

UNDERSTANDING GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES AND CONNECTING  
GENERATIONS AT GRACE MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH

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## ABSTRACT

Many congregations struggle to attract and minister to all age groups. The various generations view church differently and this can create problems in many areas of church life. This thesis project studied one local church to find out what individuals of all ages value within the church. The similarities and differences and new intergenerational activities were arranged in an attempt to draw all ages together and to discover whether such activities are effective ways to provide meaningful interaction among generations in the congregation.

Recent literature shows the importance of growing a church of all ages where people interact with those of other ages. There are theological and biblical arguments for emphasizing the importance of passing the faith on to the next generation and for understanding how this can be accomplished in the intergenerational context of family, nation and church.

The research consisted of a congregational survey on a Sunday morning followed by two focus groups. Participants were asked how highly each person valued various activities in the church. The results indicated that although in some areas there was agreement among the generations, there were many differences in what the age groups valued. There were also some surprises, one of which was the traditional perspective on worship by many of the young adults in this particular congregation. As a part of the project, intergenerational activities were held and evaluated in term of their effectiveness in engaging the various generational groups. The analysis of the survey and focus group data and the evaluation of the intergenerational events are detailed in the thesis.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to and in memory of my father, Rev. Roland Keith McCormick (1929-2016): pastor, educator and life-long student who taught me to enjoy learning.



## INTRODUCTION

In most discussions of the generation gap, the alienation of the young is emphasized, while the alienation of their elders may be wholly overlooked. What the commentators forget is that true communication is a dialogue and that both parties to the dialogue lack a vocabulary.

—Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment*

In the book *You Lost Me*, David Kinnaman writes that “the generation gap is bigger today than ever, but it is also a continuation, a deepening of the rifts introduced by the youth culture of the 1960s” (Kinnaman 2011, 45). He says that according to Gallup research, before 1960 there was little difference between the church attendance patterns of the young and the old. However, since that time, the trend of disengagement from the church begun by the Baby Boomer generation has continued and grown stronger with each new generation. As society changes rapidly, some churches have done little to adjust but still cling to the liturgy and practice of centuries of church tradition.

Is it possible for all generations to come together in the church without one group feeling alienated or overlooked? The worship conflict over the type of music, use of the organ or drums, preaching style and worship environment can separate the generations. Seldom does worship or learning take place in an intergenerational setting in most churches. Styles of leadership and church governance ideals can bring division as younger people are skeptical of, and tend to disengage from, institutions including the church (Kinnaman 2011, 49). Is it possible for all generations to know how to communicate on a level of respect with different age groups while considering their needs and desires? These are some of the issues that will be discussed in the pages which follow.

## **Ministry Context**

In 2015 Grace Memorial Baptist Church in Fredericton, New Brunswick celebrated its 50th anniversary. However, the history of the church dates back to 1845 and the formation of the Fredericton Free Baptist Church. The church met for a few years in a home on Brunswick Street but it experienced growth, and a church structure was built on the corner of York and George Streets. For more than 100 years, generations of people worshipped at George Street Baptist Church, and it became known in the city as the “friendly church on the corner.”

By the 1960s the church had outgrown its historic building and plans were made to locate a new site and erect a new facility. With the building of a new larger church facility in 1965 came a new name, Grace Memorial Baptist Church, chosen in memory of the missionary Grace Matheson. She was a life-long member of the George Street Baptist Church who served in India for 44 years. At that time the move took the congregation outside of the city core to the suburbs “on the hill.”

There have been many changes in the area during the 50 years since Grace Memorial was built. The church building now sits in the middle of older homes that have been divided into several apartments, some apartment buildings, and many homes that are about the same age as the church. It is also in a shopping district with a large Atlantic Superstore and several other smaller stores and fast food restaurants nearby. Across the street is an elementary school with which the church has a strong, mutual relationship.

The people of Grace are proud of the church’s heritage. This pride is especially true among those members who were present 50 years ago when the church building was constructed on the corner of Northumberland and Connaught Streets. Unfortunately, this

location is not in a high traffic area and the church is hidden from most city residents. It is on a street that is travelled mainly by those involved with the school and is not visible from the two main streets that are just one city block from the church's location. People have come to the church and said they did not even know there was a church building in this spot. In some ways the "friendly church on the corner" at a busy intersection in downtown Fredericton has become an invisible "church on the hill."

The structure is large with a sanctuary and balcony that can accommodate about 450 people. It has a high ceiling with beautiful, large windows, but it is very expensive to heat in the winter and extremely hot in the summer with no air conditioning. It is long and narrow with straight-line pews which make it impossible to use for anything but an auditorium. The sanctuary platform was renovated three years ago giving it a more updated look and making it more practical for ministry. Its design is an open concept with stairs across the front leading to the platform. There were some who missed the "privacy barrier" that hides the lower half of the choir, so a very lovely cloth one was made. However, for many activities the barrier is removed until one of the pro-barrier people decides to put it back up again. The struggle regarding the privacy barrier shall no doubt be an ongoing conflict in the church for many years. Not everyone in the congregation was in favour of the platform change, but since the renovation was completed most of the congregation has come to appreciate its beauty and usefulness.

For many years the gym at Grace Memorial was one of the largest among the churches of the city. In recent years several churches in Fredericton have invested in gyms making the one at Grace appear small in comparison. Now the gym is not used to its full potential but sits empty during much of the week except for a few evening rentals.

There is a new, well-located nursery which was a part of the Welcome Centre construction about seven years ago, but classroom space in the church is limited. The best and largest rooms (parlour and board room) are used solely for adult activities. Some in the congregation feel that children and youth should not even be in the parlour or allowed to use the kitchen. By comparison, the children's classrooms are small and unattractive. There is no dedicated children's ministry area. The space for youth is limited as well. The youth room is long, narrow and very crowded. Although the room was repainted last year, the carpet on the floor is in dire need of a change.

When I first began my ministry at Grace one of my goals was to improve the facilities for children and youth. Money was raised for new chairs and tables for the children's classrooms which helped with the appearance of the children's ministry rooms. Last year the youth room was moved from an upstairs area to the room below it which increased its size, but it is still in need of improvement. Due to financial restraints nothing else has been accomplished to upgrade the facilities for children and youth. I do not believe this would be high on the priority list of the church.

For many years the congregation's only children's ministry activity (other than summer camps) took place on Sunday morning during the worship service. The children go to their program part way through the service. Average attendance is 12 in the preschool and elementary areas. The nursery averages about four babies and toddlers. In September of 2015 a new afterschool program called "Graceland" was begun on Wednesday afternoons. In total, about 20 children have attended the program and most of them are not associated with Grace Memorial Church. Some of them have attended children's summer camps or their parents have been a part of the English classes on



Tuesday mornings. During the summer the church runs three full-day camps of 50 children. The week of VBS about 100 children attend the morning program. Although many of the participants attend other churches, there are some with no church association.

The summer camp ministry has also been instrumental in growing the youth group as well. A faithful group of youth who meet regularly on Friday evening has grown from five to fifteen. Most of these are middle-school-age youth and about half of them have no association with the church other than the children's summer programs or the English language class. The youth group was much larger in previous years but consisted mostly of high school students who have since graduated. During my first three years at Grace the youth group did not attract the few middle school students who are a part of the congregation and so they do not attend the youth group now that they are in high school either.

The sanctuary which seats 450 people looks quite empty on a Sunday morning with an average congregation of 180. For much of the church's history the sanctuary was almost full on a Sunday morning. About 20 years ago the congregation experienced a devastating split and has been seeking to rebuild ever since. The main reason for the split was an alternate worship style practiced by some in the congregation. Many were not in favour of this style of worship and did not want it to continue, even if it was not a part of the Sunday morning service. Unable to reconcile the differences, this group of people who desired to worship differently left the church and began a new one. One of the pastors was part of this group as well as music leaders and many young families. The loss of those young adults and families is still evident in the congregation today. Some other

people left the church because they were upset with how the situation was handled. Many church ministry leaders were lost during this time. Those who remained were determined to rebuild.

The pipe organ at Grace Memorial has been central for the worship in the church and is valued highly by the long-time members of the congregation. About six or seven years ago the church hired a young college student as music director. However, the student could not play the organ and received some criticism from people who regard the organ as a necessary part of worship. During this time, the church grew in its ministry to youth and young adults because of the style of music in the service and also due to the music director and spouse encouraging the participation of university-age adults. I hear people in the church lamenting how there used to be a strong ministry with youth of college age and now there are so few in this age group. I believe the lack of quality, current music has had a big impact on the involvement of this age group.

When this director finished ministering at the church, an organist was hired as music director. He was very skilled in his area of music and there was some beautiful music during worship. One woman was overheard in a prayer meeting thanking God that “our worship service is like a concert.” However, the switch from traditional to contemporary and back to traditional was quick and worship style is just now beginning to balance out more as the church seeks to provide a blended style of worship. On most Sundays, the morning worship contains both hymns and contemporary songs.

The congregation is also multi-cultural. Close to 20% are immigrants from Korea, China, Philippines and other Asian and African countries. Many of the 30 and 40 year olds in the congregation are a part of this group. More than half of the children and youth

who attend worship regularly are from immigrant families. Most of these children are skilled on the violin, flute or clarinet and appreciate the opportunity to participate in the worship service using their talent. On Pentecost Sunday the scripture was read in ten different languages. Part of the ministry of Grace is a Korean discussion group which takes place following the morning service. There is also a Chinese Fellowship which meets on Saturday mornings. An ESL class has about 30 participants each week most of whom are from outside the congregation.

I serve at Grace Memorial as the pastor of family ministries. The senior pastor has been with the congregation for two years. He was preceded by a pastor who began ministering at the church following the church split and who retired after 18 years of service to the congregation. Under the current pastor a new governance plan has come into place. There were some “old guard” members who did not have confidence in the new plan, but the church voted to give it a two-year test. The previous organizational structure had consisted of many boards and committees and was effective when the congregation was larger. It worked well for a congregation of 400 and it was too big for a church of 200. There was also a need to have a more contemporary style of church governance.

It is in this context that in 2013 I began this thesis project titled, *Understanding Generational Differences and Connecting Generations at Grace Memorial Baptist Church*.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The generation gap has been a reality in society and the church for more than 50 years. Each new generation in the church experiences the world differently than did their

predecessors. In many congregations the result is to be relevant to the young while keeping the peace with older people. The challenges faced by churches can be summed up by the title of a book which says the church needs to be *Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60* (Hammet and Pierce 2007).

The different age groups at Grace Memorial Baptist Church do not always see eye-to-eye on what the church is or how it should be run. The older generations have a different worldview and they value traditions that have been a part of their experience of church life. The younger people in the church question these traditions because they do not have the same experiences as their elders. There is little opportunity for people of various ages to interact to begin the process of communication and understanding each other.

Carroll and Roof in their book *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations* state that it is important to study generations because “they are of far greater significance in understanding the dynamics of congregational change than is generally recognized by sociologists and other religious commentators” (Carroll and Roof 2002, 4). So much of what happens in a church is related to generations, whether it is style of worship, programs or attitudes.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to explore what each generation within Grace Memorial Baptist Church values in the areas of worship, education, fellowship, mission and church governance and then to discover ways to connect the generations through intergenerational worship, teaching and fun events.

The question is, “how can different generations in the church better understand each other and accept one another’s differences?” As the various age groups interact in

worship, through teaching opportunities or just for fun, relationships are built that can bridge the differences. As members of the congregation come to know one another better it is hoped that the gap will narrow as each generation learns to give a little to gain a lot for the church family.

The exploration portion of the project was accomplished through the use of a congregational survey during a Sunday morning worship service which was later followed by two focus groups. For the discovery portion, intergenerational activities were planned to bring the generations together in various settings.

### **Basic Assumptions**

The project was constructed on the following assumptions:

1. There is a difference in what older congregants and younger ones value as a part of the ministry of Grace Memorial Baptist Church.
2. Intergenerational activities will draw age groups together so they can build relationships which will help in solving generational struggles.
3. Age-graded activities are important and necessary, as well as groups by stage of life and interest. Intergenerational activities are in addition to these events and may occur several times during the year.
4. “Becoming more intergenerational” will be used interchangeably with “connecting generations” because I believe that intergenerational activities are the best way to connect people of various ages.

## **Definitions**

### *Generation*

A generation refers to a group of people born during the same time period and location in history. They are shaped by the same historical and social events which affect their beliefs and behaviours. A generation is normally about 20 years in length. Generational boundaries are not firmly set and not everyone in a generation will hold the same beliefs and attitudes.

### *Intergenerational*

Intergenerational is used to describe an activity where several generations are doing something together that provides meaningful interaction between them. In the church, most worship services contain several generations, but people do not often interact with other age groups so it is not specifically intergenerational in nature.

### *Multi-generational*

Multi-generational describes the make-up of most churches in that they contain many generations and provide ministries for most ages. It is different from intergenerational in that meaningful interaction may not occur among the different ages during multi-generational programs or activities.

## **Delimitations**

The research done for this project was specific to Grace Memorial Baptist Church and some of it may not be applicable to other churches. The study was limited to people who

are already attending Grace, presumably because they enjoy being there. It did not consider the attitude and thoughts of people who had visited the church for a few weeks and decided not to stay. The opportunity to interview committed youth and college students was limited to those who attend, so a thorough understanding of what this age group in general values in the church could not be attained other than through the literature review. The focus groups were not randomly selected but chosen by age, gender and involvement in the church's ministry.

### **Summary**

The next chapter will consider some of the literature that has been written on the topic of generations, how this affects ministry in the church and how intergenerationality can bring all ages together in a better understanding of one another. Chapter 2 examines the Biblical and theological foundations relevant to the study of generations. The third chapter will discuss the actual research that was carried out for the project, followed in chapter 4 by the results of that research. The last chapter will describe the practical project carried out at Grace Memorial. The conclusion will summarize the thesis and provide recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 1

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Magic happens when we bring the generations together.

– Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation*

One of my earliest memories of my grandmother is of me as a five-year-old child, sitting on her lap as she rocked on the porch one hot summer's eve singing the song "School Days." It was a rarity to be at my grandparent's place as they lived in northern New Brunswick and my family lived in southern Nova Scotia. However, most summers we would make the long trek to my mother's birthplace and stay a few weeks.

There was a time when many children had close contact with grandparents, and even grew up in the same home. However, few senior adults live with their families today. Grandchildren may even live hundreds of kilometers or more away from their grandparents. Sometimes children have little contact with senior adults and older people have little contact with those younger. The church is one place where many generations come together in one building or on one campus for Sunday morning activities. However, an opportunity for connecting generations is missed when attendees are separated by age: the children go to children's church; the youth go to their own worship; and the adults join together in the sanctuary. Even when various ages come together in one place for worship there is little interaction. Sometimes the only adults the children see are their ministry leaders. This chapter will examine possible methods to connect the generations in the church in ways that provide meaningful interaction. The first part of the chapter will look into "Understanding Generations," and the last part will consider the topic of "Connecting Generations: Models and Practice."



## Understanding Generations

It is possible for the church today to consist of up to six generations (Sheppard and Dilliplane 2011). Since the world in which we live is constantly changing, it is necessary to understand the events and culture that have shaped each generational cohort. Therefore the first part of this chapter will consider what is meant by the word *generation*, give a description of age groups that are currently alive and explore why it is important for the church to understand generational differences.

### Defining Generation

The word generation is used often in everyday speech. There is talk of “my generation” or “the generations who have gone before.” People might also speak of the “sixties generation,” “the generation gap,” or a “new generation” (Pilcher 1994, 481). What is meant by generation in everyday language can be difficult to define. What constitutes a generation? A generation can be defined as a group of people born and living during the same time. It is also the average length of time between the birth of parents and that of their offspring or a particular time in history (Merriam Webster online dictionary, s.v. “generation,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/generation> [accessed January 15, 2016]). However, the meaning of generation is broader than all of these.

In the early twentieth century, German sociologist Karl Mannheim wrote a paper called, “The Problem of Generations.” Many sociologists who study generations mark this work as the beginning of modern generation analysis. In an article for the *British Journal of Sociology*, Jane Pilcher writes, “Mannheim’s 1923 essay ‘The Problem of

Generations' has often been described as the seminal theoretical treatment of generations as a sociological phenomenon." (Pilcher 1994, 481). In *The SAGE Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, Michele Dillon acknowledges that "sociologists began to recognize that different birth cohorts and generations inherit, experience, and learn to think about the social world in different ways" (Dillon 2007, 526). William Strauss and Irving Howe admit that their theory of generations has been built on the pioneering work of Mannheim and others (Strauss and Howe 1991, 34). Carroll and Roof assert that "Karl Mannheim was particularly influential in helping us grasp the social and psychological dynamics of generational experience" (Carroll & Roof 2002, 5).

Mannheim posits that those of the same generation are not simply an age-based constituency but share "a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action" (Mannheim 1952, 291). It is this common location which presents common social problems to a specific generation causing them to see themselves differently from another generation. It is the formative years of youth and young adulthood in which social generations are formed. This is affirmed by Dillon, "At any given moment in history younger cohorts are more likely than older cohorts to be influenced by particular social and cultural events such that they incorporate their impact into their own (relatively unsettled) identity" (Dillon 2007, 527).

Strauss and Howe suggest three features of a generation: "(1) common age location; (2) common beliefs and behaviour; and (3) perceived membership in a common generation" (Strauss and Howe 1991, 64). They call this the "peer personality" of a

generation. A fifty-year-old who was born in 1955 will view life very differently from the way someone born in 1930 saw life at that same age. Society changed in those 25 years as did the characteristics common to each generation. This change will cause them each to view even similar circumstances differently (Allen & Ross 2012, Chapter 11, Kindle Locations 1313-1315).

*Cohort* is another term which should be defined when researching generations. Birth cohort “typically refers to all individuals born in a single year of birth or born within the span of a specified number of years” (Dillon 2007, 527). Although some use cohort and generation interchangeably, it is more common to refer to a generation as consisting of several cohorts. Carroll and Roof also define cohort as referring to people born in the same year. Cohort group refers to people born within a particular span of time, like a decade. A generation normally is thought of as consisting of cohorts (Carroll & Roof 2002, 241). Strauss and Howe agree and define generation as “a cohort-group whose length approximates the span of a phase of life and whose boundaries are fixed by peer personality” (Strauss and Howe 1991, 429).

### **Generations Today**

Carroll and Roof propose that it is difficult to draw the lines between the various generations. The first reason is that “there is no common basis for identifying and labeling a generation.” A generation may be named after an event like World War II, a demographic trend, like the Boomers or in the case of Generation X, so named because of a lack of identity. Also, these authors state that “there is little consensus as to the cutting point in time where one generation ends and another begins” (Carroll and Roof 2002, 3). Certainly this is a concern since different researchers set dissimilar dates for the various

generations today. Another concern they raise is that it is difficult to separate what are generational effects from what are simply “life-cycle effects” or “period effects.” Life-cycle effects refer to the maturing of people over time and period effects are those influences that affect all people living at that time. Generational effects “refer to the impact of historical experiences and socialization, which tend to stay with people as they age” (Carroll and Roof 2002, 3).

Therefore, in the discussion that follows, it will be impossible to state fixed dates for each generation or to speak of a common name given to each generation. For the purpose of this chapter and the research that follows I shall attempt to stay with one of the more widely used names for the generations and a range of dates for and ages of each group. It should also be noted that these descriptions are generalizations and will not fit everyone who is a part of each generation.

Two key authors in the area of generational theory and research are William Strauss and Neil Howe. In their impressive 1991 work, *Generations: The History of America's Future 1584 to 2069*, they not only define the generations of 1991 but also present a four-part generational cycle historically from the past as well as prophetically into the future. Although most of the book is dedicated to showing how the four-part cycle has been found to be true in America's history, they provide good descriptions of each of the five generations present at that time although the latest is still quite young at the point of writing the book. Since that initial work they have authored together books such as *13th Gen - Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail* (1993), *The Fourth Turning* (1997) and *Millennials Rising: the Next Great Generations* (2000).

Roof and Carroll's book, *Bridging Divided Worlds: Generational Cultures in Congregations* (2002), has been particularly helpful in explaining how generations affect congregations. In this work the authors describe only three generations: the pre-boomers, the boomers and the generation Xers. They look at how the identity, life experiences and religion of each of these can cause congregational divides among the generations (Carroll and Roof 2002, 61-86). Bob Whitesel and Kent Hunter go a step further in their book *A House Divided* to suggest that because of the difficulties among the three generations, the church should bridge the generation gap by forming a tri-generational church consisting of three generations existing in separate ministries in one building and under one leadership umbrella. In contrast, Peter Menconi in his book *The Intergenerational Church* (2008) chooses to have a church for all generations in which all ages meet together for worship, teaching, and mission in one common community.

Gary McIntosh writes about the importance of reaching the four generations in the church in his 2002 book *One Church, Four Generations*. He gives information on the current generations as well as how to reach those who are a part of each generation. He advocates working toward a blending of the generations. Hammett and Pierce look at the four generations in their book *Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People over 60* (2007) and suggest that those in their forties and fifties can be “catalysts for change, transition, and transformation” (Hammett and Pierce 2007, Chapter 10, Kindle Locations 3462-3463).

John Mabry takes a more pastoral look at five generations in his book *Faithful Generations* (2013) and discusses how people in one generation can minister to people from another generation. A book written in 2011, *Congregational Connections* by

Sheppard and Dilliplane discusses how, according to their classification, currently there are six generations in the church and what the realities are for congregations today. It is from these sources that a picture of each generation will be developed.

The oldest generation alive today is most often referred to as the *GI Generation*, born 1906-24 (Menconi 2008, 11). Some authors put the date for this generation as early as 1901 (Strauss and Howe 1991) and as late as 1926 (Whitesel and Hunter 2000, McIntosh 2002). This generation has been referred to as the *The Greatest Generation* in a book by news anchor Tom Brokaw. The term GI (Government Issue) denotes the civic nature of this group. They are patriotic and loyal. They were the first in the Scouting movement and 4-H Clubs. As children they were more favoured than those born previously, and received more education (Strauss and Howe 1991, 261-269). Some in this generation were children during World War I; they all suffered through the years of the Great Depression, and as a generation they rose up to fight in World War II. Following the war they settled down and became the parents of the Boomer generation. GIs value hard work and have been very cautious in how they spend money (Menconi 2008, 49-54). This generation is quickly dying off, the youngest of this generation being 90 in the year 2016.

The next oldest generation is commonly called the *Silent Generation*. They were born approximately from 1925 to 1945 (the end of World War II) although Strauss and Howe use 1942 as the end date for this generation. This generation was much smaller in number than the GI generation and lived in the shadow of its predecessors. Although fewer in numbers themselves, they married young and their birthrates were higher. Many of the Silent Generation were born in the years of the Great Depression but retired with moderate wealth and security. They are a generation of peace; most of the leaders of the

civil rights movement came from this generation. It is interesting that this generation did not produce a US president (Strauss and Howe 1991, 284-285).

“The Boomer Generation started it all: No one paid much attention to generations until Baby Boomers came along” (Menconi 2008, 69). The *Boomers* are the post-war babies of the GI and Silent Generations. They were born in the decades following World War II, generally thought of as 1946 to 1964 (Carroll and Roof 2002, 5). However, Strauss and Howe put the dates from 1943 to 1960 which would include those babies born near the end of the war. They are the largest generation to be born and thus have had great influence over every area of social and political life. John Mabry says that they are the “other Greatest Generation” of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but “a reaction to—and the mirror opposite of—the G.I. generation” (Mabry 2013, Chapter 3, Kindle Locations 1517-1518).

During the Boomer’s formative years the TV age began, a man walked on the moon, and the Vietnam War sent many Americans in this generation to participate in an unpopular war or caused them to flee their country (USA) to avoid the draft. The 1960s were a decade of protests, the “free speech” movement and Woodstock (Strauss and Howe 1991, 299-307). However, following graduation from college they settled down to become the Yuppies (young urban professionals) and to move up the corporate ladder. McIntosh says they are well-educated, media-oriented, independent, cause-oriented, fitness conscious, rock music fans, activists, quality conscious and still questioners of authority (McIntosh 2002, 83-88).

In contrast to the Boomers, the next generation is a small one. Known by several names—Busters, 13ers, Echo Boom, Baby Boomlet—they are most often referred to as *Generation X* (McIntosh 2002, 122). Carroll and Roof place their births between 1965

and 1980 but Strauss and Howe lengthen the years of birth from 1961 to 1981 (McIntosh, Whitesel and Hunter extend it to 1983). They are a generation very different from their hard-working parents (Boomers and Silents) and so have sometimes been labeled as slackers. Occasionally called the latchkey generation, as children they came home from school to an empty house with TV as a babysitter while both parents worked. Many grew up in single-parent homes or in a blended family because it had become much easier for their parents to obtain a divorce. Abortion also became legal during this time and many babies were aborted (Menconi 208, 96-102).

World events that shaped this generation include political and military scandals, the AIDS epidemic, environmental issues such as the hole in the ozone layer and Exxon Valdez oil spill, and the Challenger shuttle explosion (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 11, Kindle Locations 1349-1350). According to the *Generation X Report* the members of this generation are now active, balanced and happy (Miller 2011, 1). This report is based on data from a study of 4000 from this generation, surveyed each year from 1987 to 2010 through the Longitudinal Study of American Youth.

The generation following Gen X are most often called the *Millennials* and were born from about 1981-2000. This generation has been given several names including Generation Y (to follow Generation X), Generation Next, the Bridger generation and Echo Boom (after their Boomer parents) but the name *Millennial* appears to have become the most popular “because it is descriptive of this generation’s place in history” (Menconi 2008, 127). The ending birth year for this generation fluctuates greatly among researchers and authors. Like the Boomers, they are a large and influential generation.



Millennials are the most watched-over generation, the most protected and the most scheduled. They are a generation of wanted children, their births carefully planned. They are team players, accepting of authority and rule followers. They tend to be respectful, confident and intelligent (Strauss and Howe 2000, 6-10). This generation has endured the Columbine-type school shootings and 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. They have always had the internet and are technologically savvy and “connected.” Their cell phone is their best friend. Millennials are tolerant of those who are different from them and respectful of other people’s views (McIntosh 2002, 161-172).

There is little known yet about the youngest generation. Still unnamed they are often referred to as *Generation Z*, the *Homeland Generation* (LifeCourse Associates, 6) or simply the *Post-Millennials*. The members of this generation are today’s children and young teens (those born since 2001). Recent research has indicated that it is not good to over-structure children’s lives; it is healthier if they are permitted more time for free play (Entin 2011). Such research may lead to different parenting methods by Millennials who have been suffocated by their Boomer parents (Carter 2013, Chapter 2, Kindle Locations 371-379).

