OUT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

For the most part, many pastors establish boundaries and keep a certain relational distance from anyone in the church for several reasons. One reason may be that some feel that being friends with congregants can give rise to partiality. Even the most well-intentioned leader can fall into this trap. As one spends time with a select few members, they have the pastor’s ear on some issues, and their opinions could naturally shape the pastor’s. Another reason could be for protection. Vulnerability is a requirement in friendships. Like all humans, pastors, too, are vulnerable creatures, but some are not

⁶³ Jackson W. Carroll and Becky R. MacMillan, *God’s Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 2.

willing to disclose everything to their members. Yes, the pastor must show openness and honesty to everyone, but one may also need to keep details of one's personal life to oneself. Thus most pastors find themselves in unhealthy relationships where their spouse is their only friend and counselor. It is reasonable to suppose that a pastor's withholding is because of a lack of trust, which could be a rational answer; however, if the pastor continues to project their problems onto their spouse, the spouse might eventually grow disillusioned, despondent, detached, and ready to leave the ministry. A pastor's spouse should be their best friend, but not their only friend. We all need to be surrounded by the warm presence of friends and loved ones. Pastors and their families must make a more deliberate effort than most other folks toward building and fostering relationships. Choose people wisely. Select those who can be trusted with you as a person and not just your position, and who will be supportive during good times and bad. Understand that not all of your friends need to be other pastors. Have some diversity among those whom you choose to be in your inner circle.

RESERVING FAMILY TIME

Juggling between ministry and family life can be a cumbersome task. A boundary that needs to be absolutely set and protected by the pastor is that of quality family time. Pastors must learn to honor family as more important than church appointments, calls, or demands. Pastors must plan quality times and mark them down on every calendar (personal and the church). How can the pastor serve as a bridge between families when their family is being neglected?

SEEKING HELP

Pastors are in the profession of helping others and are often the last to seek help for themselves. Like any other person, pastors have a right to be human and have human problems. Pastors have a right and responsibility to seek professional counseling or additional resources and services available. Pastors must protect their mental health and have access to a therapist. In *Self-Disclosure and Spiritual Well-Being in Pastors Seeking Professional Psychological Help*, Erik Salwen wrote, “Rarely researched empirically in the psychological literature, pastoral mental health can have a significant impact on churches, communities, and even nation.”⁶⁴ Included in this research, Salwen discovered:

In the mid-twentieth century, certain circles of evangelical Christianity birthed a reaction to the influence of secular psychology that led to a closing of their ranks, and this reaction produced, at best, passing disdain for the field of psychology and, at worst, genuine fear among generations of evangelical pastors up to today. Instead of seeing psychological theory and praxis as resources with which to interact in order to shepherd and lead parishioners more effectively, a thorough campaign against psychology and the culture that was believed to be “infecting” Christians was mounted.⁶⁵

The demands of ministry and caregiving can be enormous. Boundaries and self-care are often hard to maintain but necessary in the work. So often, many pastors are so much in the center of the deep sorrow and pain of others, for long periods of time, that they neglect their own.

⁶⁴ Erik D. Salwen et al., “Self-Disclosure and Spiritual Well-Being in Pastors Seeking Professional Psychological Help,” *Pastoral Psychology* 66, no. 4 (April 2017): 506, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-017-0757-1>.

⁶⁵ Salwen et al., 506.

A BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR INTERGENERATIONAL PASTORAL CARE

It is impossible to effectively cultivate relationships between generations pastorally and resolve any tension among them without first examining the scriptures. According to Tara Barthel and David Edling, “We are unaware of any church that has successfully resolved its church-wide conflicts without first going back to the basics of what the gospel message is, its implications for faith and life, and God’s statement of the purpose and mission for his church.”⁶⁶ One factor that should be examined as it relates to being deliberate about building an intergenerational community is unity. Togetherness, understood as a sense of where each generation fits within the congregation and their purpose for being included, is one way of interpreting the writings of the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, Paul writes:

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

⁶⁶ Tara Klena Barthel and David V. Edling, *Redeeming Church Conflicts: Turning Crisis into Compassion and Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2012), 78–80.

every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.⁶⁷

Although this particular scripture does not directly address intergenerational intermingling per se, it is a declaration of inclusion and equality in the church. It speaks of how there is a need for each person within the body because, without them, the body may not be able to perform at maximum potential. Generations need one another in order for each of them to survive and for the continued success of a ministry. Though one part of the body has its own specific function and cannot do what another part does, the beauty is that each part working in its own way helps the body as a whole function in the manner it should. An intergenerational church is a healthy church from the standpoint of sustainability but also in the way God uses whatever or whoever God chooses. The Prophet Joel prophesied that a time would come when God would offer a portion of God's self to all people. Men and women will be favored to share divine wisdom with others, and generations will be tasked with an obligation in God's kingdom. God's ultimate desire for the church is expressed in unanimity and in the blending of the generations. Persons from various generations have a biblical responsibility to blend together in a spirit of unity, and it will take strategic pastoral care to foster this vision of unity.

The collaboration between Paul and Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:12 teaches the importance of generational blending or connectivity for the sake of ministry. Just like he did with Titus, Paul, being more seasoned in life, tells the younger Timothy to be assured in his gifts no matter his age and to demonstrate Godly character in his efforts to pastor

⁶⁷ 1 Cor. 12:12–27 NIV.

those much older than him. Paul encourages Timothy to apply a certain level of wisdom and maturity that would overcompensate for his youth to lead this much older congregation:

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.⁶⁸

This scripture became a source of inspiration for me when I became the pastor of Living Water Baptist Church at nineteen years old. Leading a congregation where most of the members were old enough to be my parents and grandparents, knowing that their incredulity was based on my youth, by allowing those words to guide my pastorate is something that I will inevitably cherish. Even as I now embark on this journey as the fourteenth senior pastor of the historic St. John's Congregational Church, these words continue to be ever-present. I find this to be true because while I'm trying to cultivate intergenerationality among the congregation, I, being in my late twenties, embody this work through my own lived experiences.

There are other examples in the biblical text that display the significance of generational inclusivity. Although there are more for this work, a few intergenerational partnerships found in the Bible have been brought for consideration (see Table 1 below).

⁶⁸ 1 Tim. 4:12–16 NIV.

Table 1.
Intergenerational Partnerships in Bible

Partnerships	Scripture Reference
Moses partnered with Joshua to help develop him into a leader. Joshua listened and followed the advice given by Moses.	Exodus 17:8–16; Numbers 11:24–30; Numbers 27:12–23
Jethro offered advice and wisdom in helping Moses to help expand his leadership skills. Moses received Jethro’s advice and implemented it into his leadership.	Exodus 18:1–27
Elijah saw something in the young and eager Elisha and helped to develop him into a greater prophet. Elijah was not selfish with what he had been given by God; therefore, when Elisha asked for a double portion,” Elijah gave it to him. He took the mantle, and he was fruitful in the prophetic capacity.	1 Kings 19:21
Mary and her older cousin, Elizabeth. Elizabeth helped confirm to Mary that she was indeed chosen to be the mother of Jesus Christ.	Luke 1:39–45

CHAPTER FIVE
METHODOLOGY

**MODEL 1—PREACHING AS A FORM OF PASTORAL CARE THAT
PROMOTES INTERGENERATIONALITY**

With the above pastoral and biblical theological themes setting the context for my research questions in intergenerational ministry, I now turn to my research project, in which I focus on how to use the practice of pastoral care to foster effective intergenerational relationships. One of the models of pastoral care that I have experienced success with in my pastorate in my efforts to foster effective intergenerational relationships is the preaching moment. The sermonic moment in the African American church is a plethora of things. Preaching a “complete, unified, and biblical gospel message,” is noted as the “single most important activity we can do as a church.”⁶⁹ According to Dale P. Andrews, in his work, *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, “early African Americans shaped ecclesial praxis through creative preaching and the worship experience in hush harbors and a few independent church meetings.”⁷⁰ It is a moment that is sacred and salvific, informational and inspirational, and for the most part, it is preached to a collective body but often can feel as though it is being preached specifically to each individual. Therefore, it is one of the premier modes of pastoral care that builds relationships not only with God but with others. However, it is not always the sermon itself that creates the path for relationships, but how that sermon is delivered and

⁶⁹ Donald Hilliard, *Church Growth from an African American Perspective* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2006), 29–30.

