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EMERGING ADULTS AND THE CHURCH:
VIBRANT MINISTRY IN THE WESLEYAN-HOLINESS TRADITION

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Abstract

Emerging Adults and the Church:
Vibrant Ministry in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition

Emerging adults are leaving the church shortly after high school graduation. They no longer see the church as relevant and so they do not stay engaged. Older generations fear that as the church contextualizes to be relevant to emerging adults, it will compromise doctrinal integrity. The church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition is uniquely positioned to bring generations together in vibrant transformational ministry that inspires, disciples, and develops emerging adults as leaders and at the same time maintain doctrinal integrity. This dissertation will explore Wesleyan-Holiness roots and the phase of life called “emerging adulthood”. It will highlight what churches are doing that are successful at emerging adult retention and will connect the heart of emerging adults with the heart of Wesleyanism. The dissertation will culminate with a seven-week small group curriculum to be utilized to bring generations together for building relationships, to bring about understanding, to provide mentorship and enable generations to work together in mission accomplishment.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements		i
Abstract		ii
Table of Contents		iii
Vignette #1		v
Vignette #2		vii
Chapter 1	Emerging Adults are Leaving	1
	<i>Introduction</i>	
	<i>Emerging Adulthood Defined and Described</i>	
	<i>Why Emerging Adults Leave the Church</i>	
	<i>The Problem</i>	
	<i>Thesis</i>	
	<i>Doctrinal Beliefs</i>	
	<i>Relevance to Emerging Adults</i>	
	<i>Conclusion</i>	
Chapter 2	Research and Literature Review	20
	<i>Introduction</i>	
	<i>Understanding Emerging Adulthood</i>	
	<i>Models That Increase Emerging Adult Retention</i>	
	<i>Bridging the Generation Gap</i>	
	<i>Wesleyanism and Emerging Adulthood</i>	
	<i>Conclusion</i>	
Chapter 3	Wesleyan-Holiness and Emerging Adults' Worldview	39
	<i>Introduction</i>	
	<i>The Wesleyan-Holiness Worldview</i>	
	<i>The Great Reversal</i>	
	<i>The Emerging Adult Worldview</i>	
	<i>Theological Deconstructionism</i>	
	<i>Postmodernism</i>	
	<i>Moralistic Therapeutic Deism</i>	
	<i>Church Mission</i>	
	<i>Church Culture</i>	
	<i>Conclusion</i>	
Chapter 4	A Wesleyan-Holiness Model That Works	58
	<i>Introduction</i>	
	<i>Sense of Belonging in Emerging Adults</i>	
	<i>Relationship with Christ, Scripture and Baptism</i>	

	<i>Family Relationships</i>	
	<i>Introduction To Grace Space: listening for understanding</i>	
	<i>Atmosphere of Grace Space: listening for understanding</i>	
	<i>Collaborative Leadership</i>	
	<i>Intergenerational Relationships</i>	
	<i>Serving Together</i>	
	<i>Conclusion</i>	
Chapter 5	Grace Space: listening for understanding	84
	<i>In Summary</i>	
	<i>Artifact Summary</i>	
	<i>Grace Space Leadership and Guidelines</i>	
	<i>Implications on Future Plans</i>	
	<i>Conclusion</i>	
Bibliography		93
Appendix A – Table of Contents		98
Appendix B – Introduction, Instructions, Prayer Guide, and Guidelines		100
Appendix C - Weekly Schedule and Menu		106
Appendix D - Conversation Cards		121
Appendix E - Tips, Guidelines, and Objectives		152

Vignette #1

The year 2020 has been described by many as being unprecedented mostly due to COVID-19, racial tension, violence, and a divisive presidential election. Unfortunately, this social unrest has crept into the sacred halls of the church and has left broken relationships, anger, departure of longtime members, and discouraged pastors in its wake. Gaithersburg Church of the Nazarene (GCN) experienced divisiveness like never before. Divisive not only in those ways already mentioned but also between emerging adults (ages 18-30) and older adults, especially the millennial and the boomer generations.

It began in the spring of 2019 when Steve who heads up a ministry called “Little Lights” in Washington, D.C. was invited to present a class at GCN called “Race Literacy 101”. It was an excellent and informative class and well-attended by all ages. Steve also preached on Sunday morning on the topic of systemic racism and touched on a nerve that angered several older, white adults. When George Floyd died in May of 2020 the issue of systemic racism was addressed from the pulpit and several older white couples left GCN due to what they described as a liberal agenda on the part of the pastors.