In summary, each of the six generations shares their own location in history, their common beliefs and behaviours, and a group identity with an outlook different from the other generations. The church is one of the few organizations that incorporates people from all the generations. The next section will consider the importance of understanding these generational differences in a congregation and how these differences may affect its ministry.

## Generations and the Church

Tensions among the generations exist in the church today. Congregations struggle to meet the needs of the different age groups hoping to attract and minister to all ages. Menconi writes, “To begin the process of uniting our generations into the diverse body and church God intended, we need to understand the different generations” (Menconi 2008, 16). In his book, *The Intergenerational Church*, Menconi stresses the importance of bringing the generations together and this begins with understanding each generation. For each of the five generations of adults in the church today he presents information to understand their different cultures, world-views, and sets of values. A very helpful section describes the spirituality of each generation. Ministry leaders need to understand these differences in order to deal with tensions amongst the generations in the church today.

Gary McIntosh, in *One Church, Four Generations* provides information on each generation and their relationship with the church. He places the GI and Silent Generations together in one category and refers to them as *Builders*. He uses the term *Buster* for Gen X and *Bridger* for the Millennial generation. The fourth generation is the Boomers. He notes that it is important to understand each generation; “Most of us are faced with the problem of ministering to a church that includes members of all four generational waves. We must try to understand the generations as well as how they affect each other” (McIntosh 2002, 24).

Conversation may be a valuable tool for understanding one another. Sheppard and Dilliplane write, “The single most valuable tool for leaders who wish to begin an extended conversation with their congregation to understand these generational

dynamics, may be conversation itself’ (Sheppard and Dilliplane 2011, 85). These conversations may be difficult for the congregation at first as the older generations have a lot invested in the church and younger generations will find their attachment hard to understand.

The faith of the GI generation is normally “personal, private, and conservative” (Menconi 2008, 54). For those people, the church is an important institution in society and they are committed to the church, to the denominational structures to which churches belong and to foreign missions. They are traditional in their forms of worship (i.e. organ, hymns, familiar liturgy and choirs) and they like the worship service to be consistent. They do not do well with change (Menconi 2008, 54-55). I remember when I was a child that placing a piano in the sanctuary was cause for much tension in the church, and at first was not permitted to be used for Sunday worship. The organ was the chosen instrument for worship at that time. Also, this generation was shocked when they discovered that a visiting youth group had slept in the sanctuary overnight. As youth we didn’t understand the value our elders placed on the traditions of the church.

The Silent generation, like the GIs, are fairly traditional in their style of worship. They are lifelong learners and enjoy being involved in Bible studies taught by “experts.” They are still the backbone of many congregations today both financially and in leadership (Menconi 2008, 65-66). McIntosh stresses the need to bring the generations together by providing forums for discussion and reconciliation. Older generations need contact with the younger generations. The Builder/Silent generations normally have a great relationship with their grandchildren, although maybe not with their Boomer

children. Churches can work to bring generations together as well as help with reconciliation (McIntosh 2002, 50-51).

Many of the Boomer generation have thrown aside traditions in favour of something different. They have been a generation of seekers. They are looking for a church that meets their needs. This has led to the rise of the “seeker-sensitive” churches. Whereas older generations showed their commitment to Christ through their commitment to the church, the Boomers do not gauge their commitment to Christ based on church attendance—they will not be at the church whenever the doors are open like the previous generations. They generally like more celebratory worship services with contemporary music, and they appreciate quality. The size of this generation alone makes it necessary to attract and involve Boomers in ministry. Also, they will not spend their time at meetings they perceive to be unnecessary (McIntosh 2002, 91-101).

Menconi writes that there has often been tension between the Boomers and the Gen Xers: “Xers remain the most poorly represented generation in the church since many want little to do with organized religion, especially if Boomers organize it” (Menconi 2008, 150). Gen Xers are more eclectic about their faith. They tend to be suspicious of institutions. They are developers of their own type of faith both for themselves and as a community. They want a real and authentic experience of worship; they are not content to simply be spectators (Menconi 2008, 121-125). Since friends and family are important to this generation the church must be a place for building relationships and providing quality programs for their well-protected children (McIntosh 2002, 155).

Millennials are very tolerant and politically correct. They “expect churches to be racially and ethnically inclusive” (McIntosh 2002, 183). They are accepting of a variety

of faiths and beliefs. However, they may not understand the foundations of their faith. They want worship to be real and authentic. Sometimes the younger generations are blamed for the “worship wars” that have been a part of the recent history of the church, but this is not the case for the Millennials. The “worship wars” were at their worst during the years of the Boomers and early Gen Xers. The Millennials will worship in almost any style as long as it is authentic and sincere.

A Canadian study of 18 to 35 years-olds who were raised Christian called *Hemorrhaging Faith* reveals many things about the faith of young adults. The factors that drive church involvement and the barriers against church involvement fit within four themes. The first involves the faith of the parents; “Our study confirms that emerging adults raised by parents who attend church regularly, pray regularly and read their Bible regularly are far more likely to attend church faithfully as adults ” (Penner et al. 2012, 43). The second theme that arose from interviews with young adults is that they want a real experience of God. They want to feel God and have him answer their prayers.

Canadian young adults also value community. They want to be in relationship with other people, for worship, study and sharing. They want it to be a safe community where they can be helped, find hope, grow and be mentored; “They are looking to be part of a dynamic movement rather than a stagnant institution” (Penner et al. 2012, 52). Lastly, young adults want to be taught and given the tools to apply teaching to their lives. However, they shy away from the church’s rigid beliefs on things like premarital sex, homosexuality, gender roles, and right and wrong (Penner et al. 2012, 69-72). These teachings are part of what draws young adults away from the church. An understanding

of these desires and concerns of young adults are important to keep them active in their faith and in the church.

The various generations also understand church government differently. Church structures are important for the GI/Silent generations. The Baptists of this generation grew up under a congregational style of church government with democratic voting procedures. They valued the opportunity to have their say. Boomers are less trustful of the process and dislike the undercurrent of church politics. From their perspective, church structures need to be more streamlined, without unnecessary boards and committees (McIntosh 2002, 97). Generally, GenXers do not like to be involved in the governing process of the church at all: “They protest against Church governance that is characterised by a culture of control, which was the dominant management style of older leaders who have shaped the organisational structure of much of the Church” (Gibbs 2002). The Millennial generation finds the process of making decisions in the church much too slow moving and they get tired of the long process. They are ready to move on to something else before a decision has been made. Mabry says that “methods of governance interest them not at all, and they will be eager to discard them” (Mabry 2013, Chapter 5, Kindle Location 3294).

Connecting generations in the church will not be an easy task. The term *generation gap* became popular in the 1960s to describe the differences between younger people and their elders. Tim Carter in *The 5G Fellowship* writes: “We see this ‘generation gap’ experienced in the workplace, schools, and various other settings in society. We also see it in the church” (Carter 2013, Chapter 6, Kindle Locations 1129-1130). He continues:

I, for one, believe the church should be the most capable in drawing generations together. You may believe this is a bit naïve, but we should recognize that we have

God's word as a guide and God's Spirit as an enabler. With His word and His Spirit, we should be models to all society of what it looks like when generations are learning and leading together. Perhaps, we should be the ones leading the way in our world in this area. (Carter 2013, Chapter 6, Kindle Locations 1140-1144)

A deeper look at intergenerational churches and ministries will be discussed later in this chapter as well as some ideas on how to connect generations in the church.

### **Connecting Generations: Intergenerational Church Education and Ministry**

The first part of this chapter included the topic of understanding generations today and considered why the church must be concerned about the needs of each generation. The second part of the chapter will consider ways of connecting generations. One way to do this is to help churches become intentionally intergenerational in education (spiritual formation) and ministry.

### **Intergenerational Education in the Church**

In the early 1980s while working in my first church as a new Director of Christian Education I came across a book that excited me. I do not recall the title but the content of the book focused on intergenerational education in the church. There was some theory in the book's introduction, but the majority of the material in the book consisted of lesson plans for an all-age class. I spoke with several parents about the possibility of doing an intergenerational class in Sunday school, but I was discouraged with the reply. They had no interest in such a class but wanted to have a break from their kids and be with adults. At that time parents were not interested in anything intergenerational. Discouraged, I put the book away and the idea of intergenerational education on the back burner.

Gambone suggests that the reason for the failure of intergenerational programs at that time was that “they were always seen as something outside of the core mission of the congregation....Intergenerational Christian education programs never reached their full potential because they were unable to influence and permeate all aspects of congregational life—liturgy, evangelism, development and even church leadership” (Gambone 1998, vi). For a congregation to encourage any type of intergenerational learning the leadership needed to recognize its importance as part of the mission of the church. In my experience, youth and their parents were happy to be separate for learning and fun events during the 1980s and 1990s.

This phenomenon was not only within the church. In society in general parents were also becoming less involved in their children’s lives. The rise of daycare and after-school care occurred during this time. According to the *Canadian Encyclopedia* the majority of daycares were established after 1972 “in direct response to the increasing number of working mothers with preschool children” (*Canadian Encyclopedia* online, s.v. “Daycare,” <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/day-care/> [accessed November 24, 2015]). Older children, the latch-key kids, came home from school to houses with no adult supervision and often had responsibilities to look after younger siblings.

There are a few questions to be considered in the next few pages. Is there any evidence that intergenerational experiences are helpful to children’s spiritual formation? Why might intergenerational experiences help children to grow in their faith? Can adults learn from children? Is this something worth pursuing in the church?



Several books written in the 1970s attempted to build a following for intergenerational education. Sharee and Jack Rogers' work, *The Family Together: Intergenerational Education in the Church School* (1976), was written from their own experience as a family desiring to be together in a class instead of being separated into age-specific classes. The book contains some basic outlines for an entire year of intergenerational classes. Also written in 1976 is a book by Donald and Patricia Griggs, *Generations Learning Together*. This book provides more in-depth lesson plans for intergenerational learning as well as a training event for leaders within the ministry. Both of these volumes speak of successful times of intergenerational interaction and growth.

A few more books were written during this time, but the idea of intergenerationality as a part of spiritual formation did not flourish. In a 1998 article, Allan G. Harkness expressed his frustration with the seemingly lack of interest in intergenerational education:

Within the field of Christian education, it is a discouraging exercise to search for literature that develops an intergenerational methodology, for the vast majority of resources assume a closely age-graded, segregated model. Seldom do Christian education textbooks allude to intergenerational Christian education (IGCE), and a review of the cumulative indexes of specialist periodicals fails to yield much fruit. (Harkness 1998, 431)

Christian Educator James White in his 1988 book, *Intergenerational Religious Education*, also mentions the lack of interest in the topic of intergenerational religious education. He notes that even the 1984 edition of the *Dictionary of Religious Education* does not mention the topic or anything like it (White 1988, 19). However, White provides a good working definition: "Intergenerational religious education is two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common-experiences, parallel-learning, contributive-occasions, and

interactive-sharing” (White 1988, 18). Simply because several generations are together in one room does not imply that intergenerational education is happening. Harkness stresses that there needs to be intentional and mutual interactions among the generations: “Intentional IG [Intergenerational] strategies are those in which an integral part of the process of faith communities encourages interpersonal interactions across generational boundaries, and in which a sense of mutuality and equality is encouraged between the participants” (Harkness 2000, 52). Rather than the teacher-student model in which the teacher presents the lesson and the students do the activities assigned, learning in an intergenerational setting takes place as each person contributes to the process. The goals for learning are the same but the style and structure to accomplish the goals are different. Later in this chapter, specific intergenerational activities related to education, worship and ministry will be discussed.

A more current work on intergenerational education is by Christian educators Holly Allen and Christine Ross titled *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (2012). Both of these women have had a life-long interest in intergenerational ministry and wrote their doctoral dissertations on an area of the topic. They also have written numerous articles related to the subject. Their hope and prayer in writing the book is that “the biblical, theological, theoretical, empirical, developmental, sociological and practical support for intergenerationality in this text will foster a renewed commitment to bringing the generations back together again in our communities of faith” (Allen and Ross 2012, Introduction, Kindle Locations 158-159).

Allen and Ross use the definitions by White and Harkness (as quoted previously) as the basis for their discussion of the topic of intergenerational formation (Allen and Ross 2012, Introduction, Kindle Locations 191-195). In the book they present a blend of the biblical, theological and theoretical principles, as well as support from learning theory and social science. They also offer practical solutions for the church. They have created a work that will prove important in the years to come for churches who wish to pass the faith on from one generation to the next.

An example of the importance of intergenerationality comes from Allen's doctoral dissertation where she interviewed 40 children from intergenerational and non-intergenerational churches. She asked the children questions about God.

More than any other set of comments on a particular practice or subject, the children's comments concerning prayer shed light on the depth and quality of their spiritual lives. Also, this area yielded the largest differences between the two groups. Children in both settings (intergenerational and nonintergenerational) spoke of prayer frequently, said they knew God and described knowing God similarly. Children in both samples offered a wealth of evidence attesting to their perception of God as warm and caring. However, those from intergenerational settings more frequently referred to their relationship with God. (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 12: Kindle Locations 1503-1506)

Allen's conclusion was that "the intergenerational children in this study were more aware of their relationship with God" (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 12: Kindle Location 1537-1539).

Normally the church assumes that children learn better in age-segregated environments. On a Sunday morning as the church gathers for worship, separate programs for younger ages are important as children and younger teens will not have the attention span nor, in most cases, the intellectual ability to understand much of the sermon. Age-specific ministries are important in the church. But children also need to see

and hear from people who are a part of other generations in order to grow spiritually and find expression for their faith. An intergenerational time of worship a few times a year on a Sunday morning can provide opportunities for all ages to come together for interaction on a level where children, youth and adults can learn from one another.

### **Theories in Support of Intergenerational Learning**

Many developmental theories have come into being over the last couple of centuries. Some of these lend support to the need for intergenerational contact in the lives of children and youth. Piaget advanced four stages of cognitive development and in his theories he recognized the crucial role interaction with others play in the process. Eric Erikson's eight stages of personality development also involve the interaction of generations; "These tasks are learned through complex social interactions of family, school, church and other social environments" (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 6: Kindle Location 795-796). Not only do children learn from their parents, but parents' development is influenced by their children. Psychiatrist Lawrence Kohlberg's theories state that socialization is important in how individuals grow morally (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 6: Kindle Location 778-815).

James Fowler developed a theory with seven stages of faith. These stages require contact with other generations to move on to the next stage. Stage 1 (intuitive-projective) is the preschool stage of "fantasy verses reality." This is when the most basic ideas about God are picked up from parents and other people. These relationships with more mature people are crucial because they lay the foundation for faith later in life. Stage 2 (mythic-literal faith) begins at school-age. Children's sense of belonging is important at this stage with their peers and in multi-age gatherings.

Stage 3 (synthetic-conventional faith) is usually the stage of adolescence. This is a period in which identity is newly discovered and affirmed. The youth in this stage have several different social circles in which they move and live. Intergenerational activities that encourage dialogue between different ages provide help for them to move to the next stage. Many adults never get past this stage in their faith development. At stage 4 (individuated-reflective faith) there is a crisis of faith for young adults as they examine their beliefs. This may lead to disillusionment with their faith. Intergenerational contacts can provide affirmation and encouragement to continue in their faith. For those in stage 5 (conjunctive faith) and the rarely attained stage 6 (selfless faith), it is a time to come to appreciate the views of the other generational groups with whom they have contact (Harkness 2000, 60-61).

Allen and Ross suggest that the situative-sociocultural theory of Lev Vygotsky can provide “the basic learning principles at work in an intergenerational Christian community” (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 7: Kindle Location 896). Vygotsky places a strong emphasis on social interaction as crucial to learning. His theory is called the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD is the assistance required for children to move from where they actually are in their learning development to where they potentially could be. Allen and Ross suggest that “when a person is ready to learn the next thing, the best way to learn it is to be with those who are just ahead on the learning journey” (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 7 Kindle Locations 923-924).

Thus intergenerational education in the church is valuable to move people forward in their development, learning from those with more experience. Children learn and grow from being around teens and adults. Teens learn from young adults and older ones.

Adults learn from being in community with older adults and those with greater experience and knowledge. Adults can also learn from the innocence and wisdom of children. Since everyone develops spiritually at a different rate, a child at age 10 may be more spiritually mature than a 67-year-old. Through intergenerational education and ministry groups, people of all ages and maturity can learn from one another and grow in their faith.

### **The Importance of Intergenerationality in the Church**

Allan Harkness, in his article “Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church” suggests three major reasons why intergenerational strategies are critical for the church now and in the future. The first reason he gives is “our theology demands it” (Harkness 1998, 436). In both the Old and New Testaments the community of faith was intergenerational and the early church involved all ages. The names given to the church in scripture such as the “family of God” and the “body of Christ” indicate the intergenerationality of the church. The topic of the Biblical and theological foundations of intergenerationalism will be discussed further in chapter two.

The second reason Harkness gives for the church’s need to continue an intergenerational emphasis is “our personal spiritual formation requires it” (Harkness 1998, 438). He concludes that “a faith community which encourages intentional intergenerational educational processes will enhance in its members the development of the spiritual (as well as psychological and social) qualities needed for personal growth and maturity that might otherwise remain dormant or unfulfilled” (Harkness 1998, 440). Children and youth not only learn from adults but can teach adults many things because

of their simple faith and trust. Spiritual formation takes place not only when adults teach Bible knowledge to children but when there is mutual sharing and relationship building.

The final reason Harkness gives for why the church must continue in its intergenerational ministries is “society is searching for it” (Harkness 1998, 440). People are looking for community—for a place to belong. The church is one of the few (or perhaps the only) institution that has all ages as its clientele. James White argues that society is tearing apart the family and the church is uniquely positioned to draw generations together (White 1988, 11). Today, some 27 years after White wrote his book, families want to be together and are looking for opportunities to do things as a family with other people of all ages.

Reporting on a study by Search Institute, Scales, Benson and Roehlkepartain write:

There is clear evidence that young people benefit from multiple, sustained relationships with adults outside their immediate family. For example, Search Institute research has found that the more adults a young person reports that he or she can turn to, the better off that young person is. Yet just 22 percent of the youth surveyed reported having strong relationships with five or more adults other than their parents. (Scales, Benson and Roehlkepartain 2001, 5)

Young people need relationships with older people and the church should be a place where intergenerational connections can and should be made.

Allen and Ross contend that there are many benefits to intergenerationality in the church for all ages including “a sense of belonging, support for troubled families, better use of resources, character growth and sharing each other's spiritual journeys” (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 3: Kindle Locations 416-417). A sense of belonging is important to all ages, but particularly to those who are at opposite ends of the age scale. A child was overheard at a school concert held at the church to say, “This is my church.” As a congregation there is a desire that all children and youth as well as senior adults and all

who walk through the doors of the building feel at home. The church has the opportunity to support people in all situations as they become a part of the bigger family.

Along these same lines, John Roberto notes that being intergenerational creates special relationships between adults and children, helps one generation care for and respect another, encourages greater faith at all stages of life, prepares leaders of all ages, uses all the talents of different ages, provides role models and mentors for the young, provides the opportunity for one generation to meet the needs of another, and allows the church to pass on old traditions and make new ones together (Roberto 2012, 2). When all the generations are brought together, the benefits indicate the importance of intergenerationality in the church.

### **Family Ministry Trend**

Family Ministry is currently a trend within the church. However it has not always been that way. The post-war years brought the baby boom with the traditional role of the mother in the home and the father at work, and the dream of a family home in the suburbs. This era also saw the rise of the “teenager,” a term begun in 1941 to describe the adolescent. The teenager had more disposable time and money and became “a distinct social and cultural structure that resisted movement toward adulthood” (Jones et al. 2009, 27).

As the generation gap between teens and parents began to widen, so did the gap within the Church. parachurch organizations began hiring professionals to reach teens who found the church irrelevant. Churches began to follow the model of these organizations because of their success in reaching teens. So began the professional youth pastor, which only succeeded in widening the gap between generations in the church. The



success of this style of ministry to youth resulted in the same type of ministry with children. Thus by the end of the twentieth century, the church had taken over from the parents the role of providing for the spiritual formation of their children (Jones et al. 2009, 33-35).

Since that time, reports from researchers have indicated that the church is losing its youth once they graduate high school. Kinnaman, who is the president and majority owner of the Barna research group, says that “there is a 43% drop-off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church engagement” (Kinnaman 2011, 22). The reason for the drop-off is not necessarily because the youth have lost their faith, but because they have lost trust in the church and do not regard it as relevant to their lives.

Sociologist Christian Smith, the director of the National Study on Youth and Religion, along with his team of researchers, interviewed youth ages 13 to 18 in depth regarding their religious and spiritual lives. Five years later in another phase of the study the same subjects were interviewed again as young adults, now between the ages of 18 and 23. This study found that most young people keep the same level of faith, belief and practice as young adults as they did as teens. Those who grew up in homes where they were encouraged in their spiritual lives by their parents were more likely to hang on to their faith as they entered adulthood. In an interview with Smith posted on the website, *Resources for American Christianity*, he says, “It is wrong to separate youth ministry and children ministry from adult ministry. ...The best way to minister to children and teenagers is through their parents” (Mulder 2012, 3).

In the mid-1990s the first edition of the book, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* by Mark DeVries, became popular among youth leaders. The title of the first chapter of the second

edition, “Something’s Wrong: the Crisis in Traditional Youth Ministry” (DeVries 2004, 21) sums up the reason for the book. Churches were having large successful youth ministries, but this success was not translating into spiritually mature adults. As youth moved to college or to work, they left their faith behind. The church was no longer important to them. This trend was verified by researchers such as George Barna (DeVries 2004, 25). In the twenty-first century, much of the emphasis has switched to putting the family back together in the church. Rather than calling youth pastors many churches seek a pastor who will minister to youth and their families. An indication of the emphasis on family ministry in the church is the number of books that have been written on the topic since the 1990s (by authors such as Chap Clark, Charles Sell, Diana Garland, Timothy Paul Jones, Michael and Michelle Anthony, Mark Holman, Reggie Joiner, and many more). There are currently several large family ministry conferences that take place yearly in the USA including the Orange Conference and the D6 (Deut. 6:4-7) Conference.

The trend to family-based youth and children’s ministry has helped parents become more involved with their children’s spiritual growth in church and at home. However, it has done little to encourage intergenerational learning and community ministry. Family ministry focuses on families learning together. The purpose of family ministry is for the church and family to work together in the spiritual formation of the children. Intergenerational education encourages the all-age church family to come together in settings where several different cohorts are present and learning from one another. I mention the trend of family ministry in this chapter only to show that there has been some change in emphasis toward all ages learning and working together in the church.

## Connecting Generations: Models and Practice

The last part of this chapter will consider what a church can do to bring the generations together. Some different models for churches and some practical activities will be examined later in this section. The question of how a church can begin to become a church of all generations will be discussed first.

### Connecting Generations

Tim Carter suggests that the “glue” that holds generations together is comprised of relationship, respect and revision (Carter 2013, Chapter 16, Kindle Locations 2952-2954). *Relationships* that involve real listening are vital for different generations to get along with one another.

Only through real relationships can we begin to truly understand the hearts and dreams of those in other generations. Only through these relationships can we become a true community that values the calling of the church as a whole but also honours the respective purposes of the different generations. (Carter 2013, Chapter 16, Kindle Locations 2983-2985)

Too often in the church the focus is on what the individual wants rather than what is best for the whole congregation.

Ross Parsley *Messy Church: A Multigenerational Mission for God's Family* stresses the importance of building loving relationships. He writes that love is not going to be automatic among the generations in the church. People need to be challenged to love those from other generations and encouraged to sacrifice what they like for the needs of another generation. One way a pastor can challenge the congregation to build more loving relationships is through sermons which include stories about intergenerational families (Parsley 2012, Appendix 2, Kindle Locations 2882-2885).

*Respect* is the second point that is necessary to hold generations together according to Carter. Building loving relationships among the generations is important but without respect something key is missing. Older generations do not always understand the need for younger generations to do things differently. They fear that as they hand over leadership roles to younger people, they will lose control and that what they value in the church will be lost. In their enthusiasm and desire to move the church forward, younger generations may fail to consider the importance of the traditions of the church formed by the older generations and thus not respect the contributions made by them. Each generation tends to believe that their way is the best and they are the only ones who really “get it.” However, Carter stresses that for each generation God’s purpose may be different from the current generation and so respect is needed among the generations.

We need to discover a newfound respect for the purposes of God in the new generations while continuing to honour the previous generations who have paved the way. And we need the previous generations to actually spend the time paving the way for the following generations as part of their calling, rather than criticizing and demeaning the younger generations through words and actions of disrespect. (Carter 2013, Chapter 16: Kindle Locations 3026-3033)

Carter uses the example of King David preparing the materials for his son Solomon to use in building the temple for God. David was a warrior and it was not right for him and his generation to build God’s temple, but he helped prepare Solomon’s generation for the task.

Carter states that the third “glue” to hold generations together is *revision*. This is the most difficult of the three because revision involves change. However, if there exists in the church good relationships among the generations and respect for each other’s generational needs, revision will be easier and less divisive. Without revision, younger generations are more likely to be lost to the church.

Menconi writes that in order for a church to be effective in ministry it must become more intergenerational (Menconi 2008, 21-22). He says that churches that become more intergenerational have great potential to impact and transform society. Churches with only one dominant generation are at risk to be ineffective. By definition, being intergenerational is more than simply having many generations who participate in the church. Intergenerationality involves getting to know people from other generations, by worshipping and studying together, sharing meals and fun times with each other. Also, when all generations are gathered together in the same room it does not mean that they are connecting with one another. Look around at a social gathering in the church. Unless encouraged to connect with others most people will be divided by age. Seldom would one see a senior in the middle of a group of young adults.

Becoming intergenerational is a challenge for a church in many ways. Gil Rendle says intergenerationality is a “way of seeing” that takes us beyond our own generational or cultural view. The problem is that too many people see the way of their particular generation as the right way. “Being intergenerational is one of the most difficult challenges of congregational leadership in a fast-changing culture, because leaders must constantly be more focused on learning how to speak to the shifting culture than on speaking in familiar and safe language that is already embedded in the congregation” (Rendle 2008, 61).

Leadership is vital for helping a congregation to draw generations together and become more intergenerational in outlook and practice. This paper will now examine some ways churches and leaders have attempted to deal with the issue of connecting (or not connecting) generations.

## **Models for Connecting Generations**

Carroll and Roof conducted a study on congregations and generational cultures in the mid-1990s. From the study they identified three types of congregations which they called “the inherited model, the blended congregation and the generation-specific congregation” (Carroll and Roof 2002, 15).

The inherited model tends to stick with what the congregation has been doing in the past. Tradition is very important and even if there are multiple generations in the congregation, it does not affect the way things are done; “They put greater emphasis on maintaining its history and heritage than on innovation” (Carroll and Roof 2002, 137). The authors suggest that the inherited model will face a serious challenge in trying to hold on to younger generations.