⁷⁰ Dale P. Andrews, *Practical Theology for Black Churches: Bridging Black Theology and African American Folk Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 17.

the nuances within that cause it to serve as a component that fosters intergenerationality. When it comes to preaching to multiple generations, if there is a desire to create this bridge between those groups, using the language that is recognizable to those folks is vital. According to Hall, “We can learn to speak to missing generations in our churches. As preachers, we can grow to explain God, preach the gospel, and teach the Bible in the native tongue of each generation.”⁷¹

Though having this ability to learn the language of a generational group is essential, one must be cognizant that language is more than words and phraseology because it is how it is used that persuades people to embrace a collective function. L. Susan Bond explains how language is influential in rhetoric. “It involves the way oral discourse constructs an argument strategy to persuade not just individuals but groups towards corporate activity.”⁷² Because of this, preachers must be aware of how it is to be used because it is not the “use of rhetoric that weakens preaching. It is the misuse, abuse, and overuse of the rhetorical exhibitionism that weakens preaching.”⁷³ Sermons that include a generation’s needs, experiences, and the generational language they are used to using, will attract that specific group; however, the sermons that ignore those things will see the lack of that generation.

Being intentional about the use of pastoral preaching as a way of forming intergenerational relationships, I was cognizant of the use of language in my preaching.

⁷¹ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 19.

⁷² L. Susan Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2003), 19.

⁷³ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 33.

Though I did not preach specific sermons on intergenerationality, I did, in every sermon, include words and phrases that were common to the generations present in my context. Each generation has its own verbiage that they are looking to hear when the preacher shares their message. Those who are a part of the Builder generation, the elders born in 1945 or before, have tuned their ears toward sermons that include some type of proposition. This is preaching that offers more answers than questions. It is concrete, well-founded, and stimulating. “Propositional communication tells you what it is about to say, then says it. There is no turning to the right or the left.”⁷⁴ From the research conducted from the town hall with St. John’s Builders, when it came to preaching, They collectively preferred sermons that were “biblically authoritative that is rooted in doctrine and Jesus.”⁷⁵ They recall classical church clichés such as, “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” They are drawn to sermons that incorporate the message of the “cross” and a charismatic close.

For the Boomers, who are the persons born between 1946 to 1964, giving them the right to be classified as “the largest generation in American history,” their preaching needs were diverse.⁷⁶ Like the Builders, they enjoyed propositional preaching, but there was a need for more. This is the generational group who “pushed against the institutional religions of their childhood and sought the freedom to make the choice to find the religion and decide for themselves.”⁷⁷ They needed preaching that used language that

⁷⁴ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 49.

⁷⁵ Collective answers that were collected in Survey.

⁷⁶ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 53.

⁷⁷ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 23.

conveyed conversation and application. Hall classifies this type of preaching as “skeptical.”⁷⁸ This kind of preaching “teases out tension before it ends with a proposition. Boomers enjoy the thrill of the sermonic tension, especially when it ends with a clear and applicable resolution.”⁷⁹

In conversation with Boomers, it was clear that in order to reach them in their native language, the preaching needed to provide a hint of doubt with a clear answer to resolve it. For example, one member alluded to a message preached entitled, *The Things that Come with Moving Forward*, and how the question was asked, “What do you do when God seems like the culprit of the stunt of possible progression?” That question sat with that individual because it caused them to wrestle with their view of God and God’s actions; however, they stated that it did not leave them questioning because, throughout the sermon, there were answers provided.

Busters or Gen Xers were a mixture of intellectual and inquisitive preaching with noticeable relevance. This is the generation that needs proof, and preaching needs to be based on more than just what the Bible says. With this generational group, “the preacher must know what archaeologists, sociologists, and geologists have to say about what the Bible claims.”⁸⁰ Being those who are the first in their families to receive higher education, this is the generation who have developed doubt in institutions like the church only because there is a need for them to be convinced with evidence. In times past, before this generation, the pastor would have been viewed as one of, if not the only, most

⁷⁸ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 61.

⁷⁹ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 61.

⁸⁰ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 73.

educated person in the entire congregation; however, with the rise of Xers, this changed. This group is the group that will challenge and critique what is being said in the pulpit; however, this is also the generation that needs preaching to be relevant. Within their session, it was stated that one of the things that captivated their attention during the preaching was the use of current events and how things in the biblical text resemble things of today. Making references to the political and social climate and conditions gives this generation a sense of relief that the preacher is not just concerned with spiritual matters but strives to take a holistic approach to the message.

This intellectual preaching is characterized by thoughtful research, diverse vernacular, and organized thoughts. Hall states, “Preachers whose sermons have definite structure” attract Xers.⁸¹ The use of literary devices such as alliteration, allegory, and other things is the “pulpit’s response to Xers demanding a sermon that sounds more Socratic than it does sporadic.”⁸² Though intellectuals are drawn to this mode of preaching, the sermon does not have to be scholastic or academic solely. Per members in this generational group at SJCC, while they enjoy intellectual preaching, they still have an affinity to that traditional type of preaching that is found in the Black Church, but that is after the text has been fully explained and exegeted.

As the current largest generation, Millennials find themselves the center of attention for marketers and religious institutions; therefore, captivating them must be strategic. Because this generation is privy to technology and other ways of accessing information, Hall argues that this generation is not only “connected to knowledge of

⁸¹ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 74.

⁸² Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 74.

issues and facts, Millennials are also connected to knowledge of the world.”⁸³ For this reason, they are no longer consumers; they are contributors. Sbanotto and Blomberg write, “Millennials see themselves as optimistic—more optimistic than previous generations—and believe that the world is theirs for the taking and the making.”⁸⁴ With that being said, when it comes to religion or spirituality, this generation does not treat it like the other ones. “Millennials see religion and spirituality as two distinct concepts: religion refers to an institutional belief system, while spirituality is more of a personal choice and expression,” therefore, preaching to them can be challenging if one does not pay close attention to how one communicates to this generation.⁸⁵ “Dialogical” would better describe what this group looks for in preaching, according to Hall.⁸⁶

As a Millennial, I would suggest that many of us are in pursuit of individualism, in that we want to feel as if our thoughts and theological views matter and are heard. Seeing that the nature of dialogue is when two individuals are conversant, open, and come to a point together in a discussion that could produce an unforeseen outcome; it is therefore understandable that this would be the communicative factor for Millennials. Being dialogical in the preaching moment invites the Millennial who is listening into an opportunity for them to reflect within themselves. It gives them a chance to come alongside the preacher and analyze what is being presented together. Of course, they are not standing and delivering the message with the pastor; however, a dialogical style helps

⁸³ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 82.

⁸⁴ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 175.

⁸⁵ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, 195.

⁸⁶ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 94.

them feel as if they are voicing their point, which can give them a chance to listen to yours. A Millennial member of SJCC stated to me that my preaching resonated with her because it gave off this sense of one having a conversation. Whether I was talking to them, or the text, or God, they felt as if there was some type of dialogue taking place. Bringing up questions and having the audience consider various things from the text sparks the interest of the Millennial because “though the preaching is guiding the conversation, the preacher is not driving the conversation.”⁸⁷

The next generational group that pastors must be cognizant about preaching to would be those of Generation Z and beyond. More than Millennials, this generation is heavily influenced by the culture and media, which, as they get older, can affect their spirituality and connectivity to a church. They are less likely to attend church, and if they are Christian, they “find alternative ways to practice their faith.”⁸⁸ However, like Millennials, this generation believes that they can inevitably make a difference in the world. This generation concerns themselves with social justice, environment, and other systemic issues, so if churches and leaders are going to serve these individuals, they should take these concerns seriously, and one can do that by authentically building relationships with folks in this group. So how does the preacher reach this generation? What language should the message consist of in order to effectively communicate to Gen Z?

Unlike those who prefer life application, personal conviction, and deeper scriptural insight in their sermons, this generation seeks to hear sermons that leave them

⁸⁷ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 97.

⁸⁸ Hall, 106.

with a sense of connection or even relationship. This group desires to receive messages from preachers that can connect to them. I would argue that it is not so much about what this generation hears; it's more so what they see. My father often shares wisdom from his father, who, too, was a pastor, and he would often say, "Son, folks would rather see a sermon than hear a sermon any day." Though he would be considered a part of the Builders generation, those words describe Generation Z distinctively. "The keys to speaking the language of Generation Z fluently has little to do with talking. It is not possible to simply talk relationally; we must be relational."⁸⁹ Generation Z cares nothing about charisma, poetic soliloquy, or degrees; being relational matters the most to them. Being a group that is made up of children and teens, sermons addressing them should incorporate words and phrases that they can easily understand and remember. One of the greatest rewards a preacher could ever receive is when a parent can come up and express how grateful they are that whatever was preached reached their child(ren), or when children can come and share that for themselves. Relational preaching is not what is said during the sermon; it is what is shown after the sermon and even when one isn't preaching. This is what this generation desires.