The issue of systemic racism continued to be addressed at GCN with a Zoom class on “Systems Theory” taught by a 30-year-old woman. Both boomers and millennials attended the three-week class. When words such as “illegitimate” were used by boomers to refer to a child born out of wedlock, millennials bristled. When phrases such as “white fragility” were used by millennials, boomers stiffened. At the end of the three-week class, the leader felt like it was a complete failure. A dinner meeting of the millennials who attended the class was planned to talk through their feelings. A week later the boomers who attended the class were invited to a meeting to talk through their feelings as well. It was a time of everyone talking and listening to

bring about understanding and healing. The millennials believe that if the church truly is the body of Christ, then it must address social issues. The boomers believe the church should focus on the gospel and personal evangelism and not on social issues, but most of those who are heavily involved in ministry that brings about social transformation are boomers.

Can the church, bridge this generational divide that threatens to keep us ineffective in reaching the next generation, ministering to our boomers, and addressing social justice issues in our community? Is it possible to bring different generations together in a nonthreatening environment such as around the dinner table to experience community and to engage in a guided conversation that promotes unity, understanding and direction for the church?

Vignette #2

A short-term mission team from Gaithersburg Church of the Nazarene traveled to Copan Ruinas, Honduras in July of 2018. The team of 20 was made up of high school and college students, middle-aged adults, and retirees. They traveled to Honduras to run medical clinics, visit orphanages, mix and pour concrete, install commercial fans, and to put a roof on a church. The first day on the job Tom (a retiree) and Andrew (a freshman in college) headed out to install gigantic fans in the orphanage close to where the team was staying. That evening the team met around the dinner table to eat, have devotions, and to share highlights of the day. When it was their turn to talk, Tom and Andrew shared with the team how grateful they were that God put them together to install those fans. Tom had the tools and the expertise while Andrew had the strength to lift the fans and place them. They could not have done the job without working together. Every generation has something to offer and when brought together in submission to the Lord then the Kingdom of God is advanced.

CHAPTER 1

EMERGING ADULTS ARE LEAVING

Introduction

The church is God's creation, built by Jesus Christ on the faith of a very ordinary disciple. Jesus says to Peter in Matthew 16:18 "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."¹ Jesus continues to build his church on the faith of his followers and has entrusted it with his mission. Christopher Wright describes this mission by saying, "It is not so much the case that God has a mission for his church in the world, as that God has a church for his mission in the world. Mission was not made for the church; the church was made for mission—God's mission."² Scripture describes the mission of Jesus as both proclamation of the gospel and meeting the needs of the suffering and oppressed. Jesus revealed his mission in Luke 4:18-19 when he read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah where it is written, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."³ The church is uniquely created, positioned, and called to be on God's mission which is to redeem a lost world for Christ, and to relieve suffering, poverty, and injustice in the world.

The church is also called and given the responsibility to diligently teach and preach sound doctrine. Paul charges Timothy with this vital task when he says, "I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great

¹ Matthew 16:18, NIV.

² Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2010), Location 142, Kindle.

³ Luke 4:18-19, NIV.

patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”⁴ This Scripture directs Timothy’s preaching right back to the importance of sound doctrine that comes from the Bible and provides a firm foundation on which to build the church.

God is an intergenerational God and refers to himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Exodus 3:15 says, “God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ ‘This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.’”⁵ God made a covenant with Abraham and God intends for that covenant relationship to be embodied throughout the generations of his chosen people.

The church family is intergenerational. It is made up of all ages and stages of life beginning in the infant nursery and ending in the senior-adult Sunday school class. The Apostle Paul addresses the unique makeup of the church in 1 Corinthians 12:12 when he says, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body”⁶ The body of Christ, the church, is not complete if there is a segment of the population missing. Experience and research have shown that the emerging adults are missing from the body of Christ. Steve Parr and Tom Crites say, “In America today, only about 16% of all churches across every denomination have a significant young adult population.”⁷ Emerging

⁴ 2 Timothy 4:1b-3, NIV.

⁵ Exodus 3:15, NIV.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 12:12, NIV.

⁷ Steve R. Parr and Tom Crites, *Why They Stay: Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Investments That Keep Children and Teens Connected to the Church for a Lifetime* (Bloomington, IN: WestBowPress, 2015), Loc. 342, Kindle.

adults are not staying connected to the church even if they were active in their church as teenagers. Kay Powell and Chap Clark, co-authors of *Sticky Faith*, have observed that only 50% of Christian teenagers who were active in their church youth group continue to attend church into their college years.⁸ Emerging adults are not staying engaged in the body of Christ, and the church is not complete without this generation.

Children, teenagers, and emerging adults bring energy and joy to a congregation, while older people provide mentorship, stability, and wisdom. Families provide the church with vitality and hope for the future. A healthy church body has all generations represented, and together they grow in their relationship with the Lord and serve Him in unity. Paul reminds the church in Ephesus about the significance of unity when he writes, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all in all.”⁹ The church is beautifully diverse and is called to serve the one God and Father together in the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

This dissertation emerged out of love and concern for the emerging adults at Gaithersburg Church of the Nazarene (GCN). Emerging adults are between the ages of 18-30 and are no longer an adolescent nor are they considered an adult. It is during these emerging adult years that many life-changing decisions are made. The author and her husband are in their early 60’s and have pastored GCN for 35 years. The “Young Adult Group” meets every Thursday night in their home for Bible study, prayer, snacks, and fellowship. And even though the pastors do not participate in leading the group, they enjoy spending time with the emerging

⁸ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*.