The generation-specific congregation has made a conscious decision to focus on attracting and ministering to one generation although there may still be several generations in the church. New congregations without the history of traditions will find it easiest to be generation specific. For churches steeped in tradition this will be more difficult. The question arises as to what happens to a Gen X focused church as the members age and have children who grow up in a church which is not culturally relevant to them when they become adults? Do they stay or find a church that is more pleasing to them? What happens to a Boomer seeker-sensitive church when the Xer and Millennial children desire community and fellowship that may be lacking in the seeker-sensitive model? “The generation-specific congregation risks missing the rich interaction that comes through the give-and-take of generations trying to find ways of living together faithfully” (Carroll and Roof 2002, 204).

Blended congregations are concerned with keeping and attracting all generations so they have adapted what they do to meet the needs of all ages. Though traditional in many ways they have added new ways of doing things to keep younger generations involved and happy. A blended congregation struggles with keeping the traditions of the church and staying culturally relevant. It must work at creating community and communication between generations. Although perhaps the best option for a church that wishes to keep all generations, usually no generations are completely satisfied in a blended congregation.

A different model for keeping all the generations in the church is presented by Bob Whitesel and Kent Hunter in their book, *A House Divided: Bridging the Generation Gaps in Your Church*. In an attempt to reach all generations they have created a strategy that separates the generations although still all in one building (or multiple buildings on one campus). “The Tri-Generational church is a holistic congregation with three distinct generational sub-congregations peacefully co-existing under one roof, one name, and one leadership core” (Whitesel and Hunter 2000, 28). The three generations the authors refer to are the older GI/Senior Generations, the Boomers, and Generation X.

The authors propose that each of the three-generation sub-congregations within the church would have their own shepherd, their own ministries and their own artistic expression which would include things like the environment in which they meet and the music they sing. This would avoid a lot of generational conflict that takes place in the church especially over worship styles. In this Tri-Gen model all three sub-congregations would be under the same leadership core, whether a leadership team, board or pastor. In order to build unity among the three congregations they recommend a unity service once

a quarter or twice a year to bring all groups together. The service contents would be a blending of the best from the three sub-congregations (Whitesel and Hunter 2000, 187).

Although an interesting idea, this strategy seems to do little to connect the generations, but in effect divides them. This book was published 15 years ago before the Millennials became adults. Today this generation is seeking its place in the church and a younger generation of children and young teens are about to come into their own place in the world. Does the Tri-Gen Church then become a four-generation church or a five-generation church?

During my first year at Grace Memorial Church, I attempted to develop a once-a-month alternative service called “Café Church.” I found the morning worship service very formal and thought an alternative style service might connect with younger people. The event was held at the same time as the regular worship service. One of the complaints from the main congregation was that it took all the younger people out of the service and they missed having them there. After much thought I realized that this approach was not helping to connect generations in the church and perhaps there was a method that would work better.

It is my belief that for a congregation to survive the generational tug-of-war there must be intentional intergenerational philosophy and ministry. Christine Ross in her doctoral dissertation, “A Qualitative Study Exploring Characteristics of Churches Committed to Intergenerational Ministry,” studied four churches that were intergenerational:

The findings reveal the uniqueness of each congregation’s story as well as 23 similar characteristics between the research churches. In general these characteristics pertain to: why IM [Intergenerational Ministry] is implemented into a congregation, how



leaders define IM, how IM is implemented, who was responsible for implementation, and problems of implementing IM. (Ross 2006, i)

Rather than intergenerational ministry being a new program to tag on to existing ones, it should be seen a general philosophy of the way ministry is done in the church. Of course there would still be time for age-specific ministries to teach children, youth and adults at appropriate levels but an overarching goal would be to connect generations as “frequent and regular cross-generational opportunities for worship, learning, outreach, service and fellowship offer distinctive spiritual benefits and blessings” (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 3 Kindle Location 413).

The last part of this chapter will consider how intergenerational ministry can be integrated into the church.

### **Practical Activities to Connect Generations**

“Magic happens when we bring the generations together” (Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald 2008, 2). The authors go on to say that it is going to be messy when all the generations are together but they have discovered that children, youth and adults learn a lot and enjoy themselves in an intergenerational setting.

Scott Miles in his book, *Families Growing Together*, indicates five basic components for intergenerational learning. The first is *activity*. Children and youth need to be active. They do not engage when sitting and listening for long periods of time. Even adults learn best by doing. The second component for intergenerational learning is *simplicity*. Activities should be geared so that even the younger people in attendance can participate with the help of an adult. The third component is *informality* though activities still need to be well-planned and structured. *Celebration* is the fourth part of intergenerational

activities. Be fun-loving and not boring. The last component Miles mentions is *involvement*. Intergeneration learning is for all ages and each must be encouraged to participate (Miles 1990, 31-36).

This chapter will now consider various ministries of the church and how they can assist a church in becoming more intergenerational.

### *Corporate Worship*

Allen and Ross suggest a good starting place for planning intergenerational worship. They say, “Leaders who want to nurture an intergenerational culture must consider each element of the typical worship liturgy with one question in mind: How can children, teens, emerging adults, young adults, middle adults and older adults be drawn in more fully” (Allen and Ross 2012, Kindle Edition: Chapter 14: Location 1824-1825)? Menconi writes that “effective intergenerational worship is taking the best offerings each generation makes to God and blending them in a truly meaningful way” (Menconi 2008, 182). John Ortberg sees this differently: In an article in *Leadership Journal*, he comments, “Effective intergenerational worship would be a congregation of diverse ages sitting through a service of mixed styles that displeases everyone equally” (Ortberg 2009, Online Edition: 2). Unfortunately, this is often the case with blended worship. Whitsel and Hunter (proponents of the tri-generation church that meets together a couple of times a year) suggest that each generation bring the best that it has to offer to an intergenerational service. The older generations might bring a choir selection, the Boomers provide a skilled worship band, and Generation X produce video and dramatic elements of worship. However, the authors have no suggestions for what teens and

children might bring to the service, thus making it not a truly intergenerational worship event.

It is not an easy accomplishment to plan an intergenerational time of worship. An important way to keep the planning fresh and new is to use a team approach to planning, consisting of people from several generations. Allen and Ross suggest using several generations in drama ministry and in music leadership; having father/son, mother/daughter, or other cross-generationally led prayers; and having older generations share their faith stories (Allen and Ross 2012, Kindle Edition: Chapter 14, Location 1839-1841). A children's story is a hit with all ages and interaction fuels more discussion. However, most churches opt for a separate children's worship time or the children exit the main service for their own teaching time at some point in the service. Some churches might lead an intentional intergenerational service once a quarter or a couple of times a year.

Preaching to different generations is also challenging. Younger generations tend to be postmodern in their thinking while the older generations are firmly rooted in the modern world. Postmoderns are non-authoritarian and do not view moral issues as black and white. They do not want to be told what they can and cannot do. Preaching must direct them to a relationship with Christ rather than a set of rules to follow. Older generations like to listen to a preacher who has studied hard and presents the information in an authoritative way. An understanding of the generations is important to be able to communicate effectively. Menconi suggests a few ways to speak to an intergenerational congregation: be authentic not manipulative; speak to real issues faced by the congregation; give practical application for the message; use media; think through how it

relates to different ages; be creative in sermon presentation; encourage generations to interact; and seek input from all generations (Menconi 2008, 193-194).

### *Learning Events*

Small groups are important for spiritual growth. The last few decades have brought an emphasis on small group ministry in the church. However, there is very little material available on intergenerational small groups. There are many things that all ages can do together in a small group. Kara Powell, the Executive Director of the Fuller Youth Institute, shares on the *Sticky Faith* website the five things they do in their intergenerational small group: They share a common meal, have a conversation on a certain topic, include the kids in the conversation, share prayer requests, and have fun (Powell 2012).

Many people would have concerns that a child could not participate in an adult study and an adult will receive little from a study at children's level. Allen and Ross speak clearly to this misconception:

It is well established that when teaching children, one should utilize all the senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling—as well as a variety of learning styles (e.g., collaborative, analytical, common sense, dynamic). When all generations are present, all benefit when those teaching keep these pedagogical principles in mind. That is, adults also learn through their senses; that they can and often do learn primarily aurally in public settings doesn't mean that they don't also learn well through all their senses. (Allen and Ross 2012, Kindle Edition: Chapter 15, Location 1908-1911)

There is a mistaken belief in the church that learning takes place when one person studies and expounds his or her knowledge to a group of willing participants. Knowledge and the experience of sharing with others are both important for spiritual formation.

A program from the Church of England called “Messy Church” has attempted to bring the generations together for a time of fun, food and learning. A two-hour gathering time (usually not Sunday morning) includes a welcome, a time to explore a Biblical theme for the event through crafts and messy activities, a time of worship involving songs, story, and prayer, and a meal together. The activities involve all ages working and learning together, rather than age-graded activities. The intention of Messy Church is to reach people at all stages of their faith development and to appeal to those who do not feel comfortable in a Sunday morning worship setting (<http://www.messychurch.org.uk/>).

In Roman Catholic churches an intergenerational learning experience called “Generations of Faith” has been adopted by many churches. This model begins with an all-age learning experience to introduce the theme for the event. This is followed by an in-depth learning experience which may happen in age-specific parallel groups, all-age small groups or self-directed learning activity centers. An all-age learning experience follows in which each generation teaches the other generations. The meeting closes with a reflection and application time (Roberto 2009, 43).

James Gambone suggests several ideas for intergenerational learning experiences. One of these is to have a Vacation Bible School that involves all ages learning together, rather than divided by age. He also suggests conducting a congregational retreat for all generations, celebrating special days and seasons of the church with intergenerational activities, and running an after-school program for all ages (Gambone 1998, 80-83).

### *Service and Missions*

Service to others is a ministry that can be done very effectively in an intergenerational context. There are many intergenerational service projects that the church can sponsor.

Some of these include: serving in a community kitchen, doing yard work or home repair for homebound senior citizens, doing a program at a local retirement community, sending care packages and letters to missionaries or college students, and graffiti and trash cleanup around the congregation's neighborhood (Allen and Ross 2012, Chapter 17: Kindle Location 2237-2239). Grace Memorial Church recently collected more than \$20,000 worth of food for the local food bank through a project at the major grocery stores. Who can resist a young child asking if they would like to make a contribution to a food bank?

An intergenerational mission trip is a great way to build relationships among people of different generations. Spending time together fulfilling a common purpose helps to build lasting bonds among participants especially if it is away from home and overnight; “When an intergenerational group is together in a neutral—and often uncomfortable environment—conversations are more easily initiated” (Menconi 2008, 209). Youth and young adults today are mission focused and need only to have older generations join them on the journey. Renée Embree, Director of Youth and Family Ministries for the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches, challenges readers in the blog, “One Neighbourhood,” to “look beyond the walls of your church and invite youth and children to serve your community together with you” (Embree, posted February 12, 2015).

### *Mentoring*

Paul says to the Corinthian church, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Parsley suggests “The Four Cs of Mentoring” in his book. The first “coaching for life” helps a young person learn from the life of an elder to have the skills and character to be successful in life. The second “C” involves “caring for needs.” A

young person in crisis or need can benefit greatly from the support of an older mentor. The third “C” which Parsley calls “challenging for improvement” is important in helping a young person make good choices and learn from mistakes. The final “C” is cheering for confidence” and requires the mentor to provide encouragement to help the young person build confidence and find success (Parsley 2012, Appendix 3: Kindle Locations 2917-2935).

Mentoring, however, does not only involve older people encouraging those younger. In the book, *Reverse Mentoring: How Young leaders Can Transform the Church and Why We Should Let Them*, author Earl Creps proposes that the young have much to teach those who are older. In the church this is an area that needs growth as older leaders are not always willing to take the advice or help of someone much younger (Creps 2008, xvi-xxi).

### **Conclusion**

In order to bring the generations together the church will need to attempt to understand the differences that divide generations and provide opportunities for the generations to connect. One way to do this is for the church to move toward becoming intentionally intergenerational. This may involve some changes at the leadership level but is best accomplished through already existing programs in which intergenerationality is encouraged. Occasional special events which are intergenerational in nature will also improve communication among generations.

A congregation of many generations worshipping, learning and serving together will not be an easy accomplishment but it is worth the effort, lest the church become as God’s people did after entering the Promised Land: “After that whole generation had been

gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:10 NIV). The next chapter will consider the Biblical and theological imperative of intergenerationality in the church.



## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

—Joel 1:3 (NIV)

During a visit with the Chinese Fellowship ministry at Grace Memorial Church I sat with a group of children at a table where lunch would soon be served. A time of worship through singing occurred first with the use of music videos in the Mandarin language. All through a beautiful song based on Psalm 103, a seven-year-old boy at the table sat with his hands folded, head bowed, and eyes closed as he sang along with the video. This was a very meaningful moment. Even though I did not understand the words that were being sung, it was a blessing to be able to share in worship with this child. What if the children at that meeting had been removed from the gathering to go to their own time of worship? It would have been a loss for both the children and the adults.

When age groups are always segregated in the church something is missing in the community of faith. The purpose of this project is to understand generational differences in the church and to connect the generations through meaningful activities. This chapter will examine a Biblical and theological imperative for connecting generations in the church beginning with a description of how the word generation is used in scripture and the intergenerationality of God.

The Old Testament focuses on God's relationship with his people beginning with the covenant made with Abraham and his descendants. This chapter will discuss the importance of this covenant community and God's instruction to pass on the faith from one generation to the next. In the Biblical record, people of all ages resided in family

units. Therefore, much of the discussion will centre on how families lived and interacted in the communities of faith. Various intergenerational relationships and their importance will be considered.

The New Testament portion of this chapter will consider the life and teachings of Jesus in the context of his family and the intergenerational community that followed him. It will also examine the description of the church as the children or family of God, the household of faith, and the body of Christ.

### **Generation in the Bible**

The first Hebrew word for generation found in Genesis 2:4 is *tôledâh*: “These are the *generations* of the heavens and the earth when they were created” (NRSV). This verse is translated more frequently as “this is the *account* of...” (NASB, NIV) or “these are the *records* of...” (HCS). This Hebrew word is most often used in the explanation of descendants and in genealogies. It is derived from the Hebrew word meaning “to bear children” and is used in Genesis to give the narrative from the creation of the world through the years of the patriarchs (Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon online, <http://www.studylight.org/lexicons/hebrew/hwview.cgi?n=8435> [accessed January 15, 2016]). “Human history in its simplest form of family history is then the way God tells His story of working with human beings to bless them and to accomplish His purposes for them. He works not only in miraculous, unique events; He works also in the continuing series of human births and deaths” (*Holman Bible Dictionary online*, <http://classic.studylight.org/dic/hbd/view.cgi?number=T2239> [accessed January 15, 2016]). The word *tôledâh* is found 39 times in the Old Testament.

The most common Hebrew word for generation in the Old Testament is *dôr*. The word occurs 167 times in the Old Testament. It is used as a general term for those living at a specific time in the past, present or future. Genesis 6:9 speaks of Noah as a “righteous man, blameless in his *time*.” It is not an exact number of years but a general period of time: “One *generation* shall praise your works to another” (Ps. 145:4 NASB) and in the future, “We will not conceal them from their children, but tell to the *generation* to come the praises of the LORD” (Ps. 78:4). The word can also mean a dwelling or habitation: “Like a shepherd’s tent my *dwelling* is pulled up and removed from me” (Is. 38:12).

The Greek equivalent to the Hebrew *dôr* is the word *geneá*. It is used 43 times in the New Testament. *Geneá* can be used in the sense of successive members of a genealogy: “So all the *generations* from Abraham to David are fourteen *generations*; from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen *generations*; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen *generations*” (Matt. 1:17). It can also refer to a group of people living at the same time, “Why does this *generation* seek for a sign?” (Mark 8:12) and sometimes can be accompanied by a pejorative adjective to describe the character of the group, “You unbelieving and perverted *generation*” (Matt. 17:17).

The Greek word *génésis* is equivalent to the Hebrew word *tôledâh*. The word occurs only five times in the New Testament. It means source or origin in Matthew 1:1 where Jesus’ ancestry is enumerated, “The record of the *genealogy* of Jesus the Messiah”. It is used of Jesus’ birth or nativity in Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:14 (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon online, <http://www.studylight.org/lexicons/greek/gwview.cgi?n=1078> [accessed January 15, 2016]).

## **The Triune God**

“Intergenerationality is an expression of who God is” (Harkness 2012, 125). It is clear in scripture that there is only one God. The Hebrew Shema begins with the words, “The Lord our God, the LORD is one” (Deut. 6:4). God, however, is not a solitary being. He is a father with an eternal son, united in love by the Holy Spirit. He is a family. There is only one God who exists eternally in three persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. “The foundational Christian understanding of God is that he is Holy Trinity, three in one. He is, in the words of John Zizioulas ‘being as communion.’ Because God is three in one and one in three there is intimate community, a community of love at the heart of God” (Mounstephen and Martin 2004, 5).

This community of God is reflected in the church as the body of Christ (Allen and Ross 2012, Kindle Location 1027-1029). The Christian life is primarily relational. It is learning to love and to respond to one another, in our limited ways, as do the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to one another. At creation God said, “Let us make humankind in *our* image, according to *our* likeness” (Gen. 1:26 NRSV; emphasis added). Humankind was made by God in his own image to have fellowship, and to live together in relationship. It is unfortunate that as the people of God, the church does not always respond in love to or have respect for those within the faith. The image of the body of Christ will be discussed later in the chapter.

## **Old Testament**

God revealed himself to Moses as the God of the generations. From the burning bush he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God

of Jacob” (Exod. 3:6 NIV). He is the creator God who made a covenant with Abraham to make a great nation of Abraham’s offspring: “This is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations” (Gen. 17:4). God then reaffirmed this promise with Abraham’s son Isaac: “To you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham (Gen. 26:3b). Isaac’s son Jacob was also given the promise but in the form of a dream; “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying” (Gen. 28:13).

Jacob, his twelve sons and their families settled in Egypt where they multiplied greatly in number. Pharaoh forced them into slavery and they cried out to God for deliverance. God met Moses at the burning bush and called him to lead the people from slavery in Egypt to the land promised to them many generations earlier.

Therefore, say to the Israelites: “I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.” (Exod. 6:6-8)

The covenant with Abraham was reaffirmed, this time with Moses. God said, “I will take you as my own people.” God made himself known to the descendants of Abraham in a different way, with a new name—the LORD (Yahweh). God brought them out of slavery into a community of faith under his own leadership. Joseph P. Hellerman writes, “The historical event that the Israelites most dearly associated with the idea of salvation—deliverance from Egypt—was the very act that established them as the people of God....God saved the Israelites to community” (Hellerman 2009, 128).

God led his people under the leadership of Moses to Sinai. It is here that the covenant was confirmed between God and his people, the nation of Israel. The LORD did not make the covenant until he had revealed his power to them by leading them out of Egypt and providing for them in the desert. It was not a new covenant, but the fulfillment of the one made 400 years earlier with Abraham. “What God has started in Gen. 12 he is bringing to completion in Exod. 19-24” (Hamilton 2011, xxv). God then provided the law to help preserve the relationship.

When the people of God were finally ready to enter the Promised Land, Moses gave the law of God to them again, stressing the importance of faithfulness if the nation was to be prosperous. The people had a responsibility to follow the ways God had set for them. This duty involved passing on the information to the next generations; “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:6-7).

The great commandment to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5) was to be passed on through successive generations. This obligation fell to parents and grandparents to teach their children; “In the future, when your son asks you, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?’ tell him...‘The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today’” (Deut. 6:20, 24). In the Old Testament, education involved the older generation communicating what they had learned to the younger generation.

When the people entered the Promised Land, the territory was apportioned as God had instructed Moses, “Distribute the land by lot, according to your clans” (Numb. 33:54). Meyers writes that the Hebrew word, *mišpāhôt*, translated as “clan” or sometimes “family,” might be described best as a “residential kinship group.” The kinship group included “related farm families sharing common settled space and earning their livelihoods in the fields, orchards, and vineyards surrounding the village site” (Meyers 1997, 13). The family household might also have included servants and travellers.

Children were an important part of the family household, beginning work at the age of five or six. By age 13, boys would be working with the men while the girls laboured with the women. When the children were grown and married, a daughter would go to live with her husband’s family, and the wife of a son would join in her husband’s household. Education consisted of learning the skills and values necessary for survival of the household (Meyers 1997, 22-27).

The generations spent time together. Children did not go away for school but helped in the home and worked alongside their parents: “The bulk of education may very well have taken place in the family setting, where practical instruction in daily life was provided for boys and girls according to the opportunities open to them” (Crenshaw 1985, 614). Learning probably took place through oral instruction as it is not clear if reading and writing were taught in ancient Israel (Crenshaw 1985, 603).

In an article on passion and perspective in education in the Bible, Walter Brueggemann wrote, “Education in passion, in the Bible, is nurture into a distinct community that knows itself to be at odds with dominant assumptions. Torah education is an insistence on being fully covenanted Israel who has been chosen, summoned,

commanded, and promised” (Brueggemann 1985, 173). Israel had an identity which was distinctive from the surrounding communities and it was necessary that instruction be done to produce people who understood their uniqueness. Education is deeply rooted in passing on the stories of how God has called and led his people, from one generation to the next.

Children were an important part of this community. They were included in all parts of the worship and seasons of Israel; “In the religion of Israel, children were not just included, they were drawn in, assimilated, and absorbed into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging” (Allen 2009, 5). This can be seen in the Passover celebration, “And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians’” (Exodus 12:26-27). In order for their faith to be passed on, people of all ages experienced the same things, listened to the same stories, and participated in the feasts and rituals. “Embedded in Deuteronomy 6:4-6 is a mandate to the people of God to instruct their children, to uphold and to explain the Scriptures with the expectation that all, from the youngest to the oldest will participate in the feasts, festivals and sacrifices” (Glassford and Barger-Elliott 2011, 373).

There are many narratives in the Old Testament which show that all ages, including young children, participated in the community worship and events. Moses gave instructions to the priests and elders of Israel for the public reading of the Law:

Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and



learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess. (Deut. 31:12-13)

After crossing the Jordan River and conquering Jericho, Joshua read out the law and “there was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children, and the foreigners who lived among them” (Josh. 8:35).

When Israel was under attack from their neighbours, the scriptures say “all the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the Lord” (2 Chron. 20:13) as Jehoshaphat prayed. As Nehemiah and the people of Jerusalem rebuilt the walls, on a day of celebration and dedication, “they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away” (Neh. 12:43). Even during a call for repentance for the nation of Israel because they had turned away from God, the call went out to all ages, “Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast” (Joel 2:16).

The Bible uses the phrase *generation to generation* nine times in the Old Testament. The continuance of the nation of Israel depended upon the older generation passing on the faith to the next generation in order to prevent them from being led astray from God’s way. Psalm 145:4 says, “One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts.” Joel 1:3 proclaims, “Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.” When the people practiced and lived their faith, their beliefs and values would be passed on to their children.

Joshua led God’s people into the Promised Land and under his rule everything was good. “The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders

who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the Lord had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:7). Following Joshua’s death everything changed: “After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel” (Judg. 2:10). The people had failed to pass on what they knew and had experienced to the next generation.

In the book of Judges there is an ongoing cycle of sin. The people would serve the Lord until the death of the ruling judge, then fall into sin and become enslaved by the surrounding nations. They would then cry out to God and he would raise up a judge to deliver the nation of Israel from their oppressors. However, when the judge died, the cycle would repeat (Judg. 2:18-19). Failure to pass on their faith to the next generation caused this cycle to continue for about 350 years.

There are several intergenerational mentoring relationships in the Old Testament. Samuel and Eli had one of those relationships (1 Sam. 3). They needed each other. Samuel needed the teaching and training that Eli could provide for him. Eli needed someone to follow him as priest since his sons had blasphemed God and would therefore never serve as priest.

Ruth and Naomi had a mentoring relationship. They were both widowed and needed one another. Ruth followed her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem where she was able to help provide for their needs, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Ruth went to work in the field of a guardian-redeemer named Boaz. When Naomi learned that Boaz was “one who has the obligation to redeem a relative in serious difficulty” (Ruth 2:20 footnote in NIV) she encouraged

Ruth to continue working in his fields. Naomi was able to instruct Ruth in the customs of the land about how to become Boaz's wife (Ruth 3:1-4).

Another important mentoring relationship in the Old Testament was between the prophets Elijah and Elisha. In 1 Kings 19 Elijah was ready to give up after defeating the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. He was tired, discouraged and running for his life from Queen Jezebel. But God spoke to him, giving him instructions along with one to "anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet" (1 Kings 19:16b). Elisha was a young man, out plowing the fields when "Elijah went up to him and threw his cloak around him" (1 Kings 19:19). Elisha responded to the call by burning his plow, slaughtering the oxen, giving a feast, and following Elijah. Elijah needed the companionship and the help Elisha could provide. Elisha needed the training that Elijah offered. Elisha followed Elijah and ministered to him, refusing to leave him: "As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you" (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6). Before Elijah went away to heaven, he gave Elisha a double portion of his spirit and Elisha was able to perform more miracles than Elijah had.

The Old Testament provides a picture of a community of faith of all ages that worshiped, celebrated and learned together. "Faith formation involves learning the content of the faith and a way of life. Young people in the Scriptures were socialized into the faith community" (Glassford and Barger-Elliott 2011, 373). This description of faith formation in the Old Testament will now provide the basis for a look at the New Testament, in the life and teachings of Jesus, the growth of the church in Acts and the teaching found in the Epistles.

## **New Testament**

God chose to be born into an earthly family as the son, Jesus, and raised in the same context. Generations were important in the life of Jesus. In Mary's song (Luke 1:46-55) there is evidence of the importance of generations. "This song highlights the place of generations in God's plan for humanity made explicit in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus borne and nurtured at the breast by Mary" (Pazmiño and Kang 2011, 385). Mary said that all generations will call her blessed (Luke 1:48) and that "his mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation" (Luke 1:50).

The gospels of Matthew and Luke both trace Jesus' genealogy (Matt 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38). Matthew's account, written mainly for Jewish people aimed at proving that Jesus was a descendant of David to gain the approval of the Jews. Luke's account showed that Jesus was also for the Gentiles tracing his ancestry all the way back to Adam, the son of God. Just as Jesus was Joseph's adopted son, so too those who know and follow Jesus are the adopted children of God.