Because every generation has its own language, the preacher must be in tune with their audience. They must pay close attention to the construction of their messages to ensure that each language is heard when sharing the gospel. This continues the premise of Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. Paul states:

For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might gain all the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to gain Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not

⁸⁹ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 109.

under the law) so that I might gain those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not outside God’s law but am within Christ’s law) so that I might gain those outside the law.= To the weak I became weak, so that I might gain the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might become a partner in it.⁹⁰

Though Paul describes *being* all things in order to win others, the same principle applies to what the preacher *says*. The preacher must take on the languages of the generations within their congregation to adequately minister to them. It is possible to learn how to speak to the missing generations in our churches so that they, too, can feel included. Speaking the languages of generations would require that sermons become generationally polylingual, which would demand the need for us to “intentionally learn the way another generation speaks, one beyond our own and the one that raised us.”⁹¹ There will be a need to work on understanding the language of the generation that comes after, and even more work in understanding that of the generational group that does not fall directly before or after yours.

MODEL 2—PASTORAL CARE AND TEACHING THAT FOSTERS INTERGENERATIONALITY

While preaching can be a great form of pastoral care that fosters effective intergenerational relationships, pairing it with biblical and practical teaching can generate even greater impact within a congregation. Preaching involves using the language of the various generational groups to establish a working relationship; however, teaching

⁹⁰ 1 Cor. 9:19–23, NRSV.

⁹¹ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 109.

requires an intentional approach to highlight how this form of connection is found within the biblical text. This part of the pastoral ministry is often neglected. Finding biblical stories to help promote intergenerationality was not hard to achieve because as John Roberto writes, “the call for one generation to share its faith and story with future generations is deeply embedded in the Jewish tradition...From the first century onward, Christian faith communities have been intergenerational communities.”⁹²

I taught the relationship of Ruth and Naomi as a model for developing intergenerational relationships in churches. For six weeks, I took St. John’s through an in-depth study of the book of Ruth for bible study. Lessons were taught in partnership with the generational group forums that will be highlighted further in this document. The theme was: *Better Together: Building Intergenerational Relationships*. It centered on the two characters coming together and their need to do life together for the sake of each other’s survival and newfound life. Seeing that intergenerationality can be viewed as the exchanges and interactions between generations and the mutual impact they have on each other, the bond that is formed between Ruth and Naomi exemplifies that. Though the narrative can be seen as divisive or even manipulative in some regards, especially on Naomi’s side, my teaching highlighted the connection that was fostered between these two. According to Dr. Renita J. Weems, “their friendship is a welcome contrast to the numerous other stories in the bible which portray women competing against one another

⁹² John Roberto, “Lifelong Faith,” Faith Formation Learning Exchange, accessed February 13, 2023, https://faithformationlearningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/best_practices_in_intergenerational_faith_formation.pdf.

for status, power, and men.”⁹³ Because of how their connection unfolds, Weems added that this is “one of the oldest testimonies in the Old Testament to female bonding. Their relationship typifies the special friendship that can often develop between women, despite differences in ages, nationality, and religion.”⁹⁴

The structure of the Bible study throughout the weeks consisted of the following:

WEEK 1—RUTH 1:1–13

I began this study with a brief introduction to the difference between intergenerationality versus multigenerationality because one cannot assume that everyone knows the difference between the two, or even if something of the sorts exists. Language, location, characters, and other necessary elements were carefully extracted and explained, specifically to show how the two women were introduced to one another, but also as a general best practice for studying scripture.

Within the first couple of verses, Naomi is introduced through her husband, Elimelech. Though they are from Bethlehem, Elimelech is forced to relocate his wife and two sons to Moab because of a famine. Mysteriously, Elimelech dies, and that places on Naomi the responsibility of taking care of the two sons in a foreign land. Years pass, and the sons leave the protective care of their mother and take on wives themselves. However, tragedy strikes again, and the two sons die, once again leaving Naomi to grieve, yet this time she is not alone because she is left with her two daughters-in-law.

⁹³ Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: LuraMedia, 1988), 24.

⁹⁴ Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 24–25.

Weems states, “The three widows lived together in Moab as a household of women bound together by their mutual love for and memories of the same dead men.”⁹⁵

However, for one of the women, their love would transcend to a greater level.

WEEK 2—RUTH 1:14–22

During this week, emphasis was placed on Ruth’s desire for connectivity with Naomi in light of previous events. Naomi has decided to return to Bethlehem due to receiving word that after ten years, the famine was over. At first, she is accompanied by her two daughters-in-law, but somewhere along the journey, Naomi decides that because she is old and unable to produce children, she doesn’t need to have two young, well-abled women stay with her. Although she is grateful for their love and devotion, she sends them back to their own “mother’s house.” This was intergenerationality. Being an older woman, Naomi offered her wisdom to the two young women to aid them in their development and process of womanhood. She only wanted the best for them, and that meant returning to Moab, finding husbands, and becoming mothers. Teaching that older generations have a well of wisdom and faith to pass down to younger generations, while the younger generations have vitality and strength to assist the older generations, supports the theme of needing one another.

Orpah follows Naomi’s directives, but Ruth stays. “Orpah opted to trust the wisdom of an old woman rather than the sentimentality of her young heart.”⁹⁶ I noted that there were three types of widows: Naomi, the grieving widow; Orpah, the leaving widow;

⁹⁵ Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 25.

⁹⁶ Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 27.

and Ruth, the cleaving widow. It was in these verses where intergenerationality was strongly identified as well. Ruth embodies sisterhood when she expresses her commitment and devotion towards Naomi and the lengths that she is willing to undergo if she is permitted to travel with Naomi back to Bethlehem, setting the groundwork for their new relationship. Their former relationship was a mother and daughter-in-law relationship created by the love they shared for the men who brought them together, but now that they are dead, the two women must formulate a new relationship that will reflect their new realities.

WEEK 3—RUTH 2:1–12

Structurally, things remained the same. The study led with a brief recap of what was taught the previous week, and then introduced another character into the picture. Boaz is made known along with his supposed relationship and responsibility within the narrative. Intergenerationality was again emphasized in verses 2–3, as the need for Ruth and Naomi to not just co-exist but to work together demonstrates intergenerational connectivity. Ruth wanted to find a field to glean in, whose owner would be generous enough to allow her consistent employment; however, because she is new to the area, she seeks the guidance of Naomi to help her locate a suitable land to find food in. Weems suggests that this was the first commandment and even commitment to friendship: “To be a sister to a friend even when she is neither in a position nor disposition to reciprocate the sisterhood.”⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 30.

Ruth's desire that Naomi would grant her the blessing of going demonstrated that no matter which generation one is birthed in, each generation shares a need for some type of acceptance. Michael Seaver adds that "the core needs of all humans happen to be the same, but people from each generation may start at a different level of the hierarchy. As society advanced, and previous needs were met, each generation unknowingly climbed to value the next need."⁹⁸

There was a need to highlight the change in attitude in Naomi at this point in the narrative. It was important to note that Ruth's patience and persistence helped Naomi's bitterness to subside, as she viewed Ruth's devotion. This was another key point with respect to intergenerationality, that generations must be patient with one another to have a chance of fostering necessary and meaningful relationships. In *The Influence of the Intergenerational Relationship on the Academic Performance of Young and Old College Students*, the writers suggested that "intergenerational relationships require some degree of tolerance between parties, but when the initial barriers are overcome, this relationship is healthy throughout time."⁹⁹ Generational differences were not just seen between Ruth and Naomi, but also with Boaz. He, too, is much older than Ruth, yet, their relationship with unfold in a way different than the one with Naomi.

⁹⁸ Michael Seaver, "Finding Generational Similarities to Improve Communication," *Conscious Connection*, accessed February 14, 2023, <https://www.consciousconnectionmagazine.com/2020/12/generational-similarities/>.

⁹⁹ Soniárlei Vieira Leite, Lucia Helena de Freitas, and Pinho França, "The Influence of the Intergenerational Relationship on the Academic Performance of Young and Old College Students," *MOJ Gerontology & Geriatrics* 2, no. 6 (December 2017): 313, <https://doi.org/10.15406/mojgg.2017.02.00069>.