⁹ Ephesians 4:3-6, NIV.

adults talking on the front porch of their old farmhouse. They discuss their lives, their relationship with God, their church, and the big social issues of the day. Several of the young men who do not have a father-figure in their home, seek out advice about their job, school, or a relationship issue. These young people are at a time in their lives when they appreciate having someone with more life experience to talk to and pray with. When the author and her husband spend time with the emerging adults, they listen more than they speak. They enter these conversations with the goal of valuing and understanding them instead of trying to change them. The Holy Spirit is present in these interactions, and he is faithful to guide seekers into truth. Jesus says in John 16:13, “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”¹⁰ The Holy Spirit uses other people, both younger and older, to speak truth into his followers.

Scripture teaches that God is a missional God who has chosen and equipped the church to join him in his mission to save a lost world. This lost world encompasses many different cultures and generations. As the intergenerational church joins God on his mission, it contextualizes the gospel message to its culture to effectively minister in its context. As the culture changes with each generation, the church must contextualize if the church is to stay relevant and on mission.

David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling write this about the passion of emerging adults,

Undoubtedly, there is exciting promise and potential for emerging adults to bring renewal to the church and the world. They are primed at this time of life to consider new ideas and dream about future possibilities. Emerging adults tend to be idealistic, energetic, and passionate about their pursuits. Many great revivals and missionary movements throughout history, in fact, were birthed through the irrepressible zeal of emerging adults.¹¹

¹⁰ John 16:13, NIV.

¹¹ David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 5.

God has used the passion and energy of emerging adults to bring renewal to the church and the world. If they stay connected to God and engaged in the church, we will continue to see God use the zeal of emerging adults to birth missionary movements and revivals.

The church is the household of ministry where all ages experience Jesus as minister. Andrew Root puts it this way, “The church, then, is not solely an institution seeking its own life. Rather, the church is a gathering place to receive the ministry of Jesus through the embrace of others The church has no life outside the receiving and giving of ministry.”¹² The church receives ministry from Jesus and then, in turn, shares ministry with others. The church is a place where stories are shared, beginning with the story of Jesus. We are called into Jesus’ story and interpret our own story through his. As we share our stories with others, we bring our lives and a transcendent God together as a powerful witness. Root says, “It is only through articulating our experience and seeking God within it that we find our way into transcendence.”¹³ Transcendence is an existence beyond the normal or physical level, and emerging adults can experience and be shaped by an indwelling God when stories of places where the divine and the human intersect in powerful ministry are shared. The church is the place where these transformational stories are experienced and shared with all generations.

Emerging Adulthood Defined and Described

If the church is going to be effective in reaching and retaining emerging adults it is important to understand this unique phase of life. Emerging adulthood is a recent phenomenon

¹² Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), Loc. 4953, Kindle.

¹³ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, Loc. 5094, Kindle.

that has been formed by our culture that delays the responsibilities of adulthood.¹⁴ Jeffery Jensen Arnett writes, “Revolutionary changes took place in the 60’s and 70’s that laid the foundation for the world as we know it today, including the new life stage of emerging adulthood: The Technology Revolution, the Sexual Revolution, The Women’s Movement, and the Youth Movement.”¹⁵ Since these revolutionary changes, emerging adults have lived with their parents longer, delayed settling into a career, and stayed single well into their 20’s or 30’s.

In generations past, young people went right from adolescence to adulthood because it was the social norm to be married before you became sexually active. Most young men and women married in their early 20’s, began a family shortly thereafter, and settled in on their lifelong career before the age of 25. Today, the social norm of sex within the confines of marriage no longer exists, at least in America, and since the invention of the birth control pill in 1964, young men and women are becoming sexually active much earlier in life. Many young people are living together before they are married and settling into marriage and family life much later. Most emerging adults now say they would like to be married and settled into their lifelong careers at around the age of 30.¹⁶

There are certain commonalities with the young people in this phase of life. At some point during this time, many of them will move back home to live with their parents. This allows them to try out different job opportunities without the financial pressure of housing. There is freedom to use these years to get their education, to try out different sexual partners, to experience different career options, and to dream big dreams. All of this is possible before

¹⁴ Jeffery Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, 2nd Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁵ Arnett, *The Winding Road*, 4.