Jesus was educated the same way as other boys either by his father or perhaps at a synagogue school. Joseph taught Jesus his occupation, as was common in that day for the oldest son to take on the occupation of his father. Jesus would have worked as a carpenter until he began his ministry at age 30 (Connick 1974, 132). There is very little known about his childhood from scripture, except that he was left behind at the temple in Jerusalem when he was 12 years old. There he listened and asked questions of the religious leaders and "everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers" (Luke 2:47). When Mary finally found Jesus and expressed her concern that she and his father had been anxiously searching for him, his response was, "Didn't you know

I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). Even though Mary had experienced the miraculous birth of Jesus she was still not aware of "the true nature of his mission and of his designation, Son of God" (Ellis 1974, 86).

People of all ages, races, and social standing were attracted to Jesus. He made it clear to the disciples that he valued the children; "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these" (Matt. 19:14. Also found in Mark 10:14 and Luke 18:16). He used a boy's lunch to feed more than 5000 people on the hillside following a day of ministry (John 6:9). He also used the example of children in his teaching:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea." (Matt. 18:1-6)

Jesus' ministry ushered in a new type of community based on family relationships: "Jesus unequivocally affirmed such an approach to interpersonal relationships when He chose 'family' as the defining metaphor to describe His followers" (Hellerman 2009, 31). In order to understand better the family relationship during both Old and New Testament times, this paper will now look to the work of Joseph H. Hellerman who has written two books on the topic: *The Ancient Church as Family* and *When the Church was a Family*.

Hellerman points out that the ancient Mediterranean family system was much different than that of the modern western family. He focuses on the patrilineal kinship group (PKG) as the type of family found in the Jewish, Roman and Greek societies of the

ancient world. Patrilineal denotes that the father is the head of the household and the line continues through the male offspring as only the male can pass on the bloodline to his children. Female children are a part of the father's bloodline but they cannot pass it down to their children. Upon marriage a woman becomes a part of her husband's household but not a part of his bloodline. When a son is produced, the bloodline is passed on through him. A woman's primary role in the PKG is to produce male heirs. Marriages were arranged for the good of the family and not the individual (Hellerman 2001, 27-32).

Sibling solidarity was a very important part of the patrilineal kinship group. The love of a brother or sister took precedence over the relationship between husband and wife because the bloodline of the patrilineal kinship group was stronger than the marriage vows. Siblings were expected to defend family honour and the sin of one could bring disgrace on the whole family (Hellerman 2001, 27-32). The worst kind of strife was that between brothers, which is found in several Old Testament narratives: "Jacob and Esau; Joseph and his brothers; Aaron, Miriam, and Moses; David and his brothers; the chaos among Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom; and Solomon and Adonijah" (Hellerman 2001, 40).

Hellerman speaks of three characteristics of this ancient family system:

1. The group comes first: In the social world of the early Christians the survival and health of the group took priority over the needs and desires of the individual.
2. It's all about family: The extended (patrilineal) family system was the group to which persons in Mediterranean antiquity expressed primary relational allegiance.
3. I am my brother's keeper: The closest same generation family bond in the New Testament world was the bond between consanguine siblings. (Hellerman 2009, 205-206).

This ancient family system is quite different from our North American structure. Understanding the cultural differences between now and the first part of the Common Era is necessary. The community created by Jesus was not based on family bloodlines, but

the group functioned as a surrogate family. Jesus expected loyalty to his new family to take precedence over their family of origin since a person could not express loyalty to two families at once. This often caused conflict and a choice (Hellerman 2009, 67). Jesus demonstrated loyalty to his new family early in his ministry by how he perceived his own family. When his mother and brothers came looking for him, he asked the question, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” (Mark 3:33). His reply to his own question showed that in his new community, the surrogate family came first: “Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother’” (Mark 3:34-35).

A difficult saying of Jesus is found in Luke 14:26, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.” *Hate* is a strong word and one that would not be used when speaking of one’s family and particularly of a person’s father since the nation was built on a patriarchal system. The IVP Press New Testament commentary suggests, “‘Hate’ is used figuratively and suggests a priority of relationship. Jesus is first. To follow Jesus means to follow Jesus, not anyone or anything else. A disciple is a learner, and the primary teacher in life is Jesus. This total loyalty is crucial, given the rejection and persecution that lie ahead” (Bock 2010).

On another occasion, Jesus said “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead” to a potential follower who wanted to bury his father first. His father may have still been alive but he wanted to first fulfill his duty to his family before joining Jesus’ family. Or his father may have recently died and not to give him a speedy burial would be shameful. Of this incident, N.T. Wright comments that the “only explanation for Jesus’ astonishing

command is that he envisaged loyalty to himself and his kingdom-movement as creating an alternative family” (Wright 1996, 401).

It is also evident in the Gospels that Jesus is pro-family. His ministry shows several occasions where family life is encouraged. In the Sermon on the Mount he condemns adultery (Matt. 5:27-28) and divorce (Matt. 5:31-32). He quotes the commandment to “honour your father and mother” to the rich man (Matt. 19:16-22) and uses it to blast the religious leaders about their hypocrisy regarding rituals (Matt. 15:4-6). Just before his death on the cross he asks his disciple John to take care of his mother (John 19:26-27).

Jesus’ teaching on the family appears to be inconsistent. “There is a duality, an apparent contradiction, in Jesus’ words about the family which is rooted in the rejection of legality as a sphere for family life and in the creation of a community whose claims transcend those of the family” (Harrisville 1969, 425). Hellerman explains this duality in figure 1.

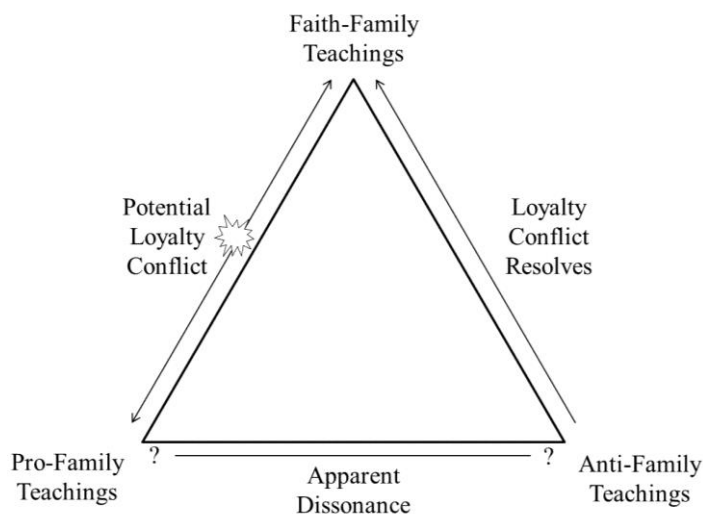


Figure 1. Jesus' Faith-Family Teachings



At the bottom of the triangle the *pro-family teachings* and *anti-family teachings* of Jesus create an *apparent dissonance*. At the top of the triangle Hellerman places the *faith-family teachings* of Jesus. Whenever possible Jesus encouraged good family relations, but “when a conflict of loyalty occurred, a follower of Jesus aligned himself with his church family as his primary locus of relational solidarity” (Hellerman 2009, 72). On the right side of the triangle, priority is given to Jesus’ family over the biological family as a person could not express loyalty to both. When conflict arose between the two families, Jesus’ family was to take precedence. The focus of one’s allegiance was to be to the new family created by Jesus over the family into which the person was born.

Jesus formed his community of followers on the basis of a surrogate patrilineal kin group with God as Father and the followers of Jesus as brothers and sisters in the family of God. For three years they spent much of their time together, supporting one another from a common fund and sharing all they had. The community Jesus began expands with the coming of the Holy Spirit and the formation of the church.

In the book of Acts there is evidence of the intergenerational nature of the newly born church.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. (Acts 2:42-46)

Although children and youth are not mentioned specifically in these verses, they would have been present in the homes. There is no evidence to prove they would have been excluded. All ages met together, sharing meals, prayer, and the breaking of bread (Horn

and Martens 2009, 99-100). The multigenerational community learned and worshiped together under the leadership of the apostles.

On two occasions in Acts 16, whole households were baptized. Paul and his companions came to Philippi and as there was no synagogue there, they went to the river outside the gate where he met some women who were worshipping God. A business woman named Lydia believed and immediately “she and the members of her household were baptized” (Acts 16:15). Later, Paul and Silas were arrested, flogged and thrown into prison in Philippi. An earthquake occurred and the prisoners were released from their chains but did not flee the prison. The jailor was so amazed that he brought Paul and Silas to his house, listened to his teaching, believed in Jesus and “immediately he and all his household were baptized” (Acts 16:33).

In Acts 20, at a late-night meeting of the church, there is a story of a youth named Eutychus. In this tragic story with a happy ending, Eutychus went to sleep in a hot, stuffy upper room while listening to Paul and fell out of the window. It appears that young people were present as well as adults at this all-night meeting. Luke also reports that children accompanied those bidding farewell to Paul as he boarded a ship at Tyre:

When it was time to leave, we left and continued on our way. All of them, including wives and children, accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray. After saying goodbye to each other, we went aboard the ship, and they returned home. (Acts 21: 5–6)

In Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians, Paul addressed children. In a list of instructions for Christian families, he said, “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord” (Col. 3:20). And to the Ephesian children he spoke similar instructions, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right” (Eph. 6:1). The inclusion of children demonstrates that they were also an important part of the

community. These directives from Ephesians 5:22–6:9 and Colossians 3:18–4:1 expressed a different form of family relationships than the patriarchal authority of the day: “Thus, within the dynamics of the Christian faith communities, the guiding principle of Ephesians 5:21 (‘Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ’) took on an intergenerational dimension radically different from the prevailing cultural norms” (Harkness 2012, 124).

In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul gave instructions to Timothy and Titus on how to relate to the various ages and generations within the church family. “Paul assumed multigenerational settings in which all ages were interacting. Paul recognized that ‘older men,’ ‘older women,’ ‘younger women’ and ‘young men’ need specific guidance and indicated that some of that teaching is to be cross-generational” (Allen and Ross 2012, Kindle Location 740-741). To Titus, Paul said, “Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children” (Titus 2:3-4). To Timothy, Paul gave similar instructions (1 Tim. 5). John R. Stott comments:

The local church is rightly called ‘the church family,’ in which there are fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, not to mention aunts and uncles, grandparents and children. Leaders should not be insensitive and treat everybody alike. No, they must behave towards their elders with respect, affection and gentleness, their own generation with equality, the opposite sex with self-control and purity, and all ages of both sexes with that love which binds together members of the same family. (Stott 1996, 126)

Paul was a mentor to many young men. He recognized that the faith of Timothy was the result of generations of faith: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also” (2 Tim. 1:5). His grandmother Lois imparted her faith to her daughter Eunice

who in turn passed on the same faith to her son Timothy. Paul saw the potential in Timothy and threw himself into his faith nurturing, “I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy” (2 Tim. 1:3-4). He trained Timothy by taking him on his journeys and leaving him to pastor new churches.

Paul’s mentorship of a young man named John Mark was not as successful. Mark had left with Paul and Barnabas on what is now called Paul’s first missionary journey; “John [Mark] was with them as their helper” (Acts 13:5). For some unknown reason, Mark left them (Acts 13:13) and returned home early in their journey. At a later time, Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance but Paul refused to take him on his second journey. This disagreement caused a split between Paul and Barnabas, “they had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus” (Acts 15:39). Although there is nothing written in scripture about what happened to this second team of missionaries, Barnabas was successful in mentoring Mark to the point where Paul was able to say later in life, “Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry” (1Tim. 4:11). Intergenerational mentoring was important to make strong pastors and leaders in the New Testament church.

### **New Testament Images of the Church**

There are many images of the church in the New Testament. Paul Minear in his book, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, says that “conservatively estimated, there are more than eighty of them [images of the church], but this number might readily be increased to one hundred if the various Greek words were counted separately” (Minear

1960, 28). This paper will consider some images that reveal the intergenerational nature of the church. These will include: the family, the household, and the body of Christ.

The church as a family is a popular image in the epistles. The letters of Paul to the churches provide the best information from scripture about church life and beliefs. Hellerman notes that throughout these letters, Paul used kinship terminology a lot. Sibling terminology occurs 118 times; father terminology is found on 40 occasions; and inheritance terminology appears 14 times (Hellerman 2001, 92).

The idea of the church as a family was central to how Paul viewed the church—God as father and the members of the church as brothers and sisters. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul spoke about being adopted as God’s children, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children” (Gal. 4:4-5 NRSV). Similarly to the Ephesians he wrote, “He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1: 5 NRSV). To the Romans he said, “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom. 8:15-16 NRSV). Those who follow Jesus are a part of a much larger family of believers—not as outsiders but as adopted children—with all the privileges and responsibilities of family membership. People are saved to community and the best description of community can be found in the metaphor of family.

Paul used the Greek word *adelphos* (Thayers Greek Lexicon online, <http://www.studylight.org/lexicons/greek/gwview.cgi?n=80>) on many occasions when

addressing the churches. The basic meaning of *adelphos* is brother and in the feminine form, *adelphe* means sister. In Paul's writings he referred to individuals as brother or sister, and the community to whom he was writing as brothers. Normally *adelphoi* (brothers) is interpreted in modern translations of the Bible to include sisters as well. In the patriarchal society of Paul, there was no inclusive language but by the context of his letters it is clear he meant to include the women as well most of the time.

The prominence of this kinship description would seem to imply that Paul both assumes and promotes the relationship between himself and his addressees, and among the addressees themselves, as one between equal siblings, who share a sense of affection, mutual responsibility, and solidarity. (Horrell 2001, 299)

Paul used sibling language 37 times to address the people in the church at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 there are four occurrences. Paul challenged the Christians not to take a brother to court as it was shameful to allow an outside court deal with a family matter. In chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians he used the term brother/sister four times in three verses;

For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the *brother* for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the *brethren* and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food causes my *brother* to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my *brother* to stumble. (1 Cor. 8:11-13 NASB; emphasis added)

He urged them to be considerate of offending another brother or sister (Horrell 2001, 300-301).

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians he expressed his emotional attachment to them with the use of the sibling terminology. He had visited Thessalonica, but had to leave quickly. After a short while, he began to question whether they had obtained enough instruction to grow strong in their faith. Paul longed to go, but was not able to so he sent Timothy to them. Timothy returned with a good report, and in his joy, Paul expressed his love and affection for them in familial language in a letter to them.

But, *brothers and sisters*, when we were *orphaned by being separated from you* for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy. So *when we could stand it no longer*, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our *brother* and co-worker in God’s service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, *when I could stand it no longer*, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that *you long to see us, just as we also long to see you*. Therefore, *brothers and sisters*, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. (1 Thess. 2:17-3:7 NIV emphasis added)

The italics are added to the scripture above to stress the sibling terms Paul used, as well as those “expressions of affective family solidarity” (Hellerman 2009, 81) to show the strong emotional attachment Paul had to the church in Thessalonica.

These examples make it clear that Paul considered the church a family. By addressing them with sibling language he was reminding them of their responsibility to one another. As family, the members of the church were to love as siblings do, treat one another with honour and respect, and share with each other. Paul’s purpose was to enhance the quality of their lives as a community of believers and to show Christ to the skeptical culture surrounding them (Harkness 2012, 125). It is important to note that never “does Paul use the term ‘brother’ to refer to pagans” (Hellerman 2001, 143).

There are many more examples of Paul’s use of sibling terminology in his letters—too numerous for the scope of this paper. However, the above examples show Paul’s love and concern for the churches. Whether he was simply greeting them, encouraging them in their faith, or pointing out an error in their ways, to Paul the church was a family.

Familial language was used often in the early church. The apostle John used “children” in his writings. Of those who believe in Jesus, John wrote, “he gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). Speaking of God’s love, he said, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” (1 John 3:10). John also uses the affectionate term “dear children” when addressing the people in the letters he wrote.

Closely related to the sibling language is the household image of the church:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of *God’s household*, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. (Eph. 2:19-22 NASB, emphasis added)

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul emphasized that God had adopted the Gentiles into his family through the work of Christ. The wall separating Jews and Gentiles had been broken down and those who were “far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:13 NASB). The people being addressed can have confidence that they are no longer outsiders but they belong—the homeless have found a home. Not only have they found a place in which to belong, but they are also growing into a temple of the Lord, built and fitted together into a spiritual dwelling. Barclay says that the church exists “to provide a home where the Spirit of Christ can dwell and where all men who love Christ can meet in that Spirit” (Barclay 1976, 119).

In God’s dwelling there are familial responsibilities, “So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the *household of the faith*” (Gal. 6:10 NASB; emphasis added). In this closing part of the letter to the



Galatians, Paul instructed the church never to tire of doing good but to let the generosity extend to the church family and also to those outside.

In 1 Timothy 3:15 Paul said he was writing “so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the *household of God* [emphasis added], which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.” In this portion of 1 Timothy, Paul was giving a description of the qualifications necessary to be leaders in the church. “The model of the household has become significantly more important as a model for the structuring of social relationships within the church” (Horrell 2001, 308). If leaders could not manage their own households well, then how could they manage the *oikos theos*, the household of God .

Another image of the church which Paul used is that of the community of believers as the body of Christ. As a body, there is interconnectedness among all of its members. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian life, but believers are dependent on one another. The part that rules the body is the head. Jesus is the head of his body and Lord of the church. As individual members of the body, the church is united in him and nourished through him (Erickson and Hustad 2001, 343).

There are several scriptures that speak about the body of Christ—Romans 12 as well as in Ephesians and Colossians—but the passage with the most details can be found in 1 Corinthians 12. “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Cor. 12:27). The body image gives no thought to race, standing, gender or age. All are a part of the body, “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” (1 Cor. 12:13).

A body must have unity. As Paul wrote, “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!’” (1 Cor. 12:21). Each part or member of the body has a role to play and the parts have been arranged by God, “But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be” (1 Cor. 12. 18). Some members of the body that appear to be lesser, God has given greater honour, “But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it” (1 Cor. 12:24). This image is then applied to relationships within the body in the form of spiritual gifts where they are used to build up the body (Middendorf 2007, 17).

Although this passage does not speak of the age of the members of the body, we can assume that this includes believers of all ages as well as all races, status, and gender:

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:26-28)

There is no specific example in the scriptures of children exercising their spiritual gifts, but scripture implies through the image of the body of Christ all believers have spiritual gifts to use to build up the church. It is my experience that children who are believers often display and use their spiritual gifts. Some children are wonderful encouragers, whether through the spoken word or by their musical abilities. Children’s faith can be very real. Once in a Sunday school class I asked a group of nine-year-olds to go somewhere alone and listen for God to speak to them. After a minute I called them back together. One little girl was crying and when I asked her what was wrong, she replied, “I wasn’t finished listening for God.” The prayer of a young child can be full of simple faith and trust in God.

## **Conclusion**

Generations are important in scripture. In the Old Testament God's covenant with Abraham was passed on through the generations, as God brought his chosen people to the land he had promised to them. A community was formed from Abraham and Sarah's descendants that became a great and powerful nation under God. The faith was passed on from generation to generation mainly through the family. Sometimes this was not accomplished very successfully, but God's promise continued with the sending of his son to become the saviour of the world.

In the New Testament, Jesus sought to build a new community based on loving family (sibling) relationships. An examination of the life and teachings of Jesus gave insights into the intergenerational community which he led and what it meant to be his follower. A study of the early church showed that the leaders regarded the members of the New Testament church as a family, emphasizing community and family life within. Relationships were of utmost importance; images of the church as a tight family unit prevailed in Acts and the epistles.

Intergenerationality in the Bible is best described through the family model. Family was much different in Biblical times than it is today in North America. Families expressed a loyalty to one another, putting the well-being of the group first, and valuing sibling relationships over that of marriage. The differences in the family make-up in scripture from what the family is today may make it difficult to successfully use the family as a model for what the church should be now. Families today can be dysfunctional and lack in the sense of community and loyalty, with the independent nature of individuals today. Although scripture gives a description of what a family

should be like, there are no perfect families to be found within its pages. In fact, families in scripture seem to be particularly troubled.

However, despite humankind's imperfections a common theme through the Bible is the importance of generations coming together to pass on the faith, to share resources, and become connected in community under God the Father, through Jesus Christ his Son and in the power of the Holy Spirit living within each person and binding God's family together in unity. The family unit in scripture and the nature of the early church provide a Biblical and theological foundation for the intergenerationality of the church.

The next chapter will discuss the research that was done in order to discover generational differences at Grace Memorial Baptist Church.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The review of literature in chapter 1 revealed that it is possible to have conflict among the generations in any setting, including the church. This clash arises because each group of peers has been born at a different time with distinct social, cultural and historical influences affecting their thought and experiences. These differences have created tensions and “gaps” among the generations. In the church, these tensions can be seen clearly in the so called “worship wars” of the last few decades. The New Testament reveals the church as the body of Christ. As all parts of a physical body work together in unity, so each person who is a part of the church is called to be in unity with all the other members. Each generation is instructed to pass on the faith to the next generation. How is this to be done if people from one generation cannot get along with those of another?

The purpose of this study was firstly, to understand and explore what the congregants at Grace Memorial Baptist Church value in the areas of worship, education, fellowship, mission, and church governance. Two research methods were used to gather data for the study. The first was a congregational questionnaire which was filled out by the assembly during a Sunday morning worship event. The other method used to collect information was through focus groups. Secondly, this project attempted to bring together the generations for intentional times of intergenerational activities. The hope was that as different age groups interacted they would understand each other better and come to appreciate the needs and beliefs of people of another generation.

When I arrived as Pastor of Family Ministries at Grace Memorial Baptist Church, I noted that the majority of people in the Sunday morning worship appeared to be over the

age of 50. However, deep concern was expressed by the leadership and the congregation regarding the small number of families attending morning worship, and although there was a small group of committed young adults, there were few college-age people. I also noted that the worship service was more traditional than contemporary most Sundays, although church leadership claimed it was blended worship. A beautiful pipe organ and a talented robed choir were central to worship. One person from an older generation was heard to pray, "Thank you God that our worship service is like a concert." As one from the "Baby Boomer" generation, I found the service to be stiff and formal. Even on the weeks when the worship band played I longed for more up-to-date upbeat praise songs that would lift my spirit and for less formality and "programmed" fellowship (a scheduled time during the worship service when people would greet one another).

The children were hardly seen during worship. A notice on the screen after the first few songs indicated the children could go downstairs to their own time of learning. Most of the families with children did not arrive until it was time for their program to begin so the children did not even come into the church sanctuary. Many people did not realize that we had about 10 children in the program downstairs. A few months later a "children's time" was initiated in the service which allowed the children to come to the front of the sanctuary for a time with the pastor who prayed with them before they went to their own activities. Some members of the congregation were amazed to see that there were children who attended the church services.

The above paragraphs indicate why I chose this particular area to study. My plan was to survey the congregation in order to discover what, if any, generational differences existed. Some people, whether young or old, prefer only one particular style worship

service including music, sermon presentation and other elements of worship. It is common for some in the congregation to believe that their particular style of worship is the right one, without considering the changes in society that necessitate change in the church in order for it to remain relevant. It seems that as people age they become more resistant to change and prefer things to remain the way they always have. People may feel the loss of their church if changes take place, even if the changes might attract young families or college-age students. Since the leaders in the church are usually older people their voices may speak more loudly than the voices of younger people who would like to see changes in the way ministry is accomplished. Since the Sunday morning worship service is the time when most people are present at the church, this project will focus on the worship event.

A mixed-methods approach was used for the study. Creswell writes that mixed-methods research is a procedure for collecting, analyzing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a study (Creswell 2009, 4). Tim Sensing in his book, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, states that although he prefers theses based on qualitative research, “a multi-methods approach is flexible enough to use quantitative tools” (Sensing 2011, 50).

Quantitative research is based on numerical data. It is a “means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables” (Creswell 2009, 4) which can then be measured and the numerical data analyzed. I chose this method because I felt it was the best way to obtain information from the greatest number of the congregants at one time. A three-page questionnaire (see appendix A) was developed using a rating scale from one to ten, one being “not important at all” and ten being “essential.” The survey

began with a request for personal data on the participant—age, sex and length of time attending Grace Memorial Church.

The first question asked, “How important to you are the following Sunday morning service activities?” A list of 27 items followed and participants were asked to circle the number corresponding to their answer on the scale of one to ten. The first few items focussed on the area of music by asking how important various types of musical instruments, songs, and choirs were to them. They were also asked to evaluate how important other elements of worship were to them including scripture reading, sermon style, prayer, the Lord’s Supper, and the setting for worship. Additionally they were invited to comment on whether it was important to see people their age in the worship service and involved in worship leadership, and to what extent it was essential to experience God and feel a sense of belonging during the time of worship.

The second question was similar to the first, but asked the participants to rate the same items based on the question, “How important to *the growth of the church* are the following Sunday morning service activities?” In hindsight, I believe I should have highlighted the difference between the two questions or altered its appearance as some people clearly did not understand how the first and second question were dissimilar.

The third and final question was geared to other activities of the church. The question asked was, “How important are the following activities of our church?” The list included educational groups by age, fellowship times, intergenerational events, mission opportunities, giving financially, church government, and being a Baptist. In retrospect, I think I should have emphasized that this question was not about how important these



pursuits were to the individual but how important the person felt these items were to the church. There was also space provided for participants to make additional comments.

The congregation was asked to fill out the questionnaire during a Sunday morning worship event on November 17, 2013. The congregation of Grace Memorial averages about 180 in attendance. Many of its people are faithful attenders, having attended for all or most of their lives, and having weathered the storms of a church split and times of serious strife. However, many of the members have only been attending for a few years. Grace is a multi-cultural congregation with families who have recently immigrated from the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, and some African countries. About 25% of the Sunday morning attendees would fall into this category.

The congregation was notified two weeks in advance that the survey would be taking place. The chairperson of the Deacon's Board served as facilitator for the filling out of the questionnaires. She explained the reason for the surveys and the process for completing and collecting them. Those present were informed that they were not required to complete the survey and that no one would be aware if they did or did not participate. The ushers for that morning were asked to hand out and collect the materials. A note at the top of the questionnaire advised participants that "by filling out the questionnaire you are indicating your consent to participate."

The school-age children were also present at the time of the survey. Parents were given a permission form to sign for their children and then the ushers gave them a red dot to put on the children's surveys indicating that parental permission was given for the children to participate. Two of the children's surveys could not be used because the red

dots were not placed on their surveys. There were a total of twelve questionnaires completed by children under the age of eighteen.

In total, 159 questionnaires were completed and collected that morning. All information was kept confidential and secure. The ushers collected the surveys and placed them in a sealed envelope on my desk and locked the door. The original surveys were filed at my home and the data was compiled in my computer at home. The data from the surveys was inputted to IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and statistical analysis was done using this program.

After the congregation had filled out the questionnaire I preached a sermon called “Connecting the Next Generation.” The main passage of scripture used was 1 Chronicles 22:5-10 in which David charged his son Solomon with the task of building the temple. David knew that the task would be great for Solomon so he began the preparations for the temple by gathering supplies. David did what he could to prepare the way for the next generation of leaders. The end of the message consisted of a discussion of the characteristics of the various generations, noting that each generation must live out the purpose of its own generation while preparing the way for the next generation. See appendix B for an outline of the message.