WEEK 4—RUTH 3:1–11

This week, the tables were turned from Ruth displaying her commitment to Naomi, to Naomi retuning the same gesture. Intergenerationally, Naomi takes the time to instruct Ruth through her wisdom and experience on how to secure Boaz as a “kinsman redeemer.” If this had been in the twenty-first century, Naomi teaches Ruth how to “secure the bag,” a phrase that was generated by Millennials around 2019. Liz Sommer clarifies that “‘Secure the bag’ or ‘bag secured’ refers to someone getting what they want, making money, and/or achieving a goal.”¹⁰⁰ Though the text can correlate the advice given by Naomi as a way to symbolize Ruth’s conversion from being a Moabite to a Jew, one cannot overlook the level of seduction and euphemistic imagery lifted in this section. What Ruth is told to do also shows a switch in gender roles. Although Ruth is instructed to let Boaz give her what he would have her to do, Ruth makes the first move. She does not wait until Boaz takes on his responsibility, she, in fact, makes the proposal, and Boaz, in a sense, says “yes.”

WEEK 5—RUTH 3:12–18

This week’s lesson focused on Boaz’s role in adhering to his promise of obliging to Ruth’s gesture. There is a level of commitment and devotion seen on Boaz’s part, even though he warns Ruth of legal procedures needing to be addressed beforehand. Provisions are made to ensure that Ruth’s wish is granted because when she leaves the threshing floor, she is given six “ephahs of barley.” This is equivalent to eighty-eight

¹⁰⁰ Liz Sommer, “What Does ‘Secure the Bag’ Mean?,” StayHipp, October 9, 2019, <https://stayhipp.com/glossary/what-does-secure-the-bag-mean/>.

pounds of grain. This was given to her; however, when she returned home, Ruth informed Naomi that it was given from Boaz to both Ruth and Naomi. This action denotes, once again, a level of faithfulness to ensuring that what Ruth promised Naomi in Chapter 1 would always be a priority for her.

WEEK 6—RUTH 4:1–22

Though the goal was to highlight the role of intergenerationality between Ruth and Naomi, there was also a need to be true to the entire narrative; therefore, one could not neglect the happenings of chapter 4. We addressed the legal matters that came along with Ruth's proposal in the previous chapter, including the acquisition of land that was owned by Naomi but denied her due to classism and misogyny because of her status as a woman and widow, and the marriage of Ruth. The marriage gave Boaz the right to manage the land that was given to Ruth as a result of the passing of her husband. Along with this, the relationship that Ruth and Naomi fostered continued to manifest even to the next generation. A son was conceived from the union of Ruth and Boaz; however, the narrative shares that it was Naomi's responsibility to raise the child. Not only did Naomi take part in the nurturing and development of the child, but the community did also as well, which suggests that effective intergenerational relationships can be cultivated through a communal effort as well. Ruth 4:14–17 states:

Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom and became his nurse. The women of the

neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.¹⁰¹

Ruth’s relationship with Naomi could have been forsaken once she married Boaz; however, it isn’t. Both relationships hold different places in her life, yet they are honored, valued, and strengthened as time progresses. Renita Weems closes her discourse arguing that regardless of ages and stages, we should “take seriously the quality of our relationships with the women and men in our lives.”¹⁰²

FEEDBACK FROM TEACHING

Overall, those who participated in Bible study shared their appreciation through what was recorded in the chat section and interactions with people throughout the week. Some had never heard of the full story of Ruth, and others had never viewed the narrative in this way. Some members and visitors had never thought about the interworking of intergenerationality within scripture; however, they are now purposefully trying to see it in just about every text that they read. No survey was conducted; however, comments were placed in the various social media platforms which gave this researcher some data to assess this model.

Because this is the model that I envision being the key to my pastoral ministry, I have discovered that taking the opportunity to teach this to the masses and even in small group settings allows for this to significantly shape how they, too, envision church. Whatever the pastor sets before the people, in most cases, becomes the very thing that the

¹⁰¹ Ruth 4:14–17, NRSV.

¹⁰² Weems, *Just a Sister Away*, 34.

people are trained to accomplish and achieve. Teaching on the areas that a pastor desires to be viewed as an essential pillar of one's ministry is important. From what I have seen, reminding people of intergenerationality in any form of communication allows people to see the things that are dear to the pastor's heart. It becomes a central discipline like prayer, discipleship, or forgiveness. Teaching is training and John Debell writes, "effective pastoral care has to be fed by effective training in order to make an impact on human and social capital."¹⁰³

Although the feedback from the membership was encouraging, I see ways in which I could have improved on the method of this research model. I could have formulated small groups, where I would have paired up senior members and younger members, and allowed them to teach each other from the book of Ruth. This would have been a way to gather different perspectives on the text but also a way to foster relationships. I also could have approached teaching this text in a more creative way than a typical bible study, using Edward Wimberly's model of storytelling and listening, which will be described in the next section, to engage the various generations in a series of conversations that would promote reflection and connection (I did not develop this idea until after the research was complete). It would have been interesting if I had constructed some type of interaction where older members could share their experiences in Springfield with younger members or younger members help older members with the use of technology; however, as I continue to do this work, I know that I will find other ways to foster intergenerationality among the congregation.

¹⁰³ John Dabell, "What Does Effective Pastoral Care Look like?" Collins, August 24, 2021, <https://freedomtoteach.collins.co.uk/effective-pastoral-care/>.

MODEL 3—PASTORAL CARE AND TEACHING THAT FOSTERS INTERGENERATIONALITY

The Black Church worship experience can be described as an emotionally therapeutic experience for the Black Christian; however, the potency of this experience should not be limited to the Sunday morning service. In most cases, it is in those small group settings, where things are often informal, where real connection is made and that therapeutic sense is felt. Maybe it is in choir practice when the choir stops rehearsal to pray for the needs of one of its members. Maybe it is the presence of a pastor at the hospital or football game. The ministry of presence is an important factor in the role and responsibility of the pastor and it is a type of caring that transcends what happens on Sunday. Being visible in the lives of a pastor's members, when able, provides the congregation with sense of empathy, affection, and connection. Also, what is seen in the work of the pastor is often reciprocated through the members. When a pastor is present, congregants learn how to build friendships and minister to others as they have observed their pastor doing with them.

This form of caring is what Edward Wimberly classifies as a “ministry of the church that cannot be understood apart from the ecclesiology or theology of the church.”¹⁰⁴ When the pastor exemplifies this care to the congregants, it helps the people “care for others by helping others see themselves the way God sees them, see God at work in their lives, and know how to respond to God’s caring presence. All of this takes place in the context of caring relationships.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 18.

¹⁰⁵ Wimberly, 21.

The presence of a pastor in the lives of their members produces effective intergenerational relationships when that presence promotes what Wimberly calls a “narrative approach,” which is best achieved in the private context of pastoral care versus the public context of preaching and worship. Placing emphasis on the Black Church, Wimberly argues that this approach facilitates “four types of therapeutic functions: healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling,”¹⁰⁶ and it is done by allowing folks the opportunity to participate in storying-listening and storytelling. According to Wimberly, story-listening involves “empathically hearing the story of a person involved in a life struggle,” while finding a way to tell the story of the biblical narrative.¹⁰⁷ This approach understands pastoral care as the unfolding of God’s story in the life of the church and members. Giving people the opportunity to share their stories and then finding a way to intertwine that into God’s story connects people on a broader scope. Every generation has a story, and every person within that generation does too, and they just need a person to share it with.

A pastor’s presence and the care they offer aren’t just needed in the storytelling and listening moments of life; their presence is also vital in life crises. Described as “developmental crises,” Wimberly raises that in the African American church, people who face life transitions often call on their pastor or lay members to help them through these moments.¹⁰⁸ Though difficult for the one facing them, a pastor that is present and

¹⁰⁶ Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 18.

¹⁰⁷ Wimberly, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Wimberly, 47.

responds with empathy and compassion, “in ways help those in crises to grow.”¹⁰⁹

Whether it is the birth of a child, marriage, death, learning how to accept one’s sexuality, or coping with the reality of ageing, pastors are desired to help walk with people through these moments. However, what should be lifted is that pastoral presence doesn’t always require words. Silence is often more powerful than any sentence uttered because the pastor’s role is very symbolic. This may be difficult to accept for some, especially those who like to point to something tangible and say, “This was all me.” But the truth is that the pastor is seen as a symbol of the Church’s presence in people’s lives and as a reminder of the presence of God. It’s a sign that the person enduring that plight is not alone—they have a church community that is very much visible and readily available to and for people in their need. It also highlights that God is present in the difficult realities of people’s lives (something that some people may not recall outright without a pastor’s presence).