¹⁶ Arnett, *The Winding Road*.

settling in as an adult at around 30 years old. It is during emerging adulthood that worldview questions are addressed, and their individualism makes them skeptical of religious institutions. This period can prove to be very formative for the emerging adult's future.¹⁷

Emerging adults are at a unique time in life where they are searching for meaning. They are seeking it in the often murky and overlooked territory between the conventional faith that they experienced as a teenager and the critical-systematic faith that adults experience. During these years, a distinctive way of meaning-making can emerge which includes self-consciously participating in an ongoing dialogue toward truth.¹⁸ If they are disconnected from the church family, and relationships with older Christian mentors during this time of seeking truth, they may be prone to be distracted by a worldly view of truth rather than the Christian view of truth that is based on Scripture, is absolute, and that Jesus teaches will set his people free.

Why Emerging Adults Leave the Church

Research shows that many emerging adults are no longer attending church, and many are doubting their faith in God. Why is this so? Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin from Fuller Youth Institute write, "Those who study demographics believe the decline in overall church attendance is linked with young people's religious practices, or lack thereof. According to 2015 US Census Bureau data, adults ages 18 to 29 comprised 17 percent of the adult population. Yet that same age group represents less than 10 percent of church attendees worldwide."¹⁹ A nationwide Barna study conducted in 2011 on a random sample of emerging adults with a

¹⁷ Arnett, *The Winding Road*.

¹⁸ Sharon D. Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 12.

¹⁹ Jake Mulder and Brad Griffin and Kara Powell, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 16.

Christian background showed that 59 percent reported that they are no longer attending church and that 38 percent have gone through a period of doubting their faith.²⁰

Reasons for this age group's exodus from the church are varied. First, at the age of 18, young people experience a sense of independence and are no longer willing to simply accept the religion of their parents. They want to decide on their own what to believe. Making independent decisions is an important milestone for adulthood.²¹ Second, many emerging adults, although raised in the church, begin finding their friendships and community elsewhere such as work, school, social media, or bars. Third, they have aged out of the youth group, so they no longer feel as if there is a place for them in the church. David Kinnaman identifies emerging adults' departure from the church as a disciple-making problem when he writes, "The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture."²² Are there ways that the church can better prepare the next generation to be faithful followers of Christ?

To gain understanding as to why emerging adults are leaving the church one must look at the church as a whole and see why people of all ages leave the church. Sociologists Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope share their research findings to help pastors and church leaders understand why good Christian people of all ages leave the church and look for community elsewhere. They interviewed Christians who had been deeply involved in their churches. They were the ones who tithed, taught Sunday School, and served on the church board. These Christians attended almost every Sunday until they decided to leave. Barna and Kinnaman provide two specific pieces of

²⁰ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church....and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 23.

²¹ Arnett, *The Winding Road*, 226.

²² Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 21.

data that are helpful. First, these Christians are not leaving the church angry, but rather they are leaving because they are uninterested. They have found that the church is not where they can have the spiritual lives that they desire. Second, churches are enabling many people to fail in their journey toward transformative faith.

In interviewing those Christians that they termed “the Dones,” Packard and Ashleigh learned many reasons why they left, what they miss about the church, and what is replacing church in their lives. “The Dones” found that modern religious organizations and institutions were stifling their ability to engage with each other and their communities. Many of them felt the church was just looking out for itself and was no longer engaged in serving the community, and that the church’s narrow focus on personal morality to the exclusion of other issues such as systemic racism and LGBTQ+ both obscure the full teachings of Jesus and limit their own access to God. Packard and Hope note that “while pastors get massive amounts of training in theology, they miss some of the key sociological dynamics at work in their churches.”²³ Even though “the Dones” include all ages, their findings are applicable in understanding the reasons emerging adults leave the church.

The Problem

The fact that emerging adults are leaving the church causes great concern to Christian parents, pastors, and church leaders. The intergenerational church best reflects the Kingdom of God when all ages are represented in the body. Powell, Mulder, and Griffin note that, “Across cultures, a major turning point for young people’s faith seems to be high school graduation. Multiple studies highlight that 40 to 50 percent of youth group seniors . . . drift from God and the

²³ Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are DONE with Church but Not Their Faith* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2015), 67.

faith community after they graduate from high school.”²⁴ Is it possible that after high school emerging adults do not feel the church is relevant to their lives anymore, or that their lives are no longer relevant to the church? Could it be that they feel unfulfilled, isolated, judged, and dismissed in their church? Emerging adults leaving the church is a problem because any congregation that does not reach out to younger generations will eventually die.²⁵ It is also a problem because the church is a place for emerging adults to be transformed by God as they worship, and to grow in their faith and knowledge of him.