The second part of the project involved qualitative research. This form of research is often used “to answer the *whys* and *hows* of human behavior, opinion, and experience” (Guest, Namey and Mitchell 2012, 1). Creswell writes that it is “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell 2009, 4). The qualitative research tool used for this project was focus groups. Also known as group interviews, these meetings generate group interaction and

insights based on questions or themes presented by the interviewer. The group interaction often provides more information than individual interviews because one person's response may bring more insights from another participant (Sensing 2002, 120).

My original plan was to have two all-age focus groups with members from teens to seniors, consisting of about eight participants. Upon consultation with others, I decided to host one focus group for people under the age of 50 and one for those over the age of 50. There was some concern that younger people would not feel free to share with older members present for various reasons and vice versa. Perhaps a young person who did not care for worship hymns might not express that fact out of respect for the older traditional people who were in the group. Alternately, older people might not be willing to express their true feelings out of a fear of alienating a younger person with their views.

Choosing the members of each focus group proved to be a difficult task. The first problem was trying to discover discretely the age of members of the congregation. This was accomplished through some guesswork and in consultation with church staff. Other challenges included balancing male and female as well as including people of other cultures. I was also aware that there should be only one family member in the focus groups; that is, if a young man was in the younger group, I would not put one of his relatives in the older group.

A long list was developed by going through the current church directory and choosing people who would be good participants. I wanted them to be regular attenders (at least twice a month) and involved in more than just attending the Sunday morning service. Twenty-eight people were finally chosen from the long list and contacted to participate in the two focus groups. There were seven men and seven women chosen for each of the

two groups. These people were emailed and two possible dates to meet given to them for a meeting if they were willing to participate. They were to reply with their choice of meeting time. Some people responded they were not available while others did not respond at all. From those who replied positively dates were set to meet. The younger focus group met on a Tuesday evening in February and the older group met the following evening. The location chosen was the Welcome Centre of the church as the more comfortable parlour was in use both evenings.

The younger focus group consisted of participants from age 19 to 49. This included a 19 year-old college student, a 26 year-old, three participants in their thirties and two in their forties totalling seven members. Five of the seven were men and two were women. This group also included two Asian participants who immigrated to Canada as adults and had been attending Grace Memorial for many years. The older focus group consisted of participants from age 49 to 78. Five of these participants were in their 70s, one was 69 years old and another 49 years old. There were four females and three males in the older group but no immigrants from other countries as most people from other countries in the church are younger than 50. It did not occur to me until following the focus group that it was lacking in 50 and 60 year-old members. Arrangements were made with two people in this missing age group to meet with me and to answer the same questions given to the two focus groups so there would be input from this age.

The focus groups each opened in prayer. A brief explanation of the purpose of the group was given and some guidelines for discussion were put in place. The confidential nature of the discussion was stressed. As Tim Sensing writes, "Once outside the focus group setting, they should not reveal the identities of other participants or indicate who

made specific comments during the discussion” (Sensing 2011, 36). Then each person was asked to sign a research consent form which they all did.

The participants were then given a list of seven questions to answer in writing (see appendix C). The first question asked how important it was to see people their age in the congregation on Sunday morning, and similarly the second question asked if it was important to see people their own age involved in leadership during the service. The third question was related to the first two but focussed on how important it was for them to meet with others their age in small group Bible studies or fellowship events. The intent of these questions was to gauge how open the congregation might be to more intergenerational activities, both on Sunday mornings and throughout the week at the church. The results might also show how essential it would be to have members of a specific generation already attending and functioning as leaders in the ministries of the church when trying to reach out to that age group.

The fourth question asked if they saw any age group missing in the church or if they observed any generation “gap” between different cohorts. This was an important question for the project. Are there age groups who are missing in our congregation and why are they not present? The next question sought to gain ideas about what the church could do to attract and involve younger people in the church without alienating older people. They were then queried about when and where they personally had had contact and interaction with people from other generations in the church. Are there natural intergenerational contacts going on in the church or do people usually stick with their own age group? The final question related to several intergenerational events that had taken place in the last year. They were questioned about their knowledge of and involvement in those events.

The introduction to the focus group and responding to the written questions took about 30 minutes. During the remainder of the time, about 45 to 60 minutes, a discussion was held based on the questions they had just answered. The audio of these sessions was recorded. Later the recording was transcribed and the answers put in a chart form. It was important to organize what I heard and read so that I could make sense of it and relate it to the information discovered from the congregational questionnaire results. The responses were analyzed for similarities and differences that seemed valuable to the project.

It was more difficult to draw comments from the older focus group. They were all very agreeable but some of them did not see that they had anything to add to my thesis. The conversation did lag on occasion in this group and not as much time was spent on discussion of the questions. The younger group seemed to be more comfortable in the setting. They commented freely and responded to the observations of other members of the group.

Several intentional intergenerational events were planned during the year of research to bring the generations together. One was a worship event on a Sunday morning. Another was an Easter Sunday evening fun and learning experience called “Journey to Easter” which included a prepared supper. The third was a series of two Wednesday evening supper time events called “Messy Church.” The insights from these events will be discussed in another chapter.

The first questionnaire yielded information and statistics that were helpful in understanding what people valued the most in the church. The focus group answered

some of the “whys” that arose from the analysis of the quantitative research. The results of this research will be reported in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH RESULTS**

The Church is living in a day of constant change. However, change is difficult for people who love their church and desire it to be the way they have always known it. The changes that are necessary to attract and minister to people of all ages may be painful for some of the long-time members. Older generations want the younger generations to be a part of their congregation but they fear losing what they hold dear. Nevertheless, one cannot assume that all people of a similar age want the same thing. The results of the research as described in the previous chapter indicate that this is true at Grace Memorial Baptist Church.

The purpose of this project is to explore what each generational cohort within Grace Memorial Baptist Church values in the areas of worship, education, fellowship, mission, and church governance and then to provide ways to connect the generations through intergenerational worship, teaching and other events. The research tools used for this examination included a congregational questionnaire completed on Sunday, November 17, 2013 during a morning worship event which was later followed by two focus groups in February 2014. This chapter will examine the results of the congregational questionnaire using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) while integrating comments made during the two focus groups.

In order to understand the composition of Grace Memorial Church, this chapter will begin with a description of a typical Sunday morning congregation. This information was gathered from the congregational questionnaire. The chapter will present an understanding of the congregation based on age and gender, as well as the length of time



participants have been attending Grace Memorial Church. An examination of generational differences discovered through the research will then be considered. This will be followed by a discussion regarding whether there are missing generations or age groups in the church. It will conclude with an exploration of the intergenerational and multi-generational nature of the congregation.

### **Description of Participants**

The congregational survey involved 159 participants. Records for attendance at worship indicated that 185 people were present that morning which was an average-size congregation for November. Participants ranged in age from 7 to 91 years. The mean age was 49 and median age was 51. There were nine participants who did not indicate their age. The group consisted of 88 women and 63 men and eight who did not indicate their gender. Among people age 15 to 50 the number of male and female participants was close to equal; however, as age increased beyond 50 the number of male participants decreased slightly.

Participants were asked the length of time they had been attending Grace Memorial. The results ranged from two second-time attenders to an 83 year old woman who had been part of Grace Memorial (and former George Street Baptist Church) for 80 years. Ten people responded that they had attended all their lives. Three of the ten were children. There were five individuals who indicated they had been present at Grace less than one month. All of the five were under the age 30. There were 14 participants who did not respond to this question. The mean length of time respondents had attended the church was 18.71 years. A more useful number for the purpose of this project is the median which was nine years. The median represents the centre of the data, the middle

number of years the participants had attended Grace. Since the mean is the average it is influenced by many of the congregation who had attended the church for many decades. Fifty percent of the participants have attended Grace Memorial for less than nine years (see table 1).

**Table 1: Length of Time Attending Grace Memorial**

Length of Time	# Participants	Valid Percent
2 years or less	36	24.8
More than 2 years; less than 9 years	35	24.2
9 to 34 years	37	25.5
35 to 80 years	37	25.5
Total	145	100.0

Almost 25% of participants had only attended Grace Memorial for two years or less. Another one quarter had been a part of the church for 35 years or more. Only one quarter of the participants had attended the church from 9 to 34 years. The situation that arises when a congregation is comprised of many long-time members and numerous attenders who have only been active for a short period of time is described by Gil Rendle as a bimodal congregation. He says it is a “healthy, but uncomfortable congregation” (Rendle 2002, Kindle Location 153). It is healthy because it is nurturing the older members while drawing in newer people. It can be uncomfortable at times because the “old guard” and the new members sometimes clash. Figure 2 shows how this looks graphically at Grace Memorial.

Long-time participants are very invested in the church. Some of them have been a part of Grace all their lives and are now in their 50s. However, it is not just the senior members who have been around a long time. The youngest long-time attender (over age 25) was only 44 years old and she had been involved all of her life. Also, Grace

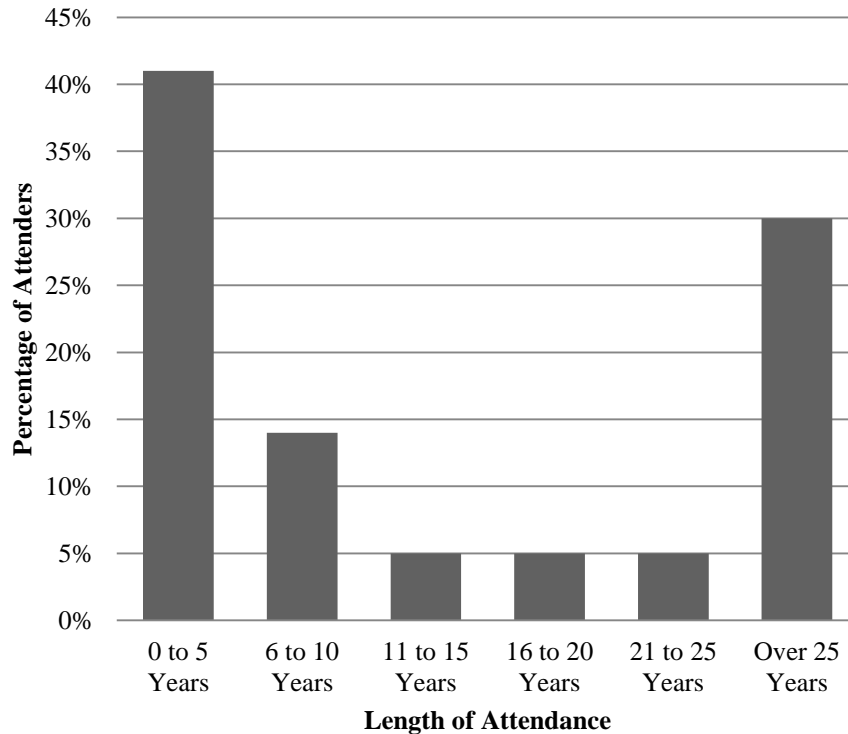


Figure 2. The bimodal nature of attendance at Grace Memorial

Memorial recently has attracted older people because of its more traditional style of worship. As some churches in the city have begun to cater to the younger generations, Grace has benefitted with an influx of people from other congregations who are more traditional in their style of worship. Almost 20% of those who have been a part the congregation for less than nine years are over the age of 50. The congregation has also benefited from the influx of immigrants to the city of Fredericton particularly from Asian countries.

Although the church attracts new people, these new attenders do not always stay with the congregation for a long period of time. People come for a few months or a year and then disappear. It is difficult to discern the reason why. The smaller number of attenders in the middle time span may also be due to some difficulties the church faced about 20

years ago which saw many people leave the church, some to worship elsewhere and some to begin a new church. Unfortunately, there were a number of young families with children and teens who moved on at that time. The result is that there is a big time gap between the half of the congregation who have been at Grace Memorial less than nine years and the one quarter who have been there more than 35 years.

### **Generational Differences**

In order to examine the generational differences, the surveys were grouped by age cohorts for analysis. As there are no standard names or dates assigned to the various generations, the dates chosen for each generation for the purpose of this project are listed in table 2. Since there was only one participant from the GI Generation, this person was included with the Silent generation. The table also shows the number of participants in each generation as well as the valid percentage.

**Table 2: Generational Divisions**

Generation Name	Range of Birth Years	Number of Participants	Valid Percent
GI and Silent	Up to 1945	37	24.7
Boomers	1946-1964	43	28.7
Generation X (GenX)	1965-1982	31	20.7
Millennial	1983-2000	31	20.7
Post-Millennial	2001 to Present	8	5.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Five areas of church life were examined in the congregational survey: worship, education, fellowship, mission, and church governance. The results of this survey and the discussion in the focus groups led to some observations about a number of generational differences. These differences were dealt with topically and include the following four

areas: style of worship; congregational connections; children and youth ministry; and governance and Baptist identity. In the discussion which follows, the “older” generations or focus group refers to the GI/Senior and Boomer cohorts (age greater than 49 at the time of the survey), and the “younger” generations or focus group applies to the GenX, Millennial, and Post-Millennial generations (age 49 and less).

### **Style of Worship**

“The worship team is excellent and the worship songs are amazing and that was a big part of my youth and making me connect a little more with the church; but in my older years I relate more to the older hymns for some reason. I don’t know why.” This comment from a 38-year-old man in some ways summed up the feelings of the seven individuals younger than age 50 who were part of the younger focus group. Contemporary songs are good but so are hymns; band instruments are important, but so is the organ. A 33-year-old man said, “I love the fact that we have a pipe organ.” A second-year male college student continued, “If we had no organ I might be sad but if we had it all the time that might be too much. It’s pretty balanced.” A 69-year-old woman in the older focus group also commented on the church’s music style, “As a new person in a church I appreciate that when we sing a hymn or contemporary song, both groups are joining in.” By both groups she meant those who prefer contemporary music and those who prefer hymns.

The congregational questionnaire backs up the reality that those who attend Grace Memorial like a blended style of worship, although, they lean more to the traditional. I found the results regarding music to be surprising. I had assumed that music was very important to most people in worship and that they would feel more strongly about the

style they liked. Music was generally not ranked high in value for most participants. The only music item with a high means was hymns which ranked in tenth place. Six out of ten items related to music ranked in the bottom ten. Classical music took last place. Adult choir and children and youth choirs ranked thirteenth and fifteenth respectively. The piano was the most popular instrument (ranked sixteenth) followed by organ (ranked nineteenth), worship band (ranked twenty-second) and orchestral instruments (ranked twenty-fourth). The only age that scored orchestral instruments high were the children and young teens. Many of these students play an instrument such as violin, flute or clarinet and are part of an orchestra. They also enjoy sharing their talent with the congregation during a prelude or offertory. See table 3 for the ranking of worship elements by means.

The oldest generation was the group who felt most strongly about music. Both hymns and the organ were valued more highly by the GI/Silent cohort. The means for this generation was 9.51 for hymns and 8.49 for organ compared to means of 6.15 for contemporary songs and 6.39 for worship band. The Millennial generation appeared to be more eclectic in their taste in music and averaged in the sevens for hymns, contemporary songs, new songs and worship band. However, the Millennials also had a mean that was a tiny bit higher for hymns than for contemporary songs and new songs. The Millennials at Grace Memorial can worship with any style of music, but it is not the most important part of worship for them. All the generations on average valued hymns more than any other kind of music, except for the Post-Millennials who liked the idea of new songs. Table 4 contains a comparison of means by generation for music in worship. See appendix D for a full list of means for each the 27 elements of worship for each generation.

**Table 3: Ranking of worship elements by means**

Ranking	Element of worship	Number		Mean
		Valid	Missing	
1	The Lord's Supper	154	5	9.34
2	Sermons that teach the Bible	153	6	9.20
3	Scripture reading	153	6	9.17
4	Participation by all ages	151	8	9.09
5	To feel a sense of family or belonging	153	6	9.05
6	To feel I've experienced God	152	7	8.91
7	Pastoral prayer	156	3	8.88
8	The Lord's Prayer	155	4	8.69
9	Sermons in general	152	7	8.63
10	Hymns	153	6	8.30
11	Children's time with pastor	152	7	8.29
12	Sermons that meet my needs	154	5	8.28
13	Adult choir	154	5	8.13
14	To see people my age	153	6	8.05
15	Children & youth choirs	152	7	7.97
16	Piano	154	5	7.94
17	Unison and/or responsive readings	156	3	7.29
18	A beautiful sanctuary	155	4	7.01
19	Organ	156	3	6.98
20	Personal testimonies	154	5	6.95
21	Contemporary songs	149	10	6.89
22	Worship band	150	9	6.85
23	New songs	154	5	6.62
24	Orchestra instruments	151	8	6.60
25	Interaction during sermons	153	6	6.46
26	Video clips	154	5	6.46
27	Classical music	151	8	5.68

The adult choir as well as youth and children's choirs were considerably more important to the older generations. The adult choir mean went steadily downward from 9.21 for the GI/Silent generation to 6.57 for Post-Millennials. Also, the value placed on youth and children's choirs dropped from the oldest generation to the Millennials, picking up again with the Post-Millennials. The church currently has a small children's choir and a youth/adult hand bell choir. The children and youth involved in these choirs seem to appreciate them.

**Table 4: Generational comparison chart of mean for music in worship**

	GI/Silent	Boomer	GenX	Millennial	Post-Mill
Hymns	9.51	8.19	8.00	7.68	7.29
Adult choir	9.21	8.29	8.03	7.00	6.57
Organ	8.49	7.12	5.94	6.00	6.63
Piano	8.32	8.21	7.61	7.19	9.00
Orchestra instruments	6.41	6.26	6.77	6.42	8.25
Worship band	6.39	7.02	6.42	7.58	6.14
Contemporary songs	6.15	6.93	7.03	7.55	6.67
Classical music	5.28	5.33	6.33	5.35	5.75
New songs	5.17	6.74	7.06	7.10	9.33

In the older focus group several people indicated the intergenerational nature of the adult choir. The choir members range in age from about 28 to 79 years old, with about one quarter of them younger than age 35. In the younger focus group a 19-year-old man stated, “I love choirs and like to participate in them but I think I’m sort of an exception that way for people in my age bracket. Most people my age don’t find choirs to be that hip style of music.” A 33-year-old woman responded to his comment with, “especially when they wear choir gowns.” He was not favourable to the choir gown. This young man has been involved in many school and community musical productions, carrying the lead role or a major role most of the time. He has a marvelous singing voice and enjoys harmonizing when participating with the worship band. He probably is not representative of people his age in this regard. A 27-year-old woman who was a participant in the congregational survey wrote that the adult choir “uniform” needs updating as it is not inviting or appealing to the younger generation. This was only her second time to attend Grace Memorial and I do not think she has returned. Apart from the choir robes, she did indicate a score of nine for the adult choir on the questionnaire. Choirs are generally considered to be old fashioned by younger adults. The traditional nature of some of the



church's younger adults is evident in their choir participation. Except for one young adult in the choir, the rest did not grow up at Grace Memorial. When asked why they liked the choir they responded that they grew up in traditional churches which had choirs and they participated in choir at a young age.

The three highest-ranked worship elements were the Lord's Supper, sermons that teach the Bible and scripture reading (see table 5).

**Table 5: Generational comparison chart of means for top three ranked worship elements**

	GI/Silent	Boomer	GenX	Millennial	Post-Mill
The Lord's Supper	9.76	9.62	9.13	9.06	8.38
Sermons that teach the Bible	9.62	9.38	9.06	8.74	9.00
Scripture reading	9.82	9.41	9.19	8.55	7.14

This is not unusual in a Baptist church as Baptists have always had an extraordinarily high regard for the scripture as the authoritative word of God for faith and practice and the preaching of God's word has always been central to worship. However, a t-test revealed that there was a significant difference in the mean between the older generations and the younger ones in all three categories. I believe this may be due to the spiritual immaturity of the teens and children in the congregation who are not yet at the place in life where they consider the Bible important in their lives. Also, the Bible today does not hold the same authority today as in previous eras. Experiencing God through music or some other medium takes precedence. It is interesting that for the two younger cohorts, Millennials and Post-Millennials, experiencing God was more important to them than the scripture reading. For the GenX, Boomers, and Silent/GI generations scripture reading was more important.

I was a bit surprised that the Lord's Supper was overall the most valued part of worship. At Grace, Communion is only celebrated the first Sunday of every month and it sometimes seems to be just a tag on to the end of the service, rather than central to the worship event. If it is indeed valuable to people, why is it not a part of worship every Sunday and what is it about the experience that people find meaningful?

It was pointed out to me by a man in his 50s that a missing element of worship on the questionnaire was baptism. In his view this was a 10. I suspect this would have rated highly in a Baptist congregation had I thought to put it in the survey. See appendix E for a listing of the 27 elements of worship ranked from the highest mean to the lowest.

### **Congregational Connections**

A question asked in the focus groups was, "How important is it to you to meet with others your age in a small group or fellowship event in the church?" A 19-year-old male commented that "for Sunday mornings I love having members from every generation, but for small groups I enjoy getting together with the same age group." This student currently attends a small group in another church because there is no opportunity for him to connect in a small group with others his age at Grace. However, he has still chosen to worship at Grace Memorial Baptist Church. A phenomenon at Grace recently has been that some senior high or college age youth have split their church attendance between Grace Memorial (to please their parents) and another church that is more attractive to youth and young adults.

Most members of the focus groups agreed that it is important to have a small group Bible study with people close to their own age. "I believe it is very important to be able to touch base and develop relationships with others in the same age group as there is a

common base or foundation already established” wrote a 49-year-old woman. Another woman who is 75 years old agreed with her; “it is important because they have had many of the same life experiences, understand the same things I am experiencing at this age, and have the same faith history in many cases.” Another point of view was from a 71-year-old man who wrote, “‘Old’ people may talk about the past too much. Some is fine but not too much.”

A younger woman, age 26, found small groups to be important to her while a student away from home; “ If I had not found a small group in Europe I may not be attending Grace today.” In the focus group this same woman shared,

I have moved to somewhere else and I have walked in off the street and if I had not been asked by someone closer to my age range to come back, I don’t think I would have because as a university student alone in a new city by myself I wasn’t going to spend my weekend with a 70 year old who isn’t going to want to do the same things you do. Although you can make friends with older people in the church you do have a hard time connecting generationally.

Being able to fellowship and have fun with people one’s own age was seen as important as well. “I like to meet with [the] same age group in a fun activity” wrote a 49-year-old male. As a supervisor at work, a 33-year-old woman feels she must be professional all the time, but “it is nice to relax with my peers and be goofy if I want to” when outside work. Another observation came from a 33-year-old male who wrote, “It is uplifting to fellowship with believers my own age, as most of my work colleagues are not Christian.” The conclusion is that individual groups by age for adults are important and valuable at Grace Memorial.

Some of the younger generations felt it was not important to see people their own age during a worship event: “I like having them there, but it’s not important;” “It’s nice to have people your own age. It’s nice to see people who are older;” “These services aren’t

a place to socialize but to worship and learn;” “Worship is not a social activity with similar age people.” There were some in the younger focus group members who thought it was important to see others their age, “If you don’t see people my age then we are missing an entire group of people to minister to.” This comment from a woman in her 20s indicates the importance of having all generations present in order to have a well-rounded ministry. A missing generation leaves a big gap in the church. A 38-year-old father commented that it was more important for him to see families at the same “age and stage” as his family than people his own age. It was more vital for him that there be other children the age of his own kids so that they would feel welcome.

The younger focus group participants viewed the worship event differently from older people. They indicated that they attended to worship God and socializing was not as vital to them. However, the social aspect of the worship event was more important to the older generations. The reason for this may be that when they were younger the church was more of a social centre than it is today. Mothers who were in the home all day with the children could look forward to meeting others at church events. Today, both parents are working outside the home and juggling a busy family schedule. Church attendance is not a social activity for them or their families. The comments from the older generations regarding how important it is to them to see people their age in the worship event were similar to their answers for small groups, “Very important. I have more in common with people my own age.” However, it is also very important to them to see people of all ages in worship.

The congregational survey revealed that it is more important to the oldest and the youngest generations that people their age are present during worship. The question was

scored the highest by the GI/Silent generation and the children and young teens. Perhaps many of the older people have been a part of Grace Memorial longer and value the friendships they have made in the church. They may remember the times when many of their weekly social activities related to the church and they looked to the church for friendships. This was my experience as a child and teen as there was not the amount of school and community activities for children at that time. With the influx of sports, music and other events for children today, the church is no longer the social hub of the community. However, when children are present the survey indicates that they want to have friends their own age there as well.

A woman in her 50s, who has been attending Grace Memorial for over 40 years, commented on the congregational survey about the divide between the young and the old:

For a long while this church has been dividing the congregation in to age groups and the divide has grown bigger and bigger, so that the youth are not comfortable being with the seniors who have prayed for them since they were born. It is very sad. Seniors do not understand the youth and they have not connected with them and find it difficult to make a connection.

It is interesting to note that this woman sees the seniors in the congregation as faithful intercessors for the children but that the older adults have lost touch with the young. The youth do not realize the allies they have in the seniors as prayer partners. What a blessing it would be to the youth to get to know older adults who are praying for them. Although people may enjoy being with those their own age, church events need to be opportunities where the young and old can mingle and get to know each other. "It is very sad" that the young and old and all of those in between do not have more opportunities to connect with each other.

## Children and Youth Ministry

Another question on the congregational survey asked, “How important are the following activities of our church?” This was a general question that consisted of items related to education, fellowship, church governance and Baptist identity. Unlike the first question which asked them to rate how important the element of worship was to them, this question asked how important these activities were to the church in general. Three of these questions related to young people in the church and included: a good youth group, a good children’s church program, and a quality nursery during worship. These three items all ranked high on the survey (see table 6). They were all considered more important by all generations than adult small group Bible studies, adult fellowship groups or any other types of groups in the church.

**Table 6: Ranking of church activities by means**

Ranking	Activity	N		Mean
		Valid	Missing	
1	A Good Children's Church Program	152	7	9.23
2	A Good Youth Group	152	7	9.20
5	A Quality Nursery During Worship	152	7	8.93
6	Ministry Group	153	6	8.62
8	Adult Outreach Groups	152	7	8.39
9	Small Group Bible Study	151	8	8.33
13	Groups by Interest	151	8	8.17

A good children’s church program ranked the highest overall for the three activities for children and youth with a mean of 9.23 followed very closely by a good youth group at 8.93. These answers show that all generations realize the importance of ministry with children and youth in the church. There was no statistically significant difference between the younger generations and the older ones; however, the GI/Silent generations

consistently gave higher scores to the children and youth activities than the other generations. I believe they realize the importance of reaching the younger generations even though they do not have children or youth to be a part of the groups. A 78-year-old man in a focus group commented, “Old people should recognize the need to involve younger people to guarantee the future of the church.” Whether this translates into changing how ministry is done at Grace Memorial in order to attract younger generations is an important question for the church.