PASTORAL PRESENCE IN DIFFERENT SIZE CHURCHES

Pastoral presence varies depending on how the congregation views their role. Gary L. McIntosh raises several key points concerning the role of a pastor relative to congregational size. McIntosh categorizes these congregations as either small (15–200 worshippers), medium (201–400 worshippers), or large (401+ worshippers) churches, and states that “most pastors are loved by their people, but they are viewed in three distinct

¹⁰⁹ Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care*, 47.

ways,” in which the pastor’s presence is seen, respected, and valued differently.¹¹⁰ According to McIntosh, those three viewpoints are relational, grammatical, and organizational, and they coincide with church size. Smaller churches tend to see their pastor from a relational perspective. “Members stress personal characteristics of the pastor. Some of the most commonly used words to describe the pastor in these churches are *loving, warm, caring, and kindhearted.*”¹¹¹ Within this type of congregation, the pastor is very personable and easily accessible. One is able to have close, face-to-face fellowship and relationship with their members. McIntosh states that in this church type, “everyone knows everyone else in the church. Their fellowship extends beyond Sunday morning as they relate to each other in the community through numerous activities.”¹¹² In most cases, these types of churches would be considered “family churches.” One or two families make up the core membership and are at the helm of everything. They take pride in informing the pastor of every stage of life they are in and expect that they are present in some respects.

McIntosh also shares that with the grammatical church, which would be a medium size congregation, the pastor is seen as an administrator, and able to delegate responsibilities. He stresses that how this church views its pastor is quite different from that of a smaller context. “Medium-sized congregations perceive their pastor from a functional viewpoint. Words like organizer, administrator, teacher, and supervisor are all

¹¹⁰ Gary L. McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All: Bringing out the Best in Any Size Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1999), 60.

¹¹¹ McIntosh, *One Size Doesn't Fit All*, 61.

¹¹² McIntosh, 39.

functional terms.”¹¹³ Every pastor is different, and how they function is equally different. The way the pastor operates is slightly more important than the relationships they build in this church. While relationship is still needed for effective functionality to exist, the closeness to the membership would be minimal in this church compared to those that are smaller. Presence is more on a needed basis, or divided with other leaders within the congregation, like deacons or associate ministers. For example, if pastoral presence and care is one pastor’s niche, then church administration may be placed in the hands of someone else, which would free up the time and opportunity for the pastor to be present in the lives of the members.

The final viewpoint that McIntosh lifts is an organizational one, which is often seen in larger congregations. This type of church views its pastor in a professional manner. While relational skills are necessary, it is equally necessary for that pastor to be a leader. They look at one’s ability to train other leaders, assemble a great staff, and present a vision and strategy. “The larger the church, the greater the demands of the congregation that the pastor be a leader.”¹¹⁴ What I have discovered, currently serving a large church, is that while my approachability, personality, and relational skills are good, since this congregation is made up of a lot of professional, working people, their perception and need is much broader than having a one-on-one relationship. While many value my presence in their lives, they also know that with a church this size, I cannot be everywhere all of the time. This is a hard yet needed truth for a pastor who pastored a large-sized congregation that had a small-size feel. Over eight years of serving *Living*

¹¹³ McIntosh, *One Size Doesn’t Fit All*, 61–62.

¹¹⁴ McIntosh, 63.

Water, we had an active membership of nearly 500 individuals; however, I was very present. I went to sports events and plays. I conducted house blessings, visitations, and funerals; however, the membership and the demand of SJCC is much larger than it was in North Carolina. This is why McIntosh suggests that “relational skills continue to be important to a pastor in any size church, but the changing complexity of the church creates a need for additional skills.”¹¹⁵

PASTORAL PRESENCE AND GENERATIONAL GROUPS

Just as different views of the pastor’s role correspond to different sized congregations, the same could be said about pastoral presence among the various generations. While pastoral presence is necessary, pastors must also be aware that every church is different because every generation within that church is different. Just as it is with learning the different languages of a generation, the same can be applied to learning how to show up for the people you serve. Each generation craves attention, just in a variety of ways.

During the generational group sessions I conducted, which will be further explained in the next section, each group expressed what they felt they needed from a pastor. Most expressed that they wanted a present pastor, but that was developed in some sessions more than others. In the forum with the Builders and Baby Boomer generations, they shared their need for pastoral presence during one’s time of sickness and bereavement. They desired that one come to visit or at least call. To them, that indicated a

¹¹⁵ McIntosh, *One Size Doesn’t Fit All*, 63.

high level of concern and connection that only a pastor could exhibit. It was important to those generations that this form of pastoral care was offered because to them, not showing it brought a sense of neglect and inconsistency, and would result in a lack of trust. This could be true because, “in every church, people place their trust in what is constant.”¹¹⁶

For other generations, while the need for this level of pastoral concern is acknowledged, the demand for it is not as strong. Those who were part of the Gen X and Millennial sessions voiced that having a pastor who would be there in the various seasons of one’s life was an advantage, but some expressed how most people are private, and thus they would rather deal with certain things on their own. They further lifted how, for some, pastoral presence was an uncommon thing. They had not seen that before because that type of care had not been shown to them. However, a few shared the sentiments of those in older generational groups. Powe, who describes the Millennial generation as the “Hip Hop Generation,” highlights the shifts in Black Millennials’ relationship with and expectation of their pastor from that of other generations. He states, “The Hip Hop generation does not need to know the pastor personally, but must feel connected to the pastor and church. This can happen via social networks or based upon the pastor’s status.”¹¹⁷ For those who were younger, presence is key for them. Though they did not address a pastor being present in moments of suffering, they did share the importance and meaning it would give to see their pastor during an important life moment for them. Children remember more than they are often given credit for, and seeing their pastor

¹¹⁶ McIntosh, *One Size Doesn’t Fit All*, 66.

¹¹⁷ Powe Jr., *New Wine, New Wineskins*, 498.

during a special moment is something they will never forget. I discovered this to be true when I was asked to read at one of the local elementary schools in Springfield for Black History Month. Several Black leaders in the community were asked to sacrifice some time to spend at the school to read. The class that I was given had two students who were a part of my congregation. I read to them on Tuesday and the following Sunday, when they came to greet me after worship, they both remembered me reading to their class.

A pastor must find a way to be present in the lives of the people they guide into the presence of God—so they recognize that God is present. Being present involves, at times, putting our own concerns aside and listening with our full attention for that moment in time. When faced with individuals in crisis, ministers are often tempted to fill the painful silence with answers, sympathy, or assurances that things will be all right. Yet many times the best thing one can do is simply be present with the member. This type of care is not just something that is given in times of crisis but in times of celebration and all the times in between.

This is not to suggest that a pastor must be leashed to every member's passing wish or present at every church gathering. If a pastor sees their role in terms of meeting every need and responding to every demand, they will end up molding into a follower rather than the leader; however, a pastor must also prioritize patterns of presence with their church. The more time a pastor spends with their members, the better they understand how people view the world, what struggles they face, and how best to apply the gospel to their lives and situation. This is how effective intergenerational relationships are developed.

ANALYTICAL RESEARCH COLLECTED FROM FORUMS

The purpose of this project is to show the need for churches and pastors to see the importance of intergenerational ministry and its role in depressing the stagnation that is on the rise in churches that don't address this need. It is to highlight how preaching, teaching, and presence can be tools to foster intergenerational ministry. Data has been extricated from multiple sources about the subject of intergenerational ministry and pastoral care. To add to this body of data, I conducted forums with roughly between 25–100 persons from various generational groups participating, along with twenty pastors of predominately Black congregations from North Carolina and Springfield, MA. I used the data collected from surveys and other sources to make thorough evaluations.

The forum questions were based on preaching, pastoral care, and the reason there is a lack of intergenerationality within the St. John's Congregational Church. The forums with the various generational groups provided primary and relevant perspectives on church dynamics. Even though each of these groups are comprised of folks of different ages, the data collected reveal many commonalities. Drawing on the findings of this research and scholarly insights, this project provides a model of how intergenerational relationships within the church can be possible. The information gathered from the generational forums and discussion with the pastors assists in maintaining active dialogue about this subject.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Members of St. John's were asked to sign up for the forums according to their generational group. The groups were conducted at different times and on different days,

with different thematic approaches to spark participation. There was no limit as to how many people could participate. The generational groups were determined by the research conducted by Pew Research and it consisted of Builders (1945 or before), Baby Boomers (1946–1964), Busters (1965–1980), Millennials (1981–1996), and Generation Z (1997–beyond).¹¹⁸ Twenty-five persons attended the forum for the Builder’s generation, eighty-six were present from the Boomer’s generation. Busters consisted of fifty persons, with Millennials totaling twenty-five individuals. The final separate meeting was with Generation Z/Alpha. This group had the lowest turnout with only fifteen individuals.