An essential attribute of the church is its beautiful diversity. God desires unity not uniformity, and unity must have diversity. When everyone is the same you cannot be unified—that’s uniformity. To have unity there must be diversity.²⁶ The body of Christ is made up of people of all ages in many different phases of life and this is a wonderful attribute. But this diversity presents some challenges. Haydn Shaw notes that, “For the first time in history, we have five generations in our families, churches, and communities.”²⁷ Each generation has experienced many different events that have significantly shaped the way they think and believe about the church, doctrine, and social issues. This presents another layer to the problem because older generations fear that the church will compromise doctrinal integrity to be relevant to the younger generations. Diane Leclerc, professor of historical theology at Northwest Nazarene University, discusses the polarization and extremism that not only plagues non-religious entities but is also evident in the church. She says, “Christianity is in crisis, certainly for a whole host of

²⁴ Mulder, Griffin, and Powell, *Growing Young*, 17.

²⁵ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*.

²⁶ Jonathan Brooks and Sho Baraka, *Church Forsaken: Practicing Presence in Neglected Neighborhoods* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 57.

²⁷ Haydn Shaw and Ginger Kolbaba, *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn’t Dying, Millennials Aren’t the Problem, and the Future Is Bright* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), Loc. 273, Kindle.

reasons, but also because we are on the verge of losing a coherent center, as we define our theological positions over-against opposing views.”²⁸ These opposing views between the older and younger generations are evident in how they believe, and how they act on their beliefs. The tension to be held is that both orthodoxy and orthopraxis are crucial aspects of Christian faith and are equally important. To the older generations, orthodoxy must be preserved at all costs. The theology and doctrine of the church must be protected. But to the younger generation, theology and doctrine are secondary to the “social vision” of the Holiness Movement. How can the church reclaim the middle way of Wesleyanism and maintain a Christian center that keeps all generations engaged in the mission of the church?²⁹

The problem that this dissertation addresses is twofold. First, the church in the Wesleyan-Holiness context is losing the emerging adult generation. They leave the church shortly after high school graduation and many never return. The church is failing to inspire and disciple emerging adults (post-moderns) and develop them into leaders. “Postmodern thinkers have been raised in a culture that implicitly instills ideological and moral relativism—thus, what matters most is what we do. Theology and doctrine matter little, or at the very least, are quite fluid.”³⁰ To emerging adults the church is relevant not because of what it believes but because of what it is doing to change the world.

Second, there is fear in the older generations (moderns) that doctrinal integrity will be compromised to reach and retain the younger generations and that personal evangelism will be

²⁸Diane Leclerc, “Why Have a Right Heart?: A Wesleyan Middle Way as the Way Forward for Holiness Ethics” in *Why Holiness?: The Transformational Message That Unites Us*, Carla D. Sunberg, (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2019), 60.

²⁹ Leclerc, “Why Have a Right Heart?”.

³⁰ Leclerc, “Why Have a Right Heart?” 62.

minimized as the church focuses on social issues. Many moderns have invested their entire lives in their church, and they believe that orthodoxy should be preserved by future generations. This fear of compromising the truth of Scripture and the doctrinal standards that are set by the church can make them resistant to change and they can come across as “being set in their ways”. This can be seen especially when dealing with issues such as sexuality, systemic racism, and social justice. These issues along with many others, are polarizing the church along generational lines, and if the church loses its coherent center, it becomes unproductive in mission accomplishment.

These are problems because the church provides guidance and instruction to enable young people to live a life that is in line with the Holy Scriptures and is pleasing to God. The church provides Biblical teaching, community, opportunities to serve, and life-giving relationships that provides mentorship and guidance to emerging adults during this phase of life when they are making many crucial decisions. When emerging adults separate themselves from the teaching and accountability of the church then they are more likely to be “tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.”³¹ The church is meant to be an anchor that keeps one grounded in their faith and in the Bible. The church is commissioned to fulfill the ministry of Jesus Christ, which includes not only personal transformation but community transformation as well. Scripture teaches that orthodoxy and orthopraxy are both vital elements of the Christian faith and the ministry of his church. James 2:14-17 says,

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

³¹ Ephesians 4:14, NIV.

A person is saved by faith in Jesus Christ, but the Christian's life reflects the person of Jesus when one lives in such a way that love is poured out on those in need.

Thesis

The church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition provides Spirit-filled transformational ministry to all generations. This Spirit-filled ministry can inspire and disciple emerging adults in a way that allows them to experience the goodness of God that motivates them to be involved in changing their world. This dissertation addresses the problem of emerging adults leaving the church and discusses how the church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition is uniquely positioned to embrace a culture that is relevant to younger generations by connecting them to a Spirit-filled relationship with Christ and a social mission. It also addresses the fear that moderns experience over the loss of orthodoxy in order to retain post-moderns.

These problems are addressed by bringing moderns and post-moderns together for sharing around the dinner table about relevant topics. It proposes a seven-week intergenerational small group that brings generations together for dinner and dialogue to build relationships and to gain understanding that allows generations to work together in God's holistic mission. When in community, the Spirit can bring the generations together in a way that not only retains emerging adults to the church, but also brings the generations together to seek truth and to experience transformation that leads to a better understanding of the mission of the church. A mission that is truly Wesleyan-Holiness includes both personal and social transformation.