### **Governance and Baptist Identity**

Another divide between the older and younger generations was in the area of church government and identity. The congregational survey asked, “How important are the following activities of our church?” There were three items related to how the church does its business: serving on boards and committees, attending business meetings and following church by-laws. The means for the older generations in all three areas were between eight and nine. There was almost a two point separation (out of a possible 10) between the GI/Silent Generations and the GenXers, who scored lowest on these questions. Attending church business meetings had the lowest mean overall (see table 7).

A t-test showed that there was a significant difference in how the older and younger generations scored these three items. In many cases younger people do not care to deal with the business side of the church as they tend to be more interested in ministry and service. Once at a special church business meeting with only one item on the agenda, a woman in her early 20s walked out of the meeting because the conversation had become about petty things that had nothing to do with what was being voted on. Younger people are easily discouraged when they encounter negativity and narrow-mindedness.

Two other questions relate to our identity as Baptists. The questions asked the participants how important it was to follow Baptist principles and how important it was to belong to the Convention of Atlantic Baptist Churches. Although there was a significant difference between the older generations and the younger ones, most participants recognized and valued the Baptist heritage of the church (see table 7). Given the traditional nature of those who attend Grace Memorial Baptist Church this result was not surprising.

**Table 7: Generational comparison chart of means for church governance and identity**

	GI/Silent	Boomer	GenX	Millennial	Post-Mill
Serving on Boards and Committees	8.83	7.76	7.03	7.45	8.00
Following Church By-Laws	8.91	8.12	7.03	7.32	8.29
Attending Church Business Meetings	8.06	7.64	6.68	6.45	7.43
Belong to the CABC	8.78	8.05	7.00	7.26	7.57
Following Baptist Principles	8.61	8.35	7.35	7.42	7.71

### **Missing Generations in the Church**

“The young adult community at Grace is quite small, and has few steady members.” This statement was made by a university student in answer to a focus group question which asked, “Where do you see a gap in our church family? Are there age groups missing?” The general consensus in both focus groups was that the mid-teens to mid-twenties were missing from our church. Some participants suggested that the parents of this age group were also absent. Their response surprised me. I had thought that the GenX generation was missing. The congregation did not appear to me as having many people between the ages of 35 and 50. A couple in their late 40s had commented to me on a couple of occasions that there was no one their age in the congregation.



In order to see if the age group from 15 to 24 was missing, I first looked at the ages of participants by generations. Table 8 indicates that there is no difference in the number of participants in the Millennial and GenX generations. There were, however, 80 members of the two older generations who filled out the survey and only 70 of the younger ones. Perhaps this is not a big difference but I also suspect there were a few senior adults who did not or were not able to fill out the survey. The Boomers were the largest generation present.

**Table 8: Age of Participants by Generation**

Generation Name	Age at Time of Survey	Number of Participants	Valid Percent
GI and Silent	69 and older	37	24.7
Boomers	50-68	43	28.7
GenX	32-49	31	20.7
Millennial	14-31	31	20.7
Post-Millennial	13 and under	8	5.2
<b>Total</b>		<b>150</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Then the participants were divided into groups by 10-year-age spans beginning with the proposed “missing” age group of 15 to 24 years. Table 9 shows that the results do not indicate that there are fewer in this age group. The number of people in this group encompasses 13% of the participants; the only larger age groups are those 45 to 54 years and 65 to 74 years.

Why have the focus group members identified this age group as missing in our congregation? Perhaps there are or have been more in this age group at one time. About six years ago the church had a large group of college-age students. Although I was not present in the church at that time, I have heard and believe that the large number of 18 to 25 year olds was due to the work of a university student who was the music director at

**Table 9: Age of Participants by 10 Year Age Span**

Age	Number of Participants	Valid Percent
14 and under	8	0.05
15-24	19	0.13
25-34	17	0.11
35-44	14	0.09
45-54	27	0.18
55-64	17	0.11
65-74	32	0.22
75 and older	16	0.11
	150	100.00

the time. Along with her husband, they made a point of connecting with and inviting the participation of this age group. The music director did not play the organ and had many younger people involved in a group called the “contemporary singers” who led contemporary music on Sundays. A 33-year-old woman who was involved in this group and has been very involved in leadership in the church said, “People used to say she wasn’t a proper music leader because she couldn’t play the organ and that she was trying to change the church and that she was bringing it down.” Another focus-group member commented that “six years ago there were more young people in the church. I used to attend a young people’s Bible study group.” When this music director left, so did many of the university-age students. A group of more traditional young adults remained.

Another reason this age group may seem to be missing from the congregation is that high school students and university-age students tend to be inconsistent in attendance. With school, part-time jobs and all the activity in their lives, being present at the church may not take priority. Also they do not always make a commitment to one church but will attend several churches depending on what is happening on Sunday.

One member in her 70s lamented, “A lot of people who grew up in this church are going to church; they’re just going somewhere else.” Another commented that “a lot of

young families left during the split.” Some of these people have dropped out of church and do not attend anywhere. Some have moved to another church. There was a general feeling of sadness in the older focus group that they have seen many of the children, including some of their own, who have grown up at Grace move on to another church in the city for whatever reason. There was some consolation in the fact that Grace Memorial Church had been a part of helping to develop these young people “so that when they do go away they can bless another church.” Perhaps a further study would involve discovering why these children of Grace are now attending another church or no church at all. In several cases it may be due to their spouse wanting to attend another church. I wonder how much of it might be based on the negative impact of the church split some 20 years ago. The teenagers and college students at the time of the split would now have children and youth of their own.

It is interesting to note at this point that the church begun by the people who left Grace (or were asked to leave) has thrived. The worship attendance has grown so much that the service is now held in a school gymnasium. People of all ages attend worship there but it appeared to me when I attended last summer that the majority of them were under the age of 40.

Another focus group question was, “What can the church do to attract and involve younger people without alienating older people?” A 38-year-old father in a focus group commented, “It was the young kids outreach things the church did that drew us to this church.” Rather than the particular style of worship, activities for his children played an important role in his family’s involvement in the church. The same man mentioned

several times the importance of food and fellowship events as well as other more informal community outreach events.

The question of how to attract younger people without alienating older people was difficult for focus group participants to answer. A 19-year-old university student wrote that it was “a question for the ages.” A woman in her 30s commented, “I don’t know if this is even possible. Everything you do is going to upset someone. I think the best attitude is to try and see what happens.” A 60-year-old woman suggested that “a second service is the only thing that can be done for Sundays to attract younger people to the worship. Making our current service modern will alienate the older people who are the supporters financially.”

There seems to be some discouragement in trying to connect generations: “That’s the problem in the church, if we knew how to get younger people we would be doing it...what can we do?” said a 70-year-old woman. She continued to say that once families start activities with kids, especially sports, that a lot of those things take place on Sunday mornings. I believe that her perception may not be correct. One faithful family who attends Grace missed three Sundays this past fall due to sports events for their three daughters but they were present more than they were absent. Another family misses occasionally for music events.

According to research done by Steve McMullin on a study of 16 mainline and Conservative congregations in decline in the US and Canada, Sunday sports does not have a big effect on church attendance. Churches that make the families choose between sports and church attendance will lose the families. However, churches should choose to offer support to families who children are in sports:

Although some children and youth miss worship services because of sports, the congregation is not losing those families. They are not forced to choose, but instead are supported in their effort to navigate a busy Sunday schedule where sports schedules and worship service times may conflict. (McMullin 2013, 58)

I intentionally set up two very similar questions in the congregational survey to see if people might consider what the church would need to do on a Sunday morning in order to grow. The first question was, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how important to *you* are the following Sunday morning service activities?” The participants then responded to the 27 elements of worship discussed previously in this chapter. The second question was very similar but asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how important to *the growth of the church* are the following Sunday morning service activities?” There were a few people who did not fill in both questions, thinking that it was the same question. I also believe some other people did not understand the difference.

There are some statistically significant results discovered from a paired-samples-t-test of the two questions. The items that scored higher included worship band, new songs, video clips, interaction during sermons, personal testimonies, and seeing people their age. Some people assumed these things were important enough to the growth of the church to score them higher, even if they personally did not find the element of worship important to them. Other elements were considered less important to the growth of the church. These included: hymns, adult choir, the Lord’s Prayer and the Lord’s Supper.

I went over the results of the congregational survey at a church meeting for those who were interested (see appendix F ). After sharing the results from a comparison of the two questions, a man in his 60s commented that over the years they had been told that the church needed more contemporary music and less of the traditional in order to grow. He believes that is why the participants marked the question as they did. Congregations have

been told by “experts” what they need to do in order to be relevant and attract younger people. Therefore, participants chose the more contemporary items as those needed in order to grow and the more traditional elements of worship as less important to growth. I find it interesting that the Lord’s Supper, which was ranked the highest as valued in worship, was seen to be less important to the growth of the church.

I believe that the results do however indicate a truth. A 29-year-old man who had only attended the church twice made the following comment on the congregational survey, “To attract a younger generation the music (worship team) needs to update: Newer, more contemporary songs, more upbeat with better volume, more instruments, louder vocals with one true leader.” His description fits the current model for worship bands used by many churches that are reaching young adults. Although contemporary in nature, the worship team at Grace is very conscious of the instruments being too loud and uses a group leadership style.

The older focus group had more discussion on the question of how to attract young adults than the younger focus group. They talked of connecting the generations in order to get the younger people involved. They thought that the youth could help the older generations by giving lessons on how to use their cell phone, the internet or other technological devices. Older people could also be mentors to younger people. “Old people should recognize the need to involve younger people to guarantee the future of the church” wrote a 78-year-old man. This focus group also suggested that youth can minister to seniors, especially those who are ill or shut-in. They could prepare and send cards on special occasions like Easter and birthdays. Another good idea was to have individuals from various generations be specifically invited to participate with one

another. These activities would help to build relationships among generations. “It all has to do with relationships; as you’re doing things you’re building relationships with others. That’s the key—incorporating what takes place in their lives outside the church.”

One man in the older focus group stressed the need to contact younger people. He suggested the church should get in touch with other churches in other communities and ask if they have high school graduates coming to the university in the city in the fall. Then the church should make one-on-one contacts with them. He also suggested the church people should make a list of all the members and adherents who no longer attend and connect with them. I wonder if some of these older adults may be sharing out of a concern for their own children and grandchildren who do not attend church.

It is interesting that none of the younger focus group members suggested anyone from the church should contact them about attending any events in the church or that contacts should be made with other younger adults. Could this be a generational difference? Visitation was always very important to older generations. In my experience I do not see that younger generations have the same concerns or desire to be contacted about church attendance. University students tend to go where their friends are. Some of the members of the younger focus group suggested that working on service projects was a good bonding experience and that the old should teach the young. A 49-year-old man suggested the importance of “mentoring programs but not just ‘one way’ (older to younger).”

### **Intergenerational or Multi-generational**

Grace Memorial is a multi-generational church with people of all ages attending the Sunday service. In general, it was somewhat or very important for the participants of the

focus groups to see others their own age in the congregation. This was discussed earlier in the chapter. Another question for the focus group was, “How important is it to you to see people your age participating in the leadership during the Sunday morning worship event?” The answers were mixed on this question, but most of the answers tended toward all-age participation and leadership. A 41-year-old man wrote, “Leadership in churches depends on talents given from God regardless of ages.” It was not important to him that other people his age be visible in leading during the Sunday morning worship event.

For other participants it was important to see people their own age involved in some form of leadership in the service. A university student wrote that he would feel less connected if leadership were limited to older people. A recent university graduate stated that “not seeing people my age would be discouraging.” A woman in her 30s felt similarly, “It helps me know people my age are valued in the church and that we have an opportunity to serve and put our gifts to use.” This woman who has been very involved in leadership in the church also stated, “I always feel bad when people say I do so many things in the church, but it’s just that the things I do are visible. So many people do so many things that aren’t visible.”

Other people expressed that it was important for all ages to be visible and leading in the worship event. A 49-year-old woman wrote, “I feel it is more important to allow others to grow in their faith through Sunday worship leadership.” A man in his late 30s expressed that it was not that important to see people his own age in leadership, but he did like to see a variety of ages leading and involved in the service. A man in the older focus group in his 70s spoke of how interesting it was “to see younger people reading



scripture and showing initiative.” A good point was raised by a woman in her 30s about involving youth in leadership in order to prepare them for ministry:

I think it is good preparation for younger people to be involved because in a lot of churches I’ve heard that kids are expected to go to Sunday school and their worship service but when they get into high school and college all of a sudden they are expected to become part of the serving in the church and be leaders. How are they supposed to do that if they’ve never had an opportunity to serve when they are younger and interact with all these people?

Although many of the participants of the focus group spoke of how necessary it was to mentor and involve the younger people, one 78-year-old man said that older people need to participate to make them feel that they are “not past being valuable.” This was a wise statement from a man who has been a faithful and strong leader in the church for most of his life. Often the church is tempted to replace the older with the younger, but a true multi-generational church will value the input of all its members, whether old or young. At Grace Memorial Church there are two sisters, ages eight and eleven who read scripture more beautifully than anyone else in the congregation. Their input is valuable as well. On the congregational survey one of the questions asked how important it was to them that there be participation by all ages. This question ranked the fourth highest with a mean of 9.09. To see all ages during worship and to be led by all ages is highly valued at Grace Memorial.

Although multi-generational in nature, is the church actually intergenerational? One of the questions for the focus group pertained to the intergenerational activities that had been held over the past year. The question asked, “Did you participate in any of the following intergenerational events? Why or why not?” There were three intergenerational gatherings. One was a Palm Sunday afternoon fun event where people journeyed through settings from the triumphal entry of Jesus to his resurrection. The second was an

intergenerational Sunday morning worship service. The third was a series of two Wednesday supper events called “Messy Church.” These experiences will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

A university student in the focus group had not attended any of the intergenerational events. As a typical student, he has too many things to do and he does not go out to events from Monday to Thursday. He also understood that “Messy Church” was a young family event. He was not alone in his perception of “Messy Church.” Several people had the idea that it was for families although it was advertised from the pulpit and in the church bulletin as for all ages. The word “family” was used as little as possible in advertising the event and only in the context of “church family.” Perhaps the name was a problem as messy activities are associated with children rather than adults.

Older adults were encouraged to attend the second Messy Church as the oldest person in attendance at the first was 58. A 26-year-old woman wrote, “I don’t know why anything at Messy Church would appeal to a 20 something.” Perhaps she was right but she is a role model to the young people of the church and could have made a big impression on them. How would she know unless she actually attended? A father in his 30s could not attend “due to other kid’s activities” which shows the busyness of the lives of the church family.

The intergenerational worship service was well attended by the focus group members because it was held at the regular time of worship on Sunday. It was also very well received. A multi-generational and multi-cultural choir was the greatest success of the service. The age of the choir members was from four to eighty and there were seven different nationalities involved. A 78-year-old man was impressed enough with the

service to suggest that “this type of event should be carried out at least once a month. It was a great experience and enjoyable.”

The Palm Sunday afternoon and supper event was also well received by those who attended; however, a 26-year-old focus group member stated that she might not have attended had she not been involved in the event. A woman in her late 60s commented that “it was a meaningful experience with good interaction of all ages.” A father in the focus group said, “It was awesome. We still talk about the donkey rides and look at the pictures.” Another father wrote, “I joined the event with my family, particularly for my child, to introduce her to the story of Jesus.” This event was the most intergenerational of all, as people were divided by ages into groups so that each group contained children to older adults. The activities were hands-on so that there was more interaction among the generations.

The comments from the focus group members and the participation at the intergenerational events leads me to believe that people enjoy seeing all ages at church happenings. However, interaction among the generations is limited. There are those who intentionally try to interact with people of other ages on a Sunday morning, as an older man in the focus group wrote, “I try to do this all the time, especially before and after church.” It is more common that most people keep to their own age group. It is unfortunate as I believe there is great value in relationships built of many generations.

### **Conclusion**

The results have shown that there are some generational differences at Grace Memorial Baptist Church. There is some variation in how people worship based on age; however, given the traditional nature of many of the younger people in the church, the

differences are not extreme. People tend to value having others their own age at church events but also want to see people from other generations present and visible as leaders. Children, youth and family ministries are slightly more important to older generations than to the younger ones. Younger generations are not as interested in serving on boards and committees or attending business meetings as older people, especially the GI/Silent generations which rank these areas of value to them.

Although Grace Memorial is a multi-generational congregation, there is a feeling among all ages that we are not reaching senior high and university students or their parents. There also seems to be concern that there is not a lot of contact among different age groups. The next chapter will review some intergenerational events that were planned as part of this thesis project with the hope of building relationships among the generations.

## CHAPTER 5

### PRACTICAL PROJECT

There is a generational divide in most North American Churches. We need to find ways to build understanding and relationships across generations.

—Jason Postma, *Rooted+Radical Blog*

When Rehoboam became king following the death of his father Solomon, he was faced with a choice: follow the guidance of his father’s advisors who were older or listen to the counsel of his younger advisors. He chose the advice of the people from his own generation and Israel was split into two nations (see 2 Chron. 10). John Ortberg writes, “It is striking that even in the Bible, one of the ways that human community becomes disrupted is the generational divide” (Ortberg 2009).

It is important to have people of all ages in the community of faith. However, a church can consist of many generations that never interact with one another. The “generational divide” in churches needs to be bridged by connecting generations and this takes intentionality. One way to connect generations is to provide intergenerational events that are intentionally planned to encourage various age groups to talk and work with one another.

The purpose of this project is to explore what each generation within the church values in the areas of worship, education, fellowship, mission and church governance and then to provide ways to connect the generations through intergenerational worship, teaching, and fun events. The results of the research were discussed in chapter 4. In order to understand one another, people of a particular age cohort need opportunities to interact with people of other cohorts. As relationships are strengthened, bridges can be built across the generational divide or perhaps the gap that separates generations can be

narrowed. When people understand and care for others, the differences that divide become less important.

In the book, *Who Stole My Church*, one of the men named Ernie is concerned about taking a young man he does not know very well to a hockey game. Winn gives him this advice:

The kid needs an old guy like you to make him feel like he's somebody. Ask him all kinds of questions until you find something he's comfortable talking about. Then listen a lot and keep asking more questions. And whenever you can, tell him your story. You've gone through enough stuff in life that there will be something he can connect with. Remember: he needs a father. You're a good father. You can do this. (MacDonald 2007, 206)

Just like Ernie, people in the church need to learn to connect with people of other ages for friendship, for mentoring and in order to understand and help each other. The purpose of intentional intergenerational events is to build similar kinds of connections among the generations.

This chapter will discuss three intergenerational events: an Easter experience called "Journey to Easter," an intergenerational worship service during the regular Sunday morning worship time and a fun and educational mid-week activity known as "Messy Church."

### **Journey to Easter**

"Journey to Easter" was an intentionally intergenerational experience which took place the afternoon of Palm Sunday. The purpose of the event was to connect the various generations in a fun and learning activity. Easter was an ideal time to host such an opportunity because so many important events took place in the life of Jesus during his last week. It is also a holiday time when people in general are more likely to be thinking

about spiritual things and looking for ways to draw closer to God. One 38-year-old man in the focus group shared, “I associate intergenerational events with holidays—Christmas, Easter, and maybe summer. Those are the times of the year that people feel more compelled to be together.”

The schedule for the program was:

4:00-4:15 p.m. Gather in the gym and divide into five small groups

4:15-5:30 p.m. Rotate through locations in 15 minute intervals

5:30-6:15 p.m. Supper

6:15-6:30 p.m. Clean-Up

The participants were divided into small groups consisting of at least one family with children and/or teens, young singles or couples without children, middle-aged singles and couples and some senior adults. Teams were identified by colourful necklaces made from a foam circle. Each team had a different colour so they would know which team they belonged to in case they became separated from their group. It was hoped that there would be sufficient attenders to have five groups of between 10 and 15 participants. Although some groups ended up a bit larger because of late arrivers, most groups had the right number of people in them.

The small groups then went on a journey together to discover the events of Holy Week and Easter. Five stations were set up which explained five separate events: Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, the crucifixion, and the resurrection. Each of the five groups started at one of the stations and moved every 10 minutes to the next station. Unfortunately, every group could not

start at the beginning point (the triumphal entry) because of time constraints. However, this did not seem to affect their understanding or enjoyment of the activities.

## **The Five Stations**

### *The Triumphal Entry*

The location for the triumphal entry was the welcome centre of the church which is a large fellowship room near the main doors. Outside the doors a small petting zoo consisting of a lamb, a goat, a rabbit and three ducks was set up in a small pen. A beautiful donkey was tied outside the pen. If the conditions had been better the whole session would have been held outdoors. However, in New Brunswick the weather is unpredictable in the middle of April and although the temperature was not too cold, there was still a lot of snow on the ground.

The first part of this station consisted of a retelling of the story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey. Palm branches and balloons decorated the meeting space. Then the participants exited to the parking lot where donkey rides were available. Only children braved the donkey rides although the adults gathered around, watched and assisted. There was a lot of interaction about the animals around the petting zoo. Animals and babies always seem to break down barriers and people feel more freedom to communicate with others. This was probably the highlight of the evening for many of the attenders.

### *The Last Supper*

The location for the Last Supper was a church classroom. Two long tables were placed in the room for the participants to sit around. On the table were foods from a Seder



meal similar to what Jesus and his disciples would have participated in. A plate was made up representing the food of the Seder meal.

Each group was welcomed by a host and invited to sit around the table. The host then briefly described the items on the table and what they meant in the Passover celebration. She invited guests to sample some of the items as she explained their meaning. She ended by explaining the institution of the Lord's Supper and the significance for the church today. This was a new experience for many of the adults as well as the children and created conversation among the participants of all ages.

### *The Garden of Gethsemane*

The Garden of Gethsemane was set up in the board room, a room large enough in which to place several artificial trees and plants. The woman who was in charge of the site did a wonderful task of decorating the room to look like a garden. On the floor was a green mat on which to sit, and there were benches for those who were not able to sit on the floor. The participants were met at the door by the gardener.

She invited people into the garden and asked them to sit on the mats on the floor or the garden bench. The gardener began her presentation by showing pictures of the Garden of Gethsemane today with its old gnarled olive trees explaining that some of these trees may have been alive when Jesus was there. She talked about how Jesus came there to pray on occasion. On this night he was troubled over upcoming events. She talked about prayer and how important it is to our lives just as it was for Jesus at this difficult time. She then passed out sunflower seeds and an envelope to hold them, which each family decorated with stickers and markers. The gardener encouraged the participants to plant

the sunflower seeds in their gardens at home and as they watched them grow it would be a reminder for them to pray.

### *The Crucifixion*

The setting for the Crucifixion was the sanctuary platform on which a large cross stood. This turned out to be a poor location as some senior adults could not climb the stairs to the platform or sit on the floor. Thus some participants sat in the front pew and became observers rather than participants. The room was also too large and there were many ways that people in the pews could disengage from what was happening. The children and parents and some able-bodied individuals sat on the floor.

The cross contained a sign on which was written, “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews” in Latin, Hebrew and Greek. The leader talked about the crucifixion and raised the question regarding what crime Jesus had committed. The participants were then given the opportunity to practice writing the words from the cross in one of the three languages on a cedar shingle to take home with them as a reminder of what happened to Jesus.

### *The Resurrection*

The setting for the Resurrection was the family centre, a mid-size room with a small stage. One half of the stage was made into a tomb for Easter. Inside the tomb lay the grave clothes of Jesus. There were tables and chairs set up for the participants as they were making a small craft at this site.

The leader greeted the participants with an excited, “He is risen!” She then led them to look in the empty tomb to see that it was empty except for the folded grave clothes of Jesus. The people were then asked to sit at a table, given a piece of clay and other

materials from which to make a small clay tomb. This was probably the most interactive site as everyone played with their clay together. The red terra cotta clay left the hands a bit messy, but everyone seemed to enjoy working with the clay. One father jokingly told me later that it took a couple of days to get the red off his children's hands.

### **A Shared Meal**

Supper was an important part of the intergenerational experience. It was a time for everyone to gather together, talk with new friends and enjoy one another. The meal was a simple one. It consisted of pita bread with meat fillings, cheese and vegetables. A cake in the shape of a cross was served for dessert. The 75 participants appeared to enjoy the experience and following the meal everyone helped with clean up. It was exciting to see the small children working with senior adults carrying dishes to the kitchen and putting away the chairs. Somehow it also seemed to make the task easier with all ages pitching in to help.

### **Evaluation**

Overall, the "Journey to Easter" event went very well and the comments were positive. In the small groups there were opportunities for more interaction than there would have been in a large group setting. I had hoped that older people without children would have taken more initiative to help the parents with their children. In future events there will need to be more intentionality in making sure this happens. This could be done by including information in the instructions at the beginning of the event on how each group can work together as a family by stressing the importance of older people helping those younger as well as the younger assisting the older. There was one family with three

young girls who would have benefitted from a “grandparent” helper. This may have occurred, but I did not see it. Also, there were a few seniors who needed to use the elevator to move from the basement to the main level. Younger people could have assisted them. There was a woman who was not able to do much with her hands due to a stroke. A younger person could have assisted her with the activities so she could have participated more instead of just being a spectator.

Another concern occurred because of inadequate information in the promotion. The time of the event was listed as from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Some people thought it was a drop-in event because Grace Memorial has held other events in which people could come at any time and visit the stations. This caused a problem because at four o'clock only about half of the participants had arrived. It was difficult to divide up groups. As people arrived, they were invited to join a group and continue the journey but they missed participating in some of the stations. In future events the starting time will have to be clearly indicated.

One of the difficulties with planning an intergenerational event is that the activities need to be simple and creative enough to keep the children's interest. Older people are hesitant to appear childish by doing what they consider to be activities for children. For example, no adults were interested in riding the donkey and few of the adults would taste the Seder foods. The adults did participate in making a tomb out of clay. I believe this was because of the leader. She is a very creative young woman who had grown up in the church and had a good relationship with most of the older people present at the event. Her enthusiasm encouraged others to participate. When adults try something they usually enjoy it when they can get past the feeling silly part.

Another concern was that some of the leaders tended to focus more on the children, especially one where the children were seated on the floor. As I said earlier, this caused some of the participants to become spectators in the group. It is good to focus on the kids but encouraging adults to participate is also necessary. In future events the leaders will need to be more aware of the location and activities so that all ages will be engaged. If an activity appears to be only for children, adults will quickly disengage from it. If the event had been planned for adults only it would have been very different, losing many of the creative aspects of the programming. If it had involved only children or only teens, the event would have contained different activities. To plan something that involves all ages is difficult, but the results are worth it.