In each forum, a noticeable factor was that the majority of those in the room were women. This was not unexpected, seeing that “African American women have played and are playing a powerful role in the survival of the African American church. The needs of families, including specific outreach to children, adolescents, and couples, have been responded to more fully because of women’s leadership.”¹¹⁹

Pastors who participated in the pastoral forum consisted of twenty pastors of predominantly Black congregations. Sixteen of these pastors led Baptist congregations, two led Church of God in Christ congregations, and one, a United Methodist Church. Among the twenty pastors, two of them were women in ministry, of which one pastored a Baptist congregation, while the other served in the Methodist faith tradition.

¹¹⁸ Dimock, “Defining Generations.”““”

¹¹⁹ Alexis D. Abernethy, “Women’s Leadership in the African American Church,” Fuller Studio, January 30, 2018, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/womens-leadership-in-the-african-american-church/>.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The generational meetings were the principal research instrument used to extract data for this project. The forum consisted of six open-ended questions designed to gather authentic perspectives from those attending the function regarding the activities among the various generations in their churches. Persons who attended these forums were given forms with the proposed questions, and they wrote out their responses as well as shared them in dialogue. The same method was used for the pastors' gathering. For the generational meetings, questions were geared around pastoral care, preaching, generational needs, and their interaction with other generations.

CHAPTER SIX
DATA AND ANALYSIS

**FINDINGS FROM FORUM CONDUCTED WITH THE ST. JOHN'S
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**

Below, the findings presented demonstrate the results from the various forums with the members of St. John's and pastors from Springfield, Massachusetts, and parts of North Carolina. The analysis reveals interactive activity among the various generations as well as the leadership in the pastors' churches. I also report on the pastors' and members' perspectives regarding the present makeup of their churches as well as the future of their churches. The forums were partially successful in that I was able to gather information from various generations about pastoral care, preaching, and other issues that prevent meaningful intergenerational relationships from developing. However, I'm not sure if the intended goal was actually manifested. I share this sentiment because I never conducted a gathering where all of the generations could have come together. Though the gatherings were intending to produce intergenerationality, they might have perpetuated multigenerationality since they did not bring all the generations together.

GENERATIONAL GROUP FORUM QUESTIONS

Question 1

What does pastoral care look like for you? How would you like to receive it?

Within these generational meetings, views of pastoral care were nearly universal. As one would suppose, the Builders, Boomers, and most of the Buster generational shared that for them, pastoral care looked like the traditional norm for the pastorate.

Pastoral care was understood as compassion exhibited in the form of visitations, attentive listening, and being present during various moments of one's life. One senior member during the Builders meeting stated, "it gave me great joy to know that when I was scheduled to have surgery, the pastor called a day before to have prayer with me."¹²⁰ Caring in this manner provides a sense of connectivity and affection that mostly all want to have. Those who were a part of the Millennial and Gen Z groups were more expansive in what pastoral care looked like for them. These groups vocalized that pastoral care was the care that was not just offered to members by one person but by a team of people. Some stated that since St. John's was not a small church, they knew how impossible it would be for one person to care for everyone individually; however, they should develop other key leaders like deacons and ministers to help with the care of the congregation. Those who were younger envisioned pastoral care involving the presence of a pastor at major life events and accomplishments. One shared how it would be special to see their pastor at a graduation or amongst the crowd at a game because, for them, pastoral embodied presence matters.

Question 2

What type of relationship would you like to have with your pastor?

Initially, this question was attached to the first question because it builds on the working definition of pastoral care. All relationships are subject to stress and strain, including that between a pastor and their congregation; however, it is important that one seeks to cultivate a healthy one, if possible. Finding out how members seek to build

¹²⁰ St. John's Congregational Church, "St. John's Congregational Church."

community with a pastor is vital for that person's ability to lead so that they are not reduced to maintaining the status quo. Paul Cannings writes, "Any leader that becomes satisfied with the status quo reduces the effectiveness of the group they lead because the needs of the people are constantly changing."¹²¹ Each session brought both different and similar answers that sparked conversation. Essentially, the discussions centered around having a relationship that consisted of approachability, respectability, integrity, authenticity, and dependability. In any organization, folks want to feel that they are valued, appreciated, and needed. As for the pastor, though most are quite aware of one's inability to connect with everyone personally, the perception that the pastor is available is sufficient for some.

Question 3

As a Builder, Boomer, Buster, Millennial, or Gen Z, how do you interact with members who are not in your generational group? Do you find it easy or difficult to make connections or build relationships? Which generation do you think you have a better working relationship with?

These questions were designed to assess the functionality of the generations that were operative in the St. John's Church. According to Christine Ross and Holly Allen, "Truly intergenerational communities welcome children, emerging adults, recovering addicts, single adults, widows, single parents, teens whose parents are not around, the elderly, those in crisis, empty nesters and struggling parents of young children into a safe

¹²¹ Paul Cannings, "Leadership Planning and Development in the Ministry of the Pastor, Elder, and Deacon," in *African American Church Leadership: Principles for Effective Ministry and Community Leadership*, edited by Lee N. June and Christopher C. Mathis Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2013), 87.

but challenging place to be formed into the image of Christ.”¹²² Therefore, it was essential to know if there was any interaction with other generations and, if not, why.

Making this question generationally specific was intentional because it was key to know how each generation viewed the other. Many of the participants agreed that the older generation (fifty years of age and older) and the combined age group of Gen Z and Millennials (ten–thirty-five years of age) were the generational groups that had the most difficulty relating to one another. It appeared that the reason for this was a lack of patience among the generations. Some shared that members of the older generation have a difficult time listening to the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of those in the younger generations, while members of the younger generations have become unconcerned about traditional ways of doing church and feel that everything needs to change. According to Craig Blomberg and Elizabeth Nesbit, the Baby Boomer generation views “themselves as possessing greater traits of accountability, integrity, and responsibility than younger cohorts, having more empathy and understanding for the effects of war, and being more intentional and dedicated to the work they do, whether in a vocation, volunteer position, or parenting.”¹²³ On the other hand, children in particular “need to feel a deep sense of belonging, and they know if they are welcome or not,” according to Ross and Allen.¹²⁴

One attendee in the Buster generational session noted that a family component is interwoven with the generational component, saying that generational families are in the

¹²² Christine Lawton Ross and Holly Catterton Allen, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 63.

¹²³ Nesbit, Sbanotto, and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*, 4.

¹²⁴ Ross and Allen, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 48.

struggle too, by which they alluded to their own family dynamic. Busters with children who are a part of the Millennial and Generation Z age range shared how the issue stems from those two generational groups “thinking that they know everything because they have access to Google, but there is a difference between Google and lived experiences.” Another participant shared that they felt that the generations relate with one another well in the church, especially in a particular ministry that they serve. While most within these generational groups have worked in ministries with varying ages or interact with them outside of a church setting, what is noticeable is that interactions are done in passing, but no real connection is ever fostered.

Differences between generations have been an issue for a very long time, but it appears to be a greater challenge with Millennials and younger generations. Millennials in particular differ from their parents and grandparents of the Boomer and Gen X generational groups. Their beliefs and views on key issues like career choices, relationships, money management, politics, and even religion/spirituality differ significantly; therefore interaction with other groups is limited, if there is any at all.¹²⁵

From discussion, it was quite clear that “Millennials have a different reality than previous generations. Our reality is also a virtual one.”¹²⁶ While the previous generations value physical interaction, Millennials through social media have discovered how to virtually and physically connect with persons of their choosing, to which one added that they felt that a congregation the size of SJCC should consider the creation of a church

¹²⁵ Nyquist and Nyquist, *The Post-Church Christian*, 35.

¹²⁶ Hall, *Speaking across Generations*, 81.

app where members are able to intermingle with one another that way besides on Facebook.

Question 4

Do you feel that the Church is meeting the needs of your generation? If yes, please explain how. If no, please explain why not?

The purpose of this question was to gauge the level of competency each generation perceived with their church, in that they are receiving what they desire to receive from the church. From the conversations, many among the Busters to Gen Z generations expressed that the church did not tailor their ministries towards them. Various generational groups (Gen Xers and Millennials in particular) suggested that both the middle-aged adults and younger adults felt as though the church was not meeting their needs. This was no surprise, seeing that Terry Dittmer concluded that those who were a part of Generation X have “largely disassociated themselves from the institutional church.”¹²⁷ Folks in these generational groups expressed that worship, administration, programs, and events are still not inclusive enough and are not designed for working families or those who are more technically advanced. As one example, during the Millennial session it was stated that the paper forms created for the research would have been better in an electronic format because actual handwriting is obsolete.