The Holiness tradition was birthed out of a deep concern for the poor and to seek justice for those who are marginalized. Phineas F. Bresee founded The Church of the Nazarene out of a desire to include ministry to the poor as a means of grace for followers of Christ. Donald Dayton

writes, “If there is a consistent theme in the activist movements in the church, from liberation theology to more traditional belief, it is the declaration for a special Christian responsibility to the poor and oppressed of this world. These movements proclaim that the Scriptures have a bias in favor of the economically poor.”³² Evangelist and social reformer Charles Finney “insisted that the spiritual vitality of the church is sapped, not by her involvement in social questions, but rather by her failure to embrace reform.”³³ When one becomes a follower of Christ, his or her life reflects God’s love by engaging in good works. Finney put God’s love into practice by being instrumental in abolishing slavery in America.³⁴

Throughout history young adults have been involved in major social movements such as the antislavery struggle. The faculty and students at Oberlin College made major contributions not only to abolitionism, but also to the peace movement, the women’s movement, and educational reform.³⁵ Unfortunately, as time went on, churches became more inward focused and ceased to take part in social reform. As churches get back to the roots of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, which not only includes personal transformation but also social transformation, then emerging adults are more apt to see the church as relevant and stay involved.

Contributing factors to emerging adult retention in the church will be discussed throughout. These factors include mentorship, family and church practices that keeps emerging adults connected and disciplined into leadership. Churches that embody a biblical and contextual ecclesiology that leads to personal transformation and missional integrity will have a greater influence in a young person’s life. When the church fails to contextualize to be effective in

³² Donald W. Dayton, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage: A Tradition and Trajectory Of Integrating Piety And Justice*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 156.

³³ Dayton, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage*, 64.

³⁴ Dayton, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage*.

³⁵ Dayton, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage*.

mission accomplishment and to reach young people, then our emerging adults can be more influenced by the culture around them than by the church.

If new and younger leaders are going to be raised up in our churches to continue the mission of God, then a process should be put into place to disciple emerging adults. Our churches tend to focus on children and teenagers and provide numerous classes and resources for those age groups. But many churches fail to provide ministries and classes for emerging adults because they do not believe there is a need. The expectation is that once a young person is no longer in the teen group then they should attend the adult classes with attendees much older than they are. Very few emerging adults feel comfortable in this situation, nor are they attracted to it, so they leave. Churches that provide groups, classes and social opportunities for emerging adults will be more effective in passing their faith and doctrine on to the next generation and raising up future leaders.

Doctrinal Beliefs

Doctrine is the set of beliefs about God that is accepted by the membership of a religion. The principal beliefs of the Church of the Nazarene are described in the 16 Articles of Faith and define who the Nazarenes are as a denomination and what they believe. These beliefs shape how Nazarenes live as followers of Jesus Christ.³⁶ “Christians believe that revelation from God and tradition are the sources of their doctrine.”³⁷ The church should never sacrifice doctrinal beliefs to be relevant to younger generations. Jacob Rodriguez writes “The church can pursue relevance

³⁶ *Our Church, Your Home, Participant's Guide: An Introduction to Church Membership* (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012).

³⁷ *Our Church, Your Home*, 12.

without losing its identity or bargaining its beliefs.”³⁸ The church can teach doctrinal beliefs and Biblical knowledge to emerging adults in foundational ways that will provide guidance and meaning to their lives. They are not looking for quick-fixes to address surface-level issues but are willing to go deeper in spiritual discipleship because they know the value of it. If something is valuable to them then they will devote the time to it.³⁹

The Church of the Nazarene is a Holiness denomination whose “very identity revolves around the proclamation of the sanctified life.”⁴⁰ Diane Leclerc wrote in her article entitled “Postmodern Holiness?,” “If we do not preach and teach holiness in a way that captures the post-moderns—so that they experience it, become passionate about it, and preach and teach it in turn—our tradition is one generation away from extinction.”⁴¹ The church’s very existence is dependent on post-moderns and it is vitally important for the church to provide ministry that allows them to be discipled, and to experience transformational worship that inspires holy living. One can be hopeful because the Holy Spirit is at work in the church empowering it and keeping it alive and the message of holiness relevant to the next generation.

Relevance to Emerging Adults

If the church is going to retain emerging adults, then it must be relevant to their lives. Since emerging adults are motivated by causes, they believe that a church should be defined by

³⁸ Jacob Rodriguez, *Growing Young: Shifting Church Culture to Reach a New Generation* (Independently published, 2020), loc. 669, Kindle.

³⁹ Benjamin Windle and Frank Damazio, *Eight Innovations to Leading Millennials: How Millennials Can Grow Your Church and Change the World* (New York, NY: Thrive Co, 2019).

⁴⁰ Diane Leclerc, “Postmodern Holiness?,” November 29, 2011, <https://www.graceandpeacemagazine.org/articles/15-issue-summerfall-2011/244-postmodern-holiness>.