I believe that part of the success of the event was that it was held on a Sunday afternoon during the holy week of Easter. The congregation is more open to special events during holidays. Another important part of the program was that it involved a shared meal. It was a prepared meal and the participants did not have to pay for it unless they wanted to make a contribution. The importance of eating together as a church family cannot be overemphasized. At one of the focus groups, the father of a young family kept stressing the important of meals to draw people together.

Despite some minor difficulties the event succeeded in drawing the generations together. During the supper meal, people were conversing with others they might not normally talk to. It was exciting to watch individuals doing activities they might not normal consider doing. Similar events will be held in the future probably during the big celebrations in the church like Christmas and Easter. This is an important type of

experience because it draws different age groups together in fun but meaningful activities in small groups where more interaction is possible.

### **Intergenerational Worship Service**

The second intergenerational event was a Sunday morning worship time. The purpose of the all-age worship service was to provide an opportunity for the whole church to share together in worship using participants from all generations and activities that were of interest to and beneficial to all ages. The question for this type of service is, “How can we design music, tell Bible stories and do prayers to engage all ages?” The challenge is to keep the children involved without losing the adults and to provide nourishment for the adults without boring the children.

The theme for the service was “God So Loved the World.” This was part of a five-week series of messages on John chapter three. This week’s service was based on John 3:16-18. The music, songs, readings and testimonies were all designed around this theme.

The order of worship follows:

Sunday, November 16, 2014  
Intergenerational Service

Prelude

Call to Worship Psalm 118:24

Songs of Praise & Worship

“Today is the Day”

“Your Grace is Enough”

“Faithful One”

Prayer

Greet the Family

Scripture John 3:16-18 (by a family)

Testimony “How I Know God Loves Me” (a senior woman)

Congregational Song “The Lord Loves Me”

Presentation of His tithes and Our Offerings

Offertory

Hymn # 512/513 “My Saviour’s Love/O How He Loves You and Me”

Ministry of Music “Love in Any Language” (all-age choir/multi-cultural choir)  
Dedication of the Shoe Boxes  
Prayer (5 Participants)  
Testimony “How I Know God Loves Me” (a senior man)  
Hymn # 579 “Jesus Loves Me”  
Message “God So Loved the World” (Pastor Marilyn)  
Hymn # 211 “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus”  
Benediction  
Postlude

The congregational singing for the service consisted of a blending of contemporary and traditional forms of music. The praise band opened the service with three songs that were more contemporary in style. Two of the songs were chosen because they had been part of Vacation Bible School programs and were familiar to most of the children in the congregation. Some youth were added to the team leading the singing to give the band a more intergenerational flavour. The youngest was 12 years old. The oldest member was a man in his 60s who played the acoustic guitar. There were also members of the band in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. Throughout the service there were older hymns and a chorus from the 1980s that were played on the organ and piano.

An all-age, multi-cultural choir was formed to sing during the service. Although the entire congregation was invited to participate in this choir, special invitations were sent to families with children as well as international families. One soloist was chosen to sing the verses of the song, “Love in Any Language.” The rest of the choir sang the chorus. It was planned this way so that only one practice would be needed. This practice happened following the morning service on the week preceding. The response to this choir’s ministry was phenomenal. People were still talking about it six months later. I believe that was due to both the intergenerational and multi-cultural nature of the choir. The choir members ranged from age four to 78.

A family of four read the scripture from John 3:16-18 in a reader's theatre style. The three verses were divided into short phrases and the family members read the part they were assigned. Sometimes they all read a part in unison. See appendix G for the full reading. The children were age five and eight and the parents in their 30s. Although the five-year-old did not read, she was present with the family on the platform.

Another part of the service involved testimonies by two senior adults in their 70s. They were invited to speak on the topic, "How I know God loves me." They were asked to share for about two minutes and use words and language that a small child could understand. Both of these testimonies were distinctive as they each shared how they had come to faith and how God had shown his love to them during their lifetime.

The pastoral prayer time involved five people of several different ages. They were each asked to pray about a specific topic relevant to their age group. Those praying lined up near a microphone and prayed one after another. The pastor began the prayer time. A 12-year-old girl then prayed for the schools, teachers and students. This was followed by a mother who prayed for the families in our church and the ministry the church has to families. A senior adult in her 80s prayed for the sick and shut-in. The prayer ended with the leader of our Chinese ministry praying for the internationals in our church and community. Many people commented that this was a meaningful time of prayer for them.

The message was a children's story titled "God So Loved the World." With the use of visuals (see appendix H), the congregation was also involved in the message. The children came to the front of the sanctuary in order to participate in the story. They sat in the front pew and had a table nearby which contained a long string of licorice from which to form a necklace and several coloured lifesavers that were wrapped.



The content of the message was the telling of God's story of salvation at a level the children could understand. The licorice and lifesavers were used as a visual aid and activity for the children to keep them involved. The projection screen was blank initially and the children were invited to hold the licorice in their hands. The second slide was blank except for the word "God." They were told that in the beginning there was nothing except God (Gen. 1:1) and darkness covered the deep waters. But the creator God had a design and he said, "Let there be light" and there was light. A yellow screen flashed the words "let there be light." The children were then asked to take a yellow lifesaver and put it on their licorice string to remind them of how God created light in the darkness. The message then described how God created everything in the world and placed a man and woman in a beautiful garden. They were told of the special relationship God had with Adam and Eve and how he would walk in the garden with them. They learned about God's one rule for them and how they broke that rule and disobeyed God. A slide on the projection screen then showed God and people separated by sin. The story continued with the expulsion from the garden.

God's plan for his people was then expressed through the scripture verse John 3:16, "God so loved the world" he made a way for his creation to know him. The children were then asked to take the red life saver and put it on their string to remind them that God loves them. The projection screen showed a big red heart. The sacrifice of Jesus and his death on the cross were then explained as a big red cross appeared on the screen. They were then shown how it is necessary to believe in Jesus to have our sins forgiven. John 3:16 was quoted several times during this explanation.

The message continued to communicate to the congregation that when people believe in Jesus their sins are forgiven and they are washed clean. The children were then asked to place the mint lifesaver on their licorice string and a plain screen was projected. A grassy, green screen and a green lifesaver placed on the licorice string were the reminders used to encourage them to grow in their faith when they believed in Jesus. The final screen was a yellow one with the words “eternal life” written on it. The children were asked to place the last yellow lifesaver on their licorice string to remind them that we will live forever with Jesus in a beautiful place where there is no sin.

The verse John 3:16 was read from the projection screen by the whole congregation. Everyone was encouraged to read it a second time and to fill in the blanks with their name: “For God so loved \_\_\_\_\_ that he gave his one and only Son, that if \_\_\_\_\_ believes in him, \_\_\_\_\_ shall not perish but have eternal life.” A closing unison prayer was read by everyone, inviting them to ask for forgiveness for the wrong things they have done, to believe in Jesus and to follow him.

The licorice and lifesaver necklaces were then tied around the children’s necks and they returned to their parents. The service closed with the singing of the great hymn, “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus” which expressed in powerful words God’s love for us.

Following the service one woman commented to me that she believed that was one of the clearest presentation of the gospel to children she had ever seen. My hope for that message was that it was also a clear message to the adults in the congregation who struggle with understanding their faith or explaining what they believe. There were also some international people present in the service for whom the simple language would

have been beneficial. I believe a simple message using the language of children occasionally can be helpful in a church for both new and long-time members of any age.

The overall feedback from the intergenerational worship service was very positive. The intergenerational/multi-cultural choir was so successful that we planned a multi-cultural choir for Pentecost Sunday. A choir of more than 40 people from children to seniors sang the song “Amazing Grace.” The first verse was sung by everyone in English. This was followed by verses in Korean, Mandarin and Filipino sung by the speakers of those languages. The congregation was invited to join in the singing of the final verse in English. I believe these types of intentional intergenerational activities as a part of a regular worship service can be very beneficial in making the congregation more aware of the people of all ages and cultures in our midst.

I made a point of asking a few seniors whom I knew well if they missed anything that was not included in the intergenerational service. I was thinking specifically of the sermon. Not one of them said they missed the sermon or anything else. In my experience in Christian education ministry through the years, sometimes when a special service was planned that involved children and youth, such as a Sunday school concert or youth-led service, there would be some people who would take the opportunity to go somewhere else that Sunday or stay at home. I did not sense this at Grace Memorial. Perhaps the difference is that the service involved all ages instead of being designated as a service by the youth or by a children’s group. I believe that most people enjoy the change in format on occasion. However, if it was done too often it may not be appreciated as much.

Six months following this intergenerational service, on Mother’s Day, another intergenerational service took place and it was well received. One of the things missing

from the November service was an intentional opportunity for different ages to interact. The Mother's Day service included a segment called "Congregational Connecting." Each person was asked to find individuals at least 20 years older or younger and share the answer to the question, "What do you like about your mother?" It was difficult to encourage folks to get up out of the pew and move to another location in the church to find a partner, but most people in the congregation took the opportunity to participate. Another intergenerational service is planned for Valentine's Day, February 14, 2016 on the theme of loving God and others. I think that an intergenerational service once or twice a year will work well. However, I also believe that there may be occasions where an intergenerational choir, scripture reading, prayer or activity can be scheduled as part of a regular Sunday worship service.

### **Messy Church**

Messy Church is a program that is supported, resourced and enabled by the "Bible Reading Fellowship," an organization that came out of the Anglican Church in the UK. According to the [www.messychurch.org.uk](http://www.messychurch.org.uk) website it is a way of "being church" for families involving fun activities. Some families who may not feel comfortable attending worship on Sunday morning may feel at home in this kind of informal setting. It is an internationally known program used around the world to help people encounter Jesus as Lord and Saviour. It is a Christ-centred program, for all ages, and is based on creativity, hospitality and celebration. I first discovered the idea by doing an internet search on intergenerational church programs and decided to try it at Grace Memorial Baptist Church.

The purpose of the program was to host an early evening weekday event and meal that would connect all generations in a fun, educational way. The ministry was set up as a once-a-month event on the fourth Wednesday of September, October and November. The November event was later cancelled because of conflicts with Christmas events (participation in the city Christmas parade and an early advent program). Messy Church was advertised in the church bulletin and during the Sunday morning worship for a couple of weeks prior to the event. People of all ages were encouraged to attend. It was advertised as “a place for people at all stages of their faith journey and of any age—children, teens and adults—that involves creativity, celebration and hospitality.”

The schedule for Messy Church was:

- 4:45 pm    Snack food, coffee/tea & juice
- Informal Craft and Game Activities
- Large Group Mixer
- 5:25 pm    Songs & Devotional
- 5:45 pm    Supper
- 6:15 pm    Clean-Up

It was expected that supper would be finished and everything cleaned up by 6:30 pm so that children could get home early for bedtime. The first part was more informal and people could join in an activity when they arrived.

The Family Centre was set up with large tables around the outside of the room on which to do the craft activities. Although the crafts were simple, it was hoped they would be of interest to older people as well as children. There was a leader at each craft table to help with the craft and to relate it to the theme for the evening. The games also took place

in this room or one close by. There were also small square tables set up in the middle of the room for people who did not want to do a craft or game. On the tables were puzzles, word searches and mazes that were also based in the theme for the evening.

As the people arrived they were greeted and asked to fill out a name tag for themselves and their children. They were offered snacks and drinks which were placed near the activities. They were then shown the options for the informal time of learning and told they could participate in the crafts or games, or they could chat at the café tables.

These informal activities lasted about 30 minutes. Following this was a “mixer” game where people were given questions to ask another person who was much older or younger than they were. The purpose of this activity was to get people to connect with those of other generations by asking and answering simple questions. The group then gathered together in a semi-circle for a couple of lively songs on video followed by a devotional thought. A prepared meal in the gym was the final activity.

The theme of the September Messy Church was “Jesus is the vine; we are the branches.” The snack at the beginning consisted of grapes, crackers and cheese. Grape juice was available to drink. The activities all focused on grapes and vines. A bracelet was made from green twine and purple beads. The adults and children all enjoyed this activity and some made several types of bracelets. There was grape painting where grapes were dipped in purple paint and pressed on to paper to make bunches of grapes. A game of skill involved picking grapes by plucking small purple pompoms from a mess of vines without dropping them. The more active children had a great time playing “crack the vine” where they would all join hands and run around the gym in a circle. The leader would stop quickly and see if everyone stayed attached to “the vine.” In all these

activities, the leaders related the activity to how important it is for the grapes to stay attached to the vine in order to grow.

The participants then gathered for singing and a devotional. A greeting song was shown by video that asked people to shake a friend's hand, scratch a friend's back and slap a friend's knee. This action song helped the people mingle with others in a fun way. After another lively video song, the pastor led a devotional on the theme of prayer—the importance of staying connected to and abiding with God. At the end he gave the participants a fruit-shaped piece of paper and asked them to write a short prayer concerning what they wanted to say to or ask of God. He then invited them to attach the prayer to a tree using a paper clip. Supper together finished off the evening.

About 50 people attended the first Messy Church. They were mostly families with elementary-age children or young teens. The only young adults who came were there as leaders of the activities. I was the only one over the age of 50. A couple in their 40s showed up for a brief period of time just to check out what was going on. Over half of the families who participated in the event were from the English language class. It was good to have them at the event, but it made interaction more difficult because there was also a language barrier to overcome. Although not as successful as an intergenerational event, it was a good opportunity for the families of our church to connect with international families outside of the church family. The result of the first Messy Church was favourable; it just was not successful as an intergenerational event.

Messy Church in October focussed on “Jesus is the light of the world.” The room was decorated with various kinds of light and the main lights were lowered some. Several activities related to light were planned. One craft opportunity involved painting “stained

glass” ornaments that let the light shine through. Although it was an inexpensive plastic “stained glass,” the adults enjoyed this craft as much as the children. In another craft activity, participants created a candle holder out of a baby food jar, tissue paper and “modge podge” glue. A transparent sticker that said “Jesus is the light” was also attached to the candle holder so the light of the candle would shine through and highlight the words. There was a science-based activity to create a rainbow from a prism and light. An overhead projector was set up in a room without windows so that the participants could make shadow puppets from the light of a projector.

The devotional included making a “Christian jack-o'-lantern.” As I gave information about how much God loves everyone, our artist cut hearts for eyes in a pumpkin. When I explained about the cross that Jesus died on and why he died, a nose in the shape of a cross was added to the pumpkin. The mouth was carved in the shape of a fish as I described that we are to follow Jesus as his fishermen friends did. A light was placed inside the pumpkin and the lights were turned off allowing the light of Jesus to shine through the images of hearts, a cross and a fish. The evening ended with a supper for all the participants. Those who made a “Jesus is the light” candle lit it and placed it on their tables as a reminder of the theme for the event.

Only 40 people participated in the October event. Despite encouraging older people to attend, they did not come. Most of the international families returned and a new international family came which was encouraging. However, fewer of our own church families were present for the second Messy Church. The activities went well and those in attendance appeared to enjoy themselves.



Neither of the Messy Church events brought the results I had hoped for as an intergenerational experience. I think the event failed to draw more people because it was an extra event that was added to an already busy church schedule. Although it was only once a month, it was still another evening out. I have learned that adding another program does not always bring good results. Instead I now believe it is more beneficial to take an opportunity that is already on the calendar and occasionally change it to an intergenerational activity.

For example, the adult fellowship group planned a family Christmas carol sing and dessert party as their December meeting. Several families did attend, attracted by the holiday theme. Although it was a well-attended and a well-done event there was no opportunity for generations to interact except during the informal refreshment time which was late in the evening and families with children had to leave. The participants sat in a semi-circle in several rows, sang Christmas carols and listened to certain individuals talk about Christmas in their culture. It also was a bit long for young children. The idea was a good one, but a less-packed program would have made for more interaction among the generations

It was difficult to decide on a time to hold Messy Church. If it was scheduled too early in the afternoon, some people would not finish work before it began. If it began too late, it would be difficult for parents to get children to bed on time. It would also make supper late unless the schedule was changed. However, if the supper was early, people might not have stayed for the program. Another difficulty was that families with several children often have every evening filled with an activity for one or more of their children. Some comments I heard from older people included that they had something else going

on that evening—a regular Wednesday night event. The name may also have been confusing to some of the older people as well. If another event were planned for the future, I believe I would change the name, perhaps to something like “Informal Church” or “Active Church.”

Messy Church was very strategic in another area. It turned out to be more of a family event than an intergenerational one. At the age of 57 years, I was the oldest participant. There were a couple of people in their 50s who assisted at the October event. The next oldest was the pastor and his wife and another couple who were in their 40s. Only three teenagers came, mostly because their parents were helping. The majority of the people who attended were from the international community. Messy Church was advertised at the English language classes held on Tuesday morning. More than 60% of the people who attended Messy Church came from this group, most of them of eastern European descent. Most of these families had been in Canada less than a year or two. The parents were interested in finding English activities for their children to help them learn the language and Canadian culture. This type of meeting allowed the mothers to attend with their children.

Although Messy Church failed to have much success drawing many generations together in a fun, learning event, the experiment did prove to be successful as an outreach to families in the international community. The interest by the families in the English language class was sufficient to try it again, but this time geared to internationals. Two more Messy Church events were planned for the winter but they both had to be cancelled because of snow storms. There have been no more Messy Church events since that time either as an intergenerational event or as an outreach to the international community. I do

not believe the program served well as an intergenerational event in the context of Grace Memorial Church.

### **Conclusion**

The church needs to create understanding and relationships among the generations. In an attempt to accomplish this at Grace Memorial Church several intergenerational events were organized. The hope was that as people worshiped, learned and fellowshiped with those of different ages they would begin to understand each generation's uniqueness. Three intergenerational experiences were offered at Grace as a part of the thesis project.

The most successful and interactive intergenerational event was the Journey to Easter. People were divided into groups so that there were children and adults of all ages and stages of life in each unit. The small size of each group made conversations easier and better for working on the activities. The special season of Easter also encouraged more people to attend. This type of event is worth repeating as it did draw people of all ages together.

The intergenerational worship service was successful in that it involved participants of all ages worshipping together on a Sunday morning. However, the nature of a worship service limits the amount of interaction possible among different generations. People are sitting in rows of pews and movement is restricted. Also, worshipers have been programmed from a young age to sit still and listen, not move around and talk. Ways of building in opportunities for communication still need to be discovered and attempted.

The third intergenerational experience was Messy Church. This program was not successful as an intergenerational event. I believe this may have been because it was another program added to an already busy schedule. Older people seemed to have no

interest in attending. Some families were just too busy to become involved in another church program.

All of these events went well and were enjoyable to those in attendance. They accomplished some interaction among people of all ages. However, there is still work to be done to move Grace Memorial Church from a multi-generational congregation to an intergenerational one.

## **CONCLUSION**

After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel (Judg. 2:10).

Passing on the faith from one generation to the next involves interaction among the various generations as the older members teach and equip the younger ones and the older people are challenged and encouraged by the youth. It has been said that the church is just one generation away from extinction. If young people do not find a positive experience within the church family, they are likely to wander away from the faith or the church of their youth. Young people need to be introduced to Jesus and to become a part of the church. This can be difficult as the ideas of one age group clash with those of another.

The general purpose of this project has been to connect different generations; to find ways to get the various age groups communicating with one another. The project began with a congregational survey during a Sunday morning service to discover what people value, followed by two focus groups. Several intergenerational events were planned to allow all ages to worship, learn and fellowship together.

### **Summary**

The research began with a review of relevant literature in order to gain an understanding of the various generations today, the events that formed their thinking and how they each relate to the church and spiritual matters. In most churches today there are five, if not six, active generations. In order to bring the generations together the church will need to understand the differences that divide them and provide opportunities for all

ages to connect. One way to assist different age groups to communicate with one another is to organize intentional intergenerational events for worship, learning and service as well as for fun and fellowship.

The literature revealed that each generation has its own preferences in all areas of life. However, everyone in a generation cannot be put in the same box; not everyone will hold to the same beliefs and ideals. This is especially true in the church as people who found faith in a traditional church as a child may appreciate the traditional more despite belonging to a generation that is more contemporary. The results of this study indicate that this is true at Grace Memorial. The younger adults who attend regularly like the traditional along with a blending of contemporary.

The second chapter examined a Biblical and theological base for connecting the generations. God revealed himself to Moses as the God of generations: of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The promise was passed on through the offspring of each of these patriarchs of faith. As the people of God settled in the Promised Land, they failed to pass on the faith to the next generation, caught in the cycle of sin, repentance and restoration. For each generation there was a responsibility to teach the young and pass on the faith. The family was very important in Israel as all ages made the trek to Jerusalem for the religious festivals. Paul uses the family as an image for the church, calling the believers brothers and sisters and the church the household of God.

Intergenerationality in the Bible may be best described through the family model. Although our society is different today and families are more spread out across the world, the church has the opportunity to be a family that connects all generations. In Bible times the generation gap did not exist to the extent that it does today so the way various ages

interact today will be different from Bible times. However, the Bible does give a base for building an intergenerational church where all ages not only participate but interact with each other.

The research portion of the project attempted to discover what the different generations within the congregation of Grace Memorial Baptist Church valued in the areas of worship, education, fellowship, mission and church governance. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of research were used. The first instrument of research used was a quantitative survey of the congregation during a Sunday morning worship event. This survey asked participants to rate on a scale of one to ten how much they valued specific elements of worship and other areas of church life. The qualitative portion of the project involved two focus group discussions, one with people under the age of 50 and the other with people over 50.

The results of the research were considered in chapter 4. Some generational differences were discovered although they were not as obvious as I expected them to be. Style of music was found to be more important to the older generations, especially the hymns and choirs. Younger generations were more eclectic in their tastes in music rating all types of music about the same. The highest-ranked elements were scripture reading, the sermon and the Lord's Supper. All ages in the congregational survey considered children and youth ministries important. However, older people in the congregation rated these higher than younger people giving the impression that they realize the importance of passing on the faith to the younger generations. In the older focus group there was discussion about the need to attract younger people for "the future of the church." They

considered the question of how to attract younger people to the church but none of the comments involved change.

Younger people at Grace Memorial were less likely to consider business meetings and serving on boards and committees as important. One of the discoveries from the literature review was that Millennials are inclined to move faster than the governing process of the church. They are more apt to let others take care of the business. There are, however, several young adults who now serve in various positions at Grace Memorial. A restructuring this past year has changed the board and committee structure and a number of people under 40 have stepped up to take leadership responsibility.

Several intentional intergenerational events took place as a part of the practical project. An Easter program guided participants from one station to other, each location centering on an event of the last week of Jesus' life and his resurrection. Groups were formed which were comprised of a variety of generations. The second event was an intergenerational service on a Sunday morning which attempted to use all age groups in some form of leadership and to provide worship that would be of interest and benefit to all ages. In retrospect, it did not accomplish any real interaction among the generations, but worship events in general do not tend to provide opportunities for interaction. Nevertheless, it was a worthwhile experience for all ages and will be continued once or twice a year. A weekday, intergenerational event happened twice on a Wednesday evening. Messy Church is a program for all ages based on creativity, hospitality and celebration. The event did not accomplish the goals of becoming more intergenerational because it did not draw in many people over the age of 40. It also did not attract many families from the church.



## **Implications for Grace Memorial Church**

The project revealed several facts about Grace Memorial Baptist Church. The research indicates that the people who attend the church value and appreciate the traditional nature of the ministry of the church. The church is traditional in the sense that the organ is central in worship, the choir is important and hymns are the most valued type of music overall for most age groups. The look of the sanctuary is also traditional with several stained glass windows and rows of straight pews. This indicates that Grace has a “niche” ministry. The people who attend do so because they enjoy the blend of traditional and contemporary. The church will attract people of all ages who feel the same way. However, is that good enough for the congregation at Grace? Since most young adults are not traditional, the membership needs to consider how it can change to be more relevant to younger people and the unchurched. Most people who do not belong to a church understand very little of the traditions of the church or the complicated, archaic language of many hymns.

Unfortunately, the church will not attract the majority of younger adults. The literature review showed that young adults in general seem to prefer a more contemporary style of worship. The congregational survey showed that young adults who have only attended a few times preferred a more contemporary style of worship. “Welcome Cards” that have been passed in on Sundays from younger visitors to the church have indicated the same thing. From discussions with congregational leaders, I discovered that about six years ago there were more young adults, especially college students, attending Grace when contemporary music was more prevalent. A college and

career luncheon after the morning worship drew about 20 individuals for food and fellowship.

Are the people of Grace Memorial content to be a niche congregation with fewer young adults in attendance, or are they willing to change in order to attract younger people? What would motivate university students to want to attend worship on a Sunday morning? There are not a lot of people of college age who attend the church and the style of worship would not attract them. Understanding what young adults are looking for in a church is an area for future research. It may be helpful to interview students who attend other churches about what they value in worship and to find out what attracts them to other churches. Another possibility would be for the congregation and leaders to attempt to connect with students at the university or to find young adults who may lean toward a more traditional form of worship and invite them to worship at Grace.

Connection to other people is important at Grace. However, people tend to seek friendships with others of similar ages or stages of life. Grandparents connect with other grandparents; families with children associate with families who have children about the same age; and young adults hang out with other young adults. The church leadership needs to consider ways to help older people get to know young families, or think about how university students might connect with middle-aged adults. Social activities would be a good opportunity for this to happen, i.e. at the coffee time following the worship service, at church family meal or during a congregational games night. Mingling often does not just happen but requires some intentional prompting.

There was some success helping different ages to connect at the intentional intergenerational events. The Sunday morning intergenerational worship service worked

well because it took place at a time that people were normally at the church. The participation by all ages in the program was appreciated by the congregation. The only difficulty with the format is that there is little opportunity for age groups to interact. As the Sunday worship event is when most people attend Grace, some more work needs to be done on finding opportunities for all ages to intermingle.

The Journey to Easter event was successful in allowing the generations to interact with each other in a fun, learning setting. The Messy Church program was not as successful, partly because it was another program that was tagged on to an already busy church schedule. Also, it could be that people did not feel a desire to connect with those of other ages, but were content with friends their own age. Another reason given for not attending was they felt that there was nothing about the event that interested them. Adults do not want to have to do something they consider childish and I believe many people thought the program was for children and families. Some more intentional intergenerational events during the year that are part of the church's regular programming may be helpful in getting those of different generations to connect. One of the outcomes of this research is my continued desire to connect the generations in meaningful ways by the use of intergenerational activities.

Another interesting result of the research was the discovery of the bimodal nature of Grace Memorial. It was determined from the congregational survey that 50% of the congregation have attended for less than nine years and 25% have been coming to Grace for two years or less. Another 25% have been a part of Grace for more than 35 years. This may result in an "old guard" and "new guard" conflict. It is important that the leadership of the church is aware of this potential clash. I was recently told by a staff

member at the church that during the tenure of the student music director (six or more years ago), one of the “old guard” asked the student if she were trying to ruin the church. She saw the ministry of the student as one that was destroying her church when actually it was building the young adult ministry of the church.