This question also was answered with some ambiguity because the specific congregational dynamics brought on by COVID-19 factored into people’s expectations. Some suggested that since the church is just starting to resurface and bounce back from

¹²⁷ Terry Dittmer, “Ministry Among the Generation: Challenges and Opportunities,” *Issues in Christian Education* 4, no. 2 (2007): 8–15.

the pandemic, they feel that their generations need will be met, while there is some skepticism among others. For this researcher and pastor, this question prompted much reflection, and an immediate desire to begin formulating ideas for developing more inclusivity among the various generations. Not one generational group in the church should feel neglected or left out if effective communication is being implemented.

According to Shaw and Kolbaba, “once we see the generational differences behind many of our conflicts in our homes and churches, it’s impossible to miss them the next time.”¹²⁸

Question 5

What makes sermons relatable? Since Pastor Wright has been serving, what has been your most memorable or impactful sermon thus far?

Seeing that preaching is one of the forms of pastoral care lifted that could help foster effective generational relationships, this question was used to help gauge its value. In fact, this inquiry helped ease some of my disappointment from the previous question because this was one of the ways attendees felt that their needs were getting met. In every generational group, members shared their most memorable sermons and why. This question helped to determine whether people are actually paying attention to the sermon and the things that captivated their attention.

Presentation and the ability to make the text come alive were the two most shared views of a sermon’s relatability. People can read the text, but the sermon’s role in applying it to their lives and the way it presents the text to them helps them understand and process it better. Beyond one’s biblical exegeting skills and homiletical prowess,

¹²⁸ Haydn Shaw and Ginger Kolbaba, *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn’t Dying, Millennials Aren’t the Problem, and the Future Is Bright* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2015), 20.

when it came to preaching, those who attended these sessions stated that application was a key reason why these sermons were memorable and impactful.

Question 6

Do you think that preaching is a way for pastors to connect with persons of all generations? If so, how is that done? What do you listen for during the sermonic moment?

Interestingly, within every generational setting, “yes” was the answer to the first portion of this question; however, the answers as to how it is done differed, with regard to intergenerational impact. While being able to speak to a mass audience of varying ages was identified as important, that alone was not what folks felt made preaching a way for pastors to connect with all generations. It was how the messages were being communicated to them that made difference because “people feel closer to you and more responsive to what you say when you take the time to communicate with them.”¹²⁹

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR PASTORS

Question 1

Describe whether your church size is small, medium or large in population; whether it is comprised of primarily older, middle-aged, or younger people, or is it considered to be multigenerational.

The first part of this question was asked of the twenty pastors because the goal for fostering effective intergenerational relationships is to produce strong growing churches of inclusion. Though numerical data is important, this question was not asked to see who had the biggest churches based on numbers. In his writing, Donald Hilliard suggested that

¹²⁹ Dave Earley, *Turning Members into Leaders: How to Raise up Your Group Members to Lead New Groups* (Houston, TX: Cell Group Resources, 2004), 46.

“healthy church growth is not always, nor is it even primarily, numerical.”¹³⁰ The pastors who were interviewed spoke truthfully about growing their respective churches, explaining where they were in regard to size and sharing that growth, for them, was not solely dependent upon numbers.

The pastors had differing views as to what made their churches small, medium or large, especially since COVID-19. The global pandemic changed how many pastors felt about the size of their churches. Given the complexities of gathering together during COVID-19 and the move to online services or very small groups in place of in-person worship gatherings, it appeared that this would be a “difficult season for the local church.”¹³¹ In responding to the question about church size, twelve of the pastors (60%) reported that they pastor mid-size churches, five of the pastors (25%) indicated that they lead smaller churches, and three pastors (15%) reporting leading larger congregational churches.

The second part of this question had the same function as question 3 in the generational group’s forum. It was to assess the interaction between generations that were functioning in each of the pastors’ churches. The question also investigated the combination of generations in the churches in which the pastors served. Each of the pastors reported having some type of generational assortment in their respective churches. For the most part, many of the pastors reported having members of each generations in their church ministries (youth, younger adults, middle-aged adults, and

¹³⁰ Hilliard, *Church Growth*, 4.

¹³¹ “Growth in Faith Impacted by Covid-19,” NCLS Research, accessed February 7, 2023, <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/growth-in-faith-impacted-by-covid-19/>.

senior adults). Many of them expressed their desire to have more people from any one of the generational groups, but a blend nonetheless. Two of the twenty pastors (10%) reported having a blend of youth and the older generation, but did not have Millennials or Gen Xers. In contrast, three of the pastors (15%) reported having a mixture of young adults, middle-aged adults, and seniors but no children or teenagers.

Once again, because of COVID-19 and the resurgence that many of the pastors are undertaking at this time, some of them expressed how it was difficult to assess the size of their congregations at the current time, yet they provided answers to the best of their ability.

Question 2

Is there a difference between multigenerational and intergenerational ministry? If so, to which model do you seek to ascribe?

The purpose of this question was to gauge the knowledge of the twenty pastors. Like, most, while they pastor multiple generations, they fail to realize the vast difference between the two approaches to community formation. Seeing that the pastors who attended this forum were varied in age, those who were fifty and younger provided their own working definitions and differences they found in understanding the difference between the two; however, older pastors were not familiar with the term intergenerational. For the most part, some suggested that they were still trying to understand what it meant to have a multigenerational ministry, so adding intergenerational was foreign to them. Consequently, there was a need to provide some clarity to the terms.

Multigenerational ministry, is understood as the presence of multiple generations without interaction among the generations. Intergenerational ministry was slightly more

complex. According to Chancey and Bruner, “Those using the word intergenerational are deliberately contrasting certain communal practices from the age-separated practices that have long dominated many Western Christian congregations.”¹³² Chancey and Bruner describe intergenerational ministry as including these several factors:

(1) many varied practices are possible, (2) several persons from multiple generations are present, (3) participants are involved in practices expecting mutual or reciprocal activity, (4) this activity is intended for spiritual formation, (5) the participants pursue this interaction of generations with intentionality. Consequently, we define intergenerational ministry as ministry where representatives from several generations intentionally share Christian practices in ways that are mutually spiritually formative. Such practice does not and should not exclude the use of some age-based activities.¹³³

Once clarity was provided, pastors answered that they are multigenerational but seek to become intergenerational. This was based firmly on the need for survival, sustainability, and connectivity. However, this led to the question of “how.” Most asked, how can this be effectively achieved? Hopefully, this research will offer an answer to that question.

Question 3

Which generational group (if any) has the most difficulty relating to one another? What do you think could be a possible solution(s) to improve church unity?

As it was in the generational group forums, many of the pastors agreed, like parishioners, that the older generation (fifty years of age and older) and the combined age group of Millennials and younger (ten–thirty-five years of age) were the groups that exhibited the most difficulty connecting to one another. The inability of one generation to

¹³² Dudley Chancey and Ron Bruner, “A Reader’s Guide to Intergenerational Ministry and Faith Formation,” *Discernment: Theology and the Practice of Ministry* 3, no. 2 (2017): 59, <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/discernment/vol3/iss2/4>.

¹³³ Chancey and Bruner, “A Reader’s Guide,” 60.

be accepting, patient, and respectful to the other was given as a reason why this disconnect was present among these generations.

A few pastors emphasized that the spiritual discipline of prayer should be the leading factor for improving unity in the church. One pastor quoted the words of Christ in John 17:21, where Jesus stated, “I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you.” The majority agreed that authenticity, open communication, listening, and open-mindedness were key factors in improving unity. Added to that were compromise and accountability named as critical factors in enhancing the harmony in the church.

It was great being among these pastors as they voiced their desire to foster harmonious and intergenerational ministries. Even if this was the first time that conversations were being curated and circulated regarding disunity among generations and finding ways to foster unity, it was delightful to know that it is not being overlooked. Prayerfully, because of these conversations, these pastors and others will start to pay attention to their respective churches critically and see how their congregants are interacting with one another, if there is any interaction at all.

Question 4

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

This same question was asked in the generational group forums because it is vital to see if pastors can, (1) see which generation is catered to the most, (2) analyze if there is a disconnect within their ministry and be able to acknowledge that, (3) figure out ways to foster and adopt a generationally inclusive approach to ministry. This question prompted great meditation for the interviewees and this researcher as well. It forced each person to

reflect on some behaviors, programs, events, and ministries that may have been inadvertently insensitive and exclusive.