⁴¹ Leclerc, “Postmodern Holiness?”

God's mission. Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen say this about God's mission and the church, "Mission cannot be conceived as a project of the church, rather, the church exists within God's reconciling mission."⁴² The church is much more than a mission, the body of Christ is the faithful presence of God's love in the community. The questions each member of a local church should be asking are,

How can our participation in a particular gathering grow our capacity to be a living expression of the church together in everyday life? How can it really help us to become a tangible witness of Christ's love, and to participate together in what God is doing in the place we live?⁴³

Church and mission become relevant to emerging adults when they can see the love of Christ being lived out in everyday life making a difference where they live. The Church of the Nazarene Manual describes the social aspect of holiness in paragraph 28.3 in the following way,

The Church of the Nazarene believes this new and holy way of life involves practices to be avoided and redemptive acts of love to be accomplished for the souls, minds, and bodies of our neighbors. One redemptive arena of love involves the special relationship Jesus had, and commanded His disciples to have, with the poor of this world; that His Church ought, first, to keep itself simple and free from an emphasis on wealth and extravagance and, second, to give itself to the care, feeding, clothing, and shelter of the poor and marginalized. Throughout the Bible and in the life and example of Jesus, God identifies with and assists the poor, the oppressed, and those in society who cannot speak for themselves. In the same way, we, too, are called to identify with and to enter into solidarity with the poor. We hold that compassionate ministry to the poor includes acts of charity as well as a struggle to provide opportunity, equality, and justice for the poor. We further believe the Christian's responsibility to the poor is an essential aspect of the life of every believer who seeks a faith that works through love. We believe Christian holiness to be inseparable from ministry to the poor in that it drives the Christian beyond their own individual perfection and toward the creation of a more just and equitable society and world. Holiness, far from distancing believers from the desperate economic needs of people in this world, motivates us to place our means in the service of alleviating such need and to adjust our wants in accordance with the needs of others.⁴⁴

⁴² Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 81.

⁴³ Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 84.

⁴⁴ Church of the Nazarene, *Manual 2017-2021* (Nazarene Publishing House, 2018), 46-47.

A holy life is one that is lived in community with one's neighbors. Holiness is about living in a sacrificial way that enables one to assist the poor and to bring about equality and justice to those who are marginalized. This outwardly focused lifestyle that focuses on others, especially those who are suffering will appeal to emerging adults and enable them to see the love of Christ making a difference in the world.

Conclusion

In summary, the intergenerational church is beautifully diverse and is called to serve the one God and Father together in the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Many emerging adults no longer see the church as relevant, so they leave shortly after they graduate from high school. They are at an age where they want to make their own decisions and their individualism makes them skeptical of religious institutions. The older generations see the importance of orthodoxy and want to be sure that the church maintains doctrinal integrity. Emerging adults desire a vibrant Spirit-filled life and tend to focus on orthopraxy and want their faith to be effective in social change. The church in Wesleyan-Holiness tradition was birthed out of deep concern for the poor and to seek justice for those who are marginalized. As the moderns and the post-moderns come together to better understand each other, and as the church focuses on a more balanced ministry which includes personal transformation and social justice, then emerging adults will be more apt to stay engaged.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The disappearing emerging adult generation from the church is a topic that many writers have addressed over the years. This chapter will discuss a portion of the relevant literature on this topic. First, the phase of life called “emerging adulthood” will be examined and the unique characteristics of emerging adults discussed. Second, models that have worked with emerging adults staying engaged in the church will be addressed, including leadership development among teenagers and emerging adults. Third, the generation gap that is evident in the church will be considered and ways that it can be bridged for mission effectiveness. Finally, the church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and its unique contribution to the solution of the problem of emerging adults leaving the church will be discussed.

Understanding Emerging Adulthood

Understanding emerging adults is the first step to effectively ministering to them. Psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett coined the term “emerging adulthood” to refer to the phase of life between adolescence and young adulthood, occurring from the ages of 18 to 25. In his book, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties*, he describes emerging adults as being self-focused with all their big dreams possible before doors close in adulthood. He says, “Adulthood and its commitments offer security and stability, but also represents a closing of doors—the end of independence, the end of spontaneity, the end of a sense of wide-open possibility.”⁴⁵ One is considered an adult when they accept responsibility for themselves, when they begin to make independent decisions, and when they become financially independent. These do not happen all at once but rather in increments.⁴⁶ According to Arnett, the characteristics of emerging adulthood are identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between (neither adolescent nor adult), and optimism.⁴⁷

Arnett argues that emerging adults are skeptical of churches because when it comes to religious beliefs, they value individualism and insist on making their own choices. He says, “Participation in a religious institution, even a liberal one, requires them to abide by a certain set of beliefs and rules, and therefore constitutes an intolerable compromise of their individuality.”⁴⁸ Emerging adults want to make their own choices and refuse to go along with their parents’ decisions anymore, or anyone else’s. Many emerging adults leave the church because it no longer fits into their full lives as they use this valuable time to pursue their dreams. They are

⁴⁵ Arnett, *The Winding Road*, 7.

⁴⁶ Arnett, *The Winding Road*, 15.

⁴⁷ Arnett, *The Winding Road*, 9.

⁴⁸ Arnett, *The Winding Road*, 218.

preparing their own path forward and unless the church extends grace and provides space for them to talk and ask questions, they cannot build a faith that they can call their own.

The church provides the perfect setting for emerging adults to be able to ask the big questions of life and to process their thoughts in a caring community of believers. The emerging adult thinks and acts in distinctive ways, and as churches seek to understand the emerging adult's unique challenges, both biologically and culturally, then they will be more effective in reaching them. Sharon D. Parks wrote *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* and discusses stages of human development that determine how one processes information. Parks focuses on the emerging adult stage of development and how they make sense of life, understand their purpose, where they fit in community, how faith is formed, and worthy dreams fulfilled. Parks, like Arnett, stresses the importance of emerging adults being encouraged to ask the big questions that awaken critical thought and enable them to compose their faith.⁴⁹

The problem of emerging adults leaving the church can be found in a variety of cultures. The Latinx church has struggled in remaining relevant and engaging emerging adults. But experience taught church leaders that contextualization is vital if churches are going to reach and retain young people in the Latinx churches. Daniel Rodriguez and Manuel Ortiz wrote the book *Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations* to discuss the struggle of the Latinx church as they minister to second and third generation English-speaking Latinx young people. The first generation Latinx wanted to maintain their traditions and it was important to them that they worship in Spanish. But, their children, grandchildren, and their friends who were born in the United States preferred to

⁴⁹ Parks, *Big Questions*.

worship in English. Church leadership was faced with the decision of whether to maintain their traditions for the sake of the first generation, or to contextualize to better minister to their young people. After seeking the Lord in prayer, the church made the decision to initiate change to be more effective in reaching the next generation of young people and began offering services in English as well as in Spanish. God blessed them with numerical and spiritual growth as they openly welcomed the next generation into the ministry of the church.⁵⁰ In order to maintain effectiveness in reaching the next generation for Christ, necessary changes must be made to minister to a different culture and mindset. Knowing what this looks like, and how to go about it, comes from the generations working out these changes together, in relationship with each other.

In various cultures it is possible for five generations to be ministering together in the church, therefore, each generation must be able to discuss viewpoints that are different than their own. Younger generations are often viewed by older generations as being fragile and weak when different viewpoints cause them anxiety. *The Coddling of the American Mind* by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt asserts that college students are fragile and need to be protected from hearing speeches or reading texts that trigger feelings of depression or anxiety. Many of these emerging adults have been overprotected by their parents so they did not learn how to deal with intolerable levels of discomfort or risk. This did not allow them to develop the strength that comes from traumatic experiences. “A culture that allows the concept of ‘safety’ to creep so far that it equates emotional discomfort with physical danger is a culture that encourages people to systematically protect one another from the very experiences embedded in daily life that they need in order to become strong and healthy.”⁵¹ Many emerging adults are suffering from high

⁵⁰ Daniel A. Rodriguez and Manuel Ortiz, *A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

⁵¹ Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2018), Loc. 654, Kindle.

rates of anxiety and depression and tend to be obsessed with emotional safety. This being the case, dealing with views and opinions that are in opposition of their own may appear as threatening and must be handled with care. The church can provide a safe and loving environment for these intergenerational conversations to occur, but a wise and discerning facilitator is necessary in order to maintain a safe atmosphere.

If churches are going to attract and retain emerging adults, then it must address issues that are personally important to younger generations. Today's emerging adults are not responding to the traditional methods of disciple making such as Sunday School classes and church services. Ken Baugh and Rich Hurst discuss a new method of discipleship for emerging adults in their book, *The Quest for Christ: Discipling Today's Young Adults*. This method of discipleship is not program oriented, but rather a lifestyle modeled by mentors, and facilitates the inner transformation of the emerging adult. Baugh and Hurst write, "Behavior modification is not the ultimate goal of discipleship. Instead, the ultimate goal of discipleship is transformation from the inside out. It begins with the heart and slowly moves into a person's behavior."⁵² Emerging adults are inspired to live a life of holiness when they have been filled with the Holy Spirit and their hearts have been transformed by the love of Christ.

Diane Leclerc's article entitled "Postmodern Holiness?" suggests practical ways that churches can preach and teach the message of holiness to postmodern thinkers. She argues that post-moderns tend to prefer sermons to be narrative rather than conceptual and to connect directly to their lives. Post-moderns believe that the church should demonstrate authentic community where attendees can