It is difficult for long-time attenders to connect with those who have been coming to Grace for only a few years. Long-time attenders are heard to comment that there are so many people in the church that they do not know. Many of the new people coming to the church are also part of the immigrant community which for some people makes communication and connection even more difficult.

At the beginning of the project I had a concern about a generation gap among the different ages at Grace Memorial. This was not supported by the research undertaken. It revealed that the differences between what the various age groups value in this particular congregation is not as great as the literature suggests regarding young adults in general. What the participants agree on is greater than those things which might divide generations. The attempt toward intergenerational connection during the project was a beginning, but it was not particularly successful in getting the various age groups to know one another. The events opened up a conversation, but continued opportunities for intergenerational dialogue are needed to strengthen the bond among all generations to truly be the family of God.

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Appendix A

**Research Project Questionnaire**

*“Understanding Generational Differences and Connecting Generations  
at Grace Memorial Baptist Church.”*

Researcher: Marilyn McCormick

You are being invited to participate in a research project. As part of the requirement for the Doctor of Ministry program at Acadia Divinity College I have to carry out a research project. I have chosen as my topic “Understanding Generational Differences and Connecting Generations at Grace Memorial Baptist Church.” You are under no obligation to participate.

By filling out the questionnaire you are indicating your consent to participate. If you wish your child under age 18 to participate in his or her own survey, please attach the red dot available from the ushers to the child’s questionnaire. By doing so, you indicate that you are giving your child permission to participate.

*Personal Information:* It is important to the research that you include the following information:

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Sex: Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been attending Grace Memorial Baptist Church? (Check one)

\_\_\_\_\_ Under 1 year                      \_\_\_\_\_ 6 to 10 years                      \_\_\_\_\_ 16 to 20 years  
\_\_\_\_\_ 1 to 5 years                              \_\_\_\_\_ 11 to 15 years                      \_\_\_\_\_ More than 20 years

*The first two questions deal with the same information but from different perspectives. The first question asks how important these activities are to you. Please give your honest answer. The second asks how important they are to the growth of the church. Your answers may or may not be the same.*

**1. How important to YOU are the following Sunday morning service activities?**  
 (Check only 1 per line)

	<b>Not important at all</b>	<b>Somewhat important</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Extremely important</b>
Organ Music					
Piano Music					
Worship Band (guitar, drums, keyboard)					
Orchestra Instruments (flute, violin, etc)					
Classical Music					
Hymns					
Contemporary Songs					
New Songs					
Adult Choir					
Children or Youth Choirs					
Scripture Reading					
Unison and/or Responsive Readings					
A 30-Minute Sermon					
Interaction During Sermons					
Video Clips					
Sermons that Meet My Needs/Interests					
Sermons that Teach the Bible					
Personal Testimonies					
Children's Time With Pastor					
Pastoral Prayer					
The Lord's Supper					
To Feel I've Experienced God					
A Feel a Sense of Family or Belonging					
Participation by all Ages					
To See People My Age					
A Beautiful Sanctuary					

2. How important to the growth of the **CHURCH** are the following Sunday morning service activities? (Check only 1 per line)

	Not important at all	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
Organ Music					
Piano Music					
Worship Band (guitar, drums, keyboard)					
Orchestra Instruments (flute, violin, etc)					
Classical Music					
Hymns					
Contemporary Songs					
New Songs					
Adult Choir					
Children or Youth Choirs					
Scripture Reading					
Unison and/or Responsive Readings					
A 30-Minute Sermon					
Interaction During Sermons					
Video Clips					
Sermons that Meet My Needs/Interests					
Sermons that Teach the Bible					
Personal Testimonies					
Children's Time With Pastor					
Pastoral Prayer					
The Lord's Supper					
To Feel I've Experienced God					
To Feel a Sense of Family or Belonging					
Participation by all Ages					
To See People My Age					
A Beautiful Sanctuary					

3. How important are the following activities of our church?

	Not important at all	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
Small Group Bible Study					
Groups by Age (seniors, youth, children, young adults, etc)					
Groups by Interest (Parenting, choir, missions)					
Ministry Groups (Divorce Care/Grief Share)					
Adult Outreach Groups (English Second Language)					
A Quality Nursery during worship					
A Good Children's Church Program					
A Good Youth Group					
Church Fellowship Meals or Events					
Events Involving all Generations					
Giving to the Food Bank					
Serving in the Community					
Giving to Overseas Missions					
Serving on Boards and Committees					
Following the Church By-Laws					
Attending Church Business Meetings					

4. Any comments you may have:

## Appendix B

### Sermon Outline: “Connecting the Next Generation”

#### A. INTRODUCTION

Pass out congregational survey to be filled out.

#### B. BIBLE

##### 1. Background

- a. King David wanted to build a temple.

*I had it in my heart to build a house for the Name of the Lord my God. (1 Chronicles 22:7)*

- b. The Lord God did not want David to build a temple because he was a man of war.

*You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight. (1 Chronicles 22:8)*

*You will have a son who will be a man of peace and rest, and I will give him rest from all his enemies on every side...He is the one who will build a house for my Name. (1 Chronicles 22:9,10)*

- c. King David wanted to offer help to Solomon

*My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it. (1 Chronicles 22:5)*

- d. Who was Solomon?
  - i. David and Bathsheba’s son
  - ii. Just a young man at this time, between 12 and 20.
  - iii. David had already appointed him to be king after him.



## 2. Preparations for the Temple

- a. King David did all he could to make sure his son would build a grand temple. He purchased the land where it was to be built, he collected money and building material for the temple, he appointed the workers...he basically did everything except put it together.

*I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them.<sup>15</sup> You have many workers: stonecutters, masons and carpenters, as well as those skilled in every kind of work<sup>16</sup> in gold and silver, bronze and iron—craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the Lord be with you.*  
(1 Chronicles 22:14-16)

- b. King David ordered the leaders of Israel to help Solomon accomplish this task.

*Then David ordered all the leaders of Israel to help his son Solomon.*  
(1 Chronicles 22:17)

*<sup>18</sup> He said to them, “Is not the Lord your God with you? And has he not granted you rest on every side? For he has given the inhabitants of the land into my hands, and the land is subject to the Lord and to his people.<sup>19</sup> Now devote your heart and soul to seeking the Lord your God. Begin to build the sanctuary of the Lord God, so that you may bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord and the sacred articles belonging to God into the temple that will be built for the Name of the Lord.”* (1 Chronicles 22:18-19)

## 3. David’s Purpose vs Solomon’s Purpose

David’s role as king was to bring peace to the nation of Israel which he did by being a great warrior. David did not expect his son to carry on his purpose; he did not expect Solomon to be like him—a great warrior.

Solomon had a different purpose for his generation. The nation was very different under Solomon. It was a time of peace and prosperity, but of overindulgence and oppression of the people.

*Now when David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.*  
(Acts 13:36)

#### 4. Generations:

Each generation today has something different to offer—each generation has a different purpose. For example

- a. GI: Builders > 1924 (90 and above today)
  - i. They were the builders of society, businesses, institutions, service organizations, schools and churches. E.g. who built this church building? Would they have from this generation...over 87 years of age today?
  - ii. They were traditional, loyal, diligent volunteers, and hard workers
  - iii. They were the leaders of the powerhouse churches of the 50s and 60s, Those were the days, big Sunday schools and full churches. It was by the sweat of this generation!
  - iv. They built up churches for future generations.
  
- b. Silent Generation -- those in their 70s and 80s years of age
  - i. They are silent reformers, humanitarians, peacemakers, who believed in honesty and morality.
  - ii. They were the champions of human rights (Martin Luther King).
  - iii. They worked within the church structure to make the church a better place, always faithful.
  
- c. Boomers – those in 50s and 60s today
  - i. They boomed into society and the church wanting to bring change, wanted things their own way; were anti-authoritarian
  - ii. They made a break from the traditions of the church of their childhood, brought in rock bands, left denominational organizations, worshiped in warehouses and multi-purpose rooms, and challenged authority.
  - iii. They brought changes to the church that grate on the older generations in the church
  
- d. Generation X – those from about 33-50
  - i. They tend to be seen as apathetic, cynical and distrustful of institutions
  - ii. Authenticity is very important to this generation. They are easily disillusioned.
  - iii. They are a missing generation in the church. In times of conflict they won't stay and fight but will leave, maybe try another church or simply give up on the church

- iv. When conflict happened in the church did they leave?
- e. Millennial Generation -- those from in their teens, twenties and early 30s
  - i. This is a hopeful, optimistic, and confident generation
  - ii. They have great hopes, grand visions, are caring and want to help the poor and needy.
  - iii. Aren't interested in organized religion but want communities of faith
  - iv. They are going to be another "great generation" like the GI Generation.

Each generation must live out the purpose of its generation without hindering the other generations. The older generations need to pass on first their wisdom and knowledge to the younger generations but allow them to live out their calling in the way unique to their generation.

Who better to reach the fed up with church Gen Xers than people from their generation? This means that this generation needs to be a part of the leadership of the church to make changes to attract the Gen Xers to be a part of our fellowship.

The same goes with the Millennials. It will take people in their 20s as leaders in our midst to reach out to young people today. It will mean that we boomers and silents need to listen to them and make necessary adjustments to how we do things in the church to make it attractive to young adults.

We can't expect the next generation to do what we did in our generation.

The younger generations must listen to the stories of the older generations to learn from the stories of what God has done.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

Like David, we must fulfill God's purpose for our generation and then help the next generation to fulfill its purposes.

John F. Kennedy in his 1961 presidential inauguration speech said:

*"Let the word go forth from this time and place...to friend and foe alike...that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans..."*

Let's pass on the torch to subsequent generations that the light of Christ may go forth from this church to each new generation.

## Appendix C

### **Questions for Focus Groups**

How important to you is it to see people your age in the congregation during the Sunday morning worship event? Why?

How important is it to you to see people your age participating in the leadership during the Sunday morning worship event? Why?

Where do you see a generation gap in our church family?

How can the church show appreciation for the wisdom and traditions of the senior members of the congregation without losing the younger people who attend?

What can the church do to attract and involve younger people without alienating older people?

How can the church involve children and youth in the ministries of the church?

When and where in this church have you had contact with people from other generations (different ages)?

What type of events could be planned that would involve and interest people of all ages?

Appendix D

**Worship Elements Generational Comparison Chart**

<b>Means</b>	<b>GI/Silent</b>	<b>Boomer</b>	<b>GenX</b>	<b>Millennial</b>	<b>Post-Mill</b>
Scripture Reading	9.82	9.41	9.19	8.55	7.14
The Lord's Supper	9.76	9.62	9.13	9.06	8.38
Sermons that Teach the Bible	9.62	9.38	9.06	8.74	9.00
Hymns	9.51	8.19	8.00	7.68	7.29
Pastoral Prayer	9.51	9.12	8.87	8.13	8.50
Sermon	9.26	8.76	8.47	8.67	5.71
Adult Choir	9.21	8.29	8.03	7.00	6.57
The Lord's Prayer	9.20	8.55	8.42	8.52	9.00
To Feel a Sense of Family or Belonging	9.18	9.40	8.71	9.03	8.43
To Feel I've Experienced God	9.15	9.10	8.29	9.03	8.57
Participation by all Ages	9.09	9.33	8.94	8.97	9.71
Children's Time with Pastor	9.06	8.48	8.39	7.29	8.29
Children & Youth Choirs	8.76	8.14	7.58	7.10	8.83
To See People My Age	8.50	7.95	7.35	8.10	8.71
Organ	8.49	7.12	5.94	6.00	6.63
Piano	8.32	8.21	7.61	7.19	9.00
Sermons that Meet My Needs	8.27	8.45	8.45	8.16	7.38
Unison and/or Responsive Readings	8.11	7.29	7.03	6.84	6.88
A Beautiful Sanctuary	7.65	6.88	6.55	6.32	8.50
Personal Testimonies	6.53	6.81	7.40	7.26	7.63
Orchestra Instruments	6.41	6.26	6.77	6.42	8.25
Worship Band	6.39	7.02	6.42	7.58	6.14
Interaction During Sermons	6.18	6.21	6.61	6.65	7.71
Contemporary Songs	6.15	6.93	7.03	7.55	6.67
Video Clips	5.53	6.43	6.90	6.32	9.13
Classical Music	5.28	5.33	6.33	5.35	5.75
New Songs	5.17	6.74	7.06	7.10	9.33

### Other Church Activities Generational Comparison Chart

Means	GI/Silent	Boomer	GenX	Millennial	Post-Mill
A Good Youth Group	9.63	9.37	9.00	9.10	8.14
A Good Children's Church Program	9.60	9.28	9.06	9.03	8.57
A Quality Nursery During Worship	9.42	9.16	8.74	8.61	7.50
Events Involving all Generations	9.28	9.37	8.94	8.26	8.29
Ministry Group	8.97	8.53	8.77	8.61	6.71
Serving in the Community	8.97	9.16	8.87	8.71	8.71
Following Church By-Laws	8.91	8.12	7.03	7.32	8.29
Groups By Age	8.88	8.07	8.10	7.84	8.57
Giving to the Food Bank	8.86	8.30	8.65	8.23	8.50
Serving on Boards and Committees	8.83	7.76	7.03	7.45	8.00
Belong to the CABC	8.78	8.05	7.00	7.26	7.57
Small Group Bible Study	8.74	8.31	8.35	8.10	7.29
Following Baptist Principles	8.61	8.35	7.35	7.42	7.71
Groups by Interest	8.57	8.26	8.03	8.06	7.14
Adult Outreach Groups	8.56	8.40	8.29	8.55	7.00
Church Fellowship Meals or Events	8.44	8.53	8.00	7.84	8.29
Giving to Overseas Mission	8.44	8.12	8.29	8.32	8.29
Attending Church Business Meetings	8.06	7.64	6.68	6.45	7.43

Appendix E

**Worship Event Mean from Highest to Lowest**

		N		Mean
		Valid	Missing	
1	The Lord's Supper	154	5	9.34
2	Sermons that Teach the Bible	153	6	9.20
3	Scripture Reading	153	6	9.17
4	Participation by all Ages	151	8	9.09
5	To Feel a Sense of Family or Belonging	153	6	9.05
6	To Feel I've Experienced God	152	7	8.91
7	Pastoral Prayer	156	3	8.88
8	The Lord's Prayer	155	4	8.69
9	Sermon	152	7	8.63
10	Hymns	153	6	8.30
11	Children's Time with Pastor	152	7	8.29
12	Sermons that Meet My Needs	154	5	8.28
13	Adult Choir	154	5	8.13
14	To See People My Age	153	6	8.05
15	Children & Youth Choirs	152	7	7.97
16	Piano	154	5	7.94
17	Unison and/or Responsive Readings	156	3	7.29
18	A Beautiful Sanctuary	155	4	7.01
19	Organ	156	3	6.98
20	Personal Testimonies	154	5	6.95
21	Contemporary Songs	149	10	6.89
22	Worship Band	150	9	6.85
23	New Songs	154	5	6.62
24	Orchestra Instruments	151	8	6.60
25	Interaction During Sermons	153	6	6.46
26	Video Clips	154	5	6.46
27	Classical Music	151	8	5.68




**Education/Fellowship/Governance Mean from Highest to Lowest**

Rank		N		Mean
		Valid	Missing	
1	A Good Children's Church Program	152	7	9.23
2	A Good Youth Group	152	7	9.20
3	Events Involving all Generations	152	7	8.97
4	Serving in the Community	154	5	8.95
5	A Quality Nursery During Worship	152	7	8.93
6	Ministry Group	153	6	8.62
7	Giving to the Food Bank	153	6	8.52
8	Adult Outreach Groups	152	7	8.39
9	Small Group Bible Study	151	8	8.33
10	Groups By Age	151	8	8.27
11	Giving to Overseas Mission	153	6	8.26
12	Church Fellowship Meals or Events	153	6	8.24
13	Groups by Interest	151	8	8.17
14	Following Baptist Principles	153	6	7.99
15	Following Church By-Laws	151	8	7.91
16	Belong to the CABC	153	6	7.77
17	Serving on Boards and Committees	149	10	7.76
18	Attending Church Business Meetings	151	8	7.25

Appendix F

Church Presentation (Results of Congregational Questionnaire)

Slide 1




**Congregational Survey Report**

**Understanding Generational Differences  
and Connecting Generations at  
Grace Memorial Baptist Church**

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Slide 2




**159 Survey Participants**

1. On a scale of 1 (not important at all) to 10 (essential), how important to YOU are the following Sunday morning service activities?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important to the growth of the CHURCH are the following Sunday morning service activities?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10, how important are the following activities of the church?

**Introduction**

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Slide 3



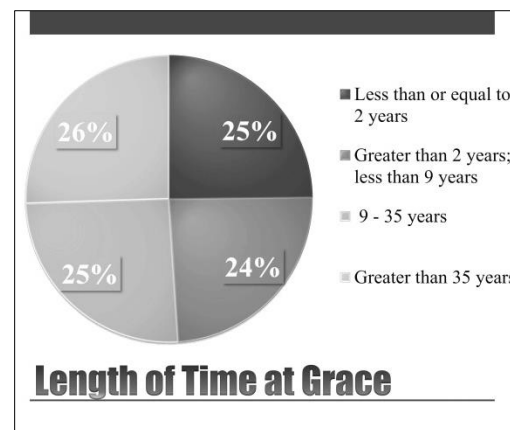
**• Length of Time at Grace**

- First time attender to 80 years
- 14 with no length of time given


**Introduction**

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Slide 4



Slide 5



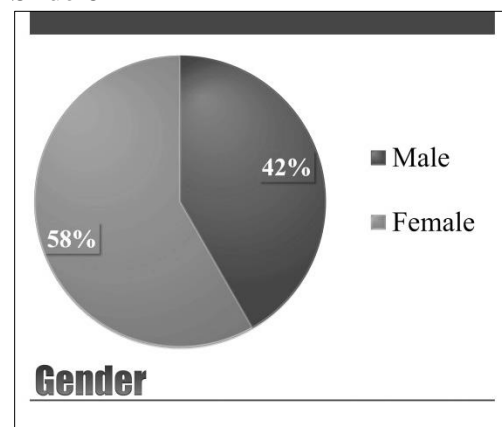
**• Gender**

- 88 Females
- 63 Males
- 8 who did not answer the question

**Introduction**

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Slide 6



## Slide 7

- **Age Range**
  - From 7 to 91 years (9 with no age given)
  - Median (Middle) Age – 51
  - Mean (Average) Age – 48.75
  - Mode (Most Common) Age – 70

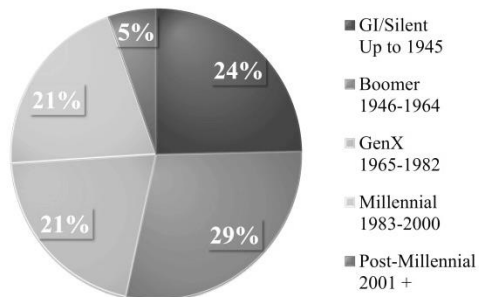
### **Introduction**

## Slide 8

- **GI/Silent – Up to 1945**  
Age 70 and over
- **Boomers – 1946-1964**  
Age 51-69
- **GenX – 1965-1982**  
Age 33-50
- **Millennials – 1983-2000**  
Age 15-32
- **Post-Millennials – 2001-Present**  
Age 14 and under

### **Generations**

## Slide 9



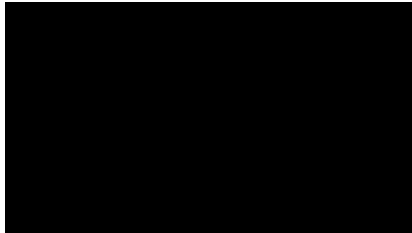
### **Generations at Grace**

Appendix G

**Scripture Reading for Intergenerational Service, November 16, 2014**

- Reader 1.** John chapter 3
- Reader 2.** Verses 16 to 18
- Reader 3.** From *The Message* Bible translation
- Reader 1.** This is how much God loved the world
- Reader 2.** He gave his Son
- Reader 3.** His one and only Son
- All** And this is why
- Reader 1.** So that no one need be destroyed
- Reader 2.** No one
- Reader 3.** No one need be destroyed
- Reader 2.** But by believing in him
- Reader 3.** Anyone can have a whole and lasting life.
- Reader 1.** God didn't go to all the trouble of sending his Son merely to point an accusing finger telling the world how bad it was.
- Reader 3.** He came to help,
- Reader 2.** He came to put the world right again
- Reader 1.** Anyone who trusts in him
- Reader 3.** is acquitted
- Reader 1.** Anyone who refuses to trust him
- Reader 3.** has long since been under the death sentence without knowing it
- All** And why?
- Reader 2.** Because of that person's failure to believe
- Reader 3.** to believe in the Son of God when introduced to him
- Reader 1.** This is how much God loved the world.
- All** "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

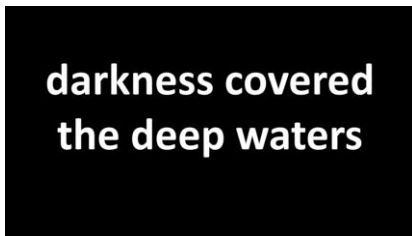
**Children’s Sermon Outline for Intergenerational Service November 16, 2014**



(**Blank screen**) – Ask children to take the licorice



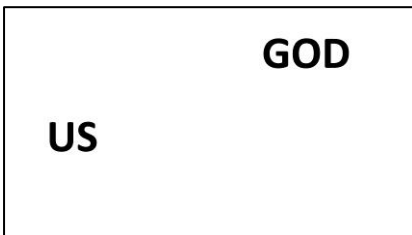
At first there was nothing but **God**—all was darkness. Genesis 1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty



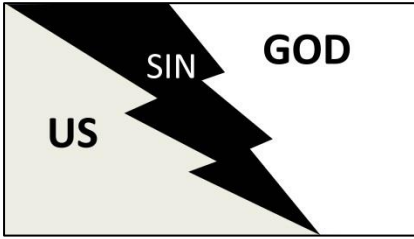
**darkness** covered the deep waters.” But the creator God had a design and he said:



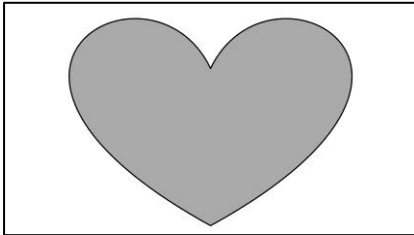
“**Let there be light**” and there was light. (Take yellow life saver and put it on the licorice string). And God continued to create: the day and night; the sky and earth; the oceans and land with all its plants; the sun, moon and stars; fish and birds and all the animals; and finally his most magnificent creation...



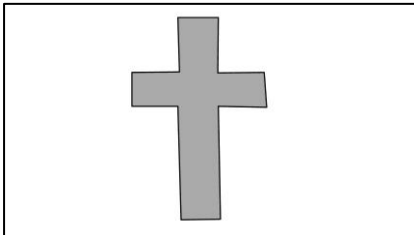
**People** – a man and a woman who he placed in a beautiful garden. And God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve and they had everything they wanted. God only gave them one rule: don’t eat from the tree in the middle of the garden, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He told them if they ate from that tree they would die. And you know what they did? They ate from the tree God told them not to eat from. They disobeyed God. This was a very sad time for God.



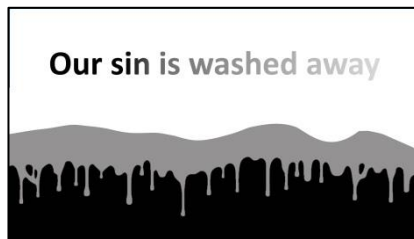
Their **SIN**, the bad thing they had done, separated them from God. He had to kick them out of the beautiful garden and God could no longer walk on earth with them. They could no longer reach God. But God didn't give up



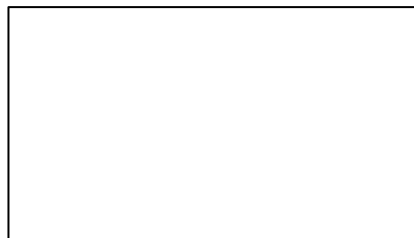
Because he **loved** them..."God so loved the world" – the red life saver reminds us that God loves us all very much. (Put the red life saver on the licorice). He wants us to be close to him, but because of that wall of sin, we can't be close to him. So God made another plan...



He sent his son **Jesus** – John 3:16 say "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son". God loves the world so much. Jesus was perfect; he never did anything wrong. So God sent Jesus to take the punishment for our sins. When Jesus died on the cross he took our punishment



Jesus **blood** was shed and our sin, the bad things we have done were all washed away when he died (place another red life saver on licorice). But John 3:16 says that we need to believe in Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish." (Perish: to not be able to be close to God). We need to believe that God sent Jesus to take our punishment. Then we are free from the darkness of not being able to be close to God.



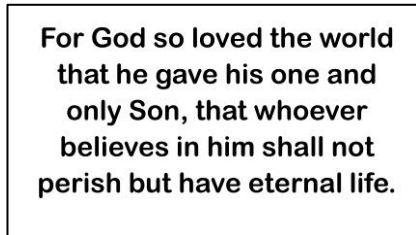
And when we believe in Jesus we are all washed clean and we can be close to God. The fresh, clean mint reminds us that God has forgiven all our sins and God looks at us as if we have never done anything wrong (place the mint on the licorice). If we believe in Jesus and love him, we will want to be close to him and get to know him better. We can do this by reading the Bible and talking to him in prayer.



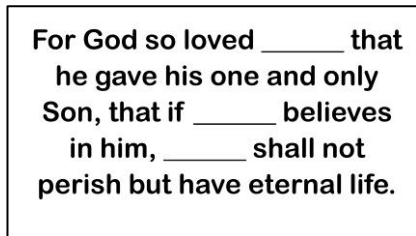
Take the green lifesaver (place it on the licorice) to remind you that just like grass and trees grow, we need to grow to know our friend Jesus better.



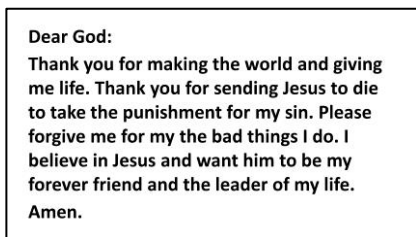
The last lifesaver is another yellow one (place it on the licorice), because if we believe in Jesus, John 3:16 says that we will have “eternal life.” That means forever and ever. Our bodies will die someday, but we will live with Jesus forever. The Bible tells us heaven is a bright place because of the light of Jesus.



Everyone read together John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”



Everyone read together John 3:16 and place their name in the blank.



Everyone read together the prayer...