As they reflect, it was made clear by some that the church is not meeting the needs of those who would be considered Busters (Gen-Xers) and younger. It was stated that because those groups are the smallest groups in their congregation, they are often displaced, if not disregarded. The matter of giving was even brought up. One pastor said that they catered their ministry to those who contributed the most, which happened to be those who were sixty and older. From worship style to events, pastors began to assess where attention needed to be placed to make sure that no one felt disregarded.

Again, this question incited much reflection, with many of the pastors instantly beginning to verbalize and curate ideas that would help develop and establish more inclusivity among the generational groups within their churches and even the communities where they are placed. Pastors agreed that there needed to be a better system of communicating more effectively, and they were appreciative that this forum was created.

Question 5

How does the pastor play in building intergenerational ministry? How do you foster effective intergenerational relationships in your congregation?

The information extracted from these questions helped to frame a contextual perspective of pastoral care. With the first part of the question, I wanted to see if pastors understood the role that we play in modeling to our congregations what relationship building looks like, and if they embraced the concept that if we pastor multiple generations, then it is our responsibility to foster intergenerational relationships. The answers given were varied. Some suggested that as pastors, it is their presence in the lives

of the various generations within their churches that plays a role in building intergenerational relationships. From attending graduations to private conversations with members after worship, it is how they show up and when they show up for people that builds relationships. Mentorships with younger members was a component lifted as well. One pastor shared that he builds intergenerational relationships by providing internships within the ministry to younger seminarians. As they conversed, one pastor mentioned one of the areas of focus for this research and shared that she agreed that preaching was a way pastors fostered relationships between generations, as Sunday morning was one of the few times all of the generations are grouped together.

Regarding the second portion of that question, pastors shared that their role regarding fostering effective intergenerational relationships within their churches ranged from mentorship to hiring staff, like an intergenerational pastor. With an intergenerational director/pastor, that person would implement the church's values and mission and coordinate an intergenerational concept for the entire church. They would develop a relational plan for the ministry that would connect and build intergenerational bridges in all areas of ministry. Allowing generational participation in the worship experience was lifted. Hearing this supported what Eric Mathis shared when it came to the importance of involving young people in worship:

Worship has the potential to be the most important training ground for young people to hear and tell the story of God working in the world. Worship has the potential to form their identities as God's image bearers who matter in God's kingdom and have a place in Christ's body just as they are. Yet churches too often limit the role of young people in worship and place them in separate buildings and

spaces, away from adults and children. This robs the church of all ages the opportunity to worship with the complete body of Christ.¹³⁴

One pastor interjected and highlighted that there needed to be intergenerationality in leadership beyond inclusivity in the worship service. That pastor continued to say that it should be the pastor's responsibility to seek, train, and develop younger leaders within one's congregation that could work with older leaders, and those two would have to learn, listen, and share the burden of leadership with each other. The pastors stated that developing intergenerational leadership teams will lead to growth in their churches because it is a strong declaration of inclusion.

From this question alone, I hoped that pastors from the forum took away that they are the master bridge builders when it comes to cultivating a congregation where intergenerationality is a part of the body of Christ, not apart from the body of Christ.

NEXT STEPS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

When reflecting on the impact of pastoral care in serving as a bridge that connects individuals to Christ, but also to other parishioners, I am drawn to wonder what outcome the methods listed within this research would have as time, culture, and church progresses. The following questions emerge: What is the future of the Black Church as Millennials and younger generations lose trust and respect for institutions as such? As technology continues to improve and evolve, how do we develop physical relationships

¹³⁴ James DeBoer et al., "Why Youth Need to Be Leading Worship Regularly Now," Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, February 9 2017, <https://worship.calvin.edu/resources/resource-library/why-youth-need-to-be-leading-worship-regularly-now/#:~:text=Worship%20has%20the%20potential%20to,body%20just%20as%20they%20are>.

with generations, particularly younger ones? What are more methods that would foster effective intergenerational relationships?

Prayerfully, this project will do more than highlight the lack of intergenerational relationships, but rather authentically engage the pastor to be more responsive to how one communicates through preaching and teaching, along with their presence when pastoring a church of multiple generations. My goal is that through this work, the Black Church and their pastors will move from priding themselves on having a multigenerational church, to doing the work that would allow them to become intergenerational. Many people grew up in multigenerational churches. Churches not only had children, teens, parents, and grandparents worshipping in the same sanctuary, but had programming for each of them: Sunday school for kids, youth group for teens, and Bible classes for adults, and for those who grew up Baptist, you had Baptist Training Union (BTU). This model for the church was taken from schools, where children and teens are separated by age. However, fewer churches would consider themselves to be *intergenerational*. Intergenerational churches are those that are intentional about joining different generations together in a mutual, significant relationship so that they can achieve common goals. The key terms are *intentional* and *mutual*. Those differences seem subtle, but they are essential. Though the term “intergenerational” was not a common phrase until 1988 when James White’s *Intergenerational Religious Education* was published, with dedicated work churches can generate life-long connections among members.

The necessary work in building these relationships will require more than just pastors seeking to lure youth and young adults; though this is not entirely a negative thing. It is, however, only one factor in the grand scheme of things. Fostering effective

intergenerational relationships is more than building youth ministries; it is making sure that each generation within a congregation has a sense of belonging and meaning. It involves the pastor intentionally pushing our young people to connect with older generations and intentionally pushing our older folks to make friends with younger members. It encompasses some sacrifice on both ends, for younger generations to yield to the wisdom of their elders and for older folks to take in the energy of and change of a new generation. Not only does this promote harmony and growth in the body, but it also moves the congregation closer to what Christ proposed: a living organism of people from differing genders, social classes, and age groups united by their common belief and love. If this work is done with purpose, then no one should be able to say that they were disregarded or isolated.

Pastors being intentional in learning and teaching about generational distinctions is a good way to begin to bridge the generations because churches can meet needs across generations. The Black Church, in particular, has been doing this ever since its formation. It has served as the epicenter of education, connection, and more; therefore, being a place where relationships are formed by different generations should be one of the main focal points for the Black Church. When intergenerationality is stressed, intergenerational congregations support families or people who need additional help. When a church includes this ministry model, the concept of a family beyond the nuclear family is extended. The community is already equipped to help because everyone knows all the other people, regardless of age.

In Cory Seibel's book *Engage All Generations*, Tammy Tolman writes a chapter describing pastors who promote intergenerational ministry craft spaces where generations

collide. With more opportunities for this collision, people get to know each other well. Fostering effective intergenerational relationships through pastoral care toward the end of becoming an intergenerational church is a process that will not happen immediately. Pastors can start helping people build relationships with people of other ages simply by working on learning each other's names whenever there is a small enough setting for intimate conversation. By introducing places where people of all ages can come together and are encouraged to talk to each other, intergenerational relationships should begin to form. Soon, ministries will see this as an important piece of sustainability and discuss how other parts of the church can also include generations of all ages.

A church that overlooks intergenerational partnerships, either consciously or subconsciously, risks disregarding the importance of intergenerational inclusion. As the church continues to develop, it must offer wisdom to each generation so that it will, in essence, mimic biblical narratives like Elijah and Elisha, Naomi and Ruth, or Paul and Timothy. Without divine models, the church, a human-run organization, can function irrationally not only in the way it exhibits unity among generations, but also in resolving conflict among them. So, the church should attempt to blend intentionally with one another to build the unity of Spirit. This is intergenerational ministry. There is a hope that attention will be given to the importance of generational inclusion not only from the biblical standpoint, but also from a practical one.

This work is something that I have the hope of continuing to do for the duration of my pastorate because I believe in this work; in fact, even as I am heading to my defense, over the course of my installation, I saw the fruits of my labor of intergenerationality. In every event, from Wednesday to Sunday, one could see intergenerationality at play. The

intentional interaction between and across the generations, with each generation contributing to and learning from each other, was visible. As I continue the work of intergenerationality, I know that pastoral preaching, teaching, and presence are not the only methods that will aid in fostering effective intergenerational relationships because the pastor cannot be the sole promoter of this work. What happens to intergenerationality when the pastor ages, retires, or transitions to another ministry? Does the work of intergenerational relationship-building end? For me, I would hope not; therefore, I must find a way to push beyond the three models lifted in this project to make sure this work continues.

We have a tagline within St. John's: believe, belong, become. I believe that placing these principles at the forefront of every ministry and activity will perpetuate the desire to form intergenerationality among the congregation. It will ultimately move from the model being pastor to member, to member to member. This way, it will not be the sole job of the pastor to form intergenerational relationships, but the members will be intentionally engaging in the work themselves.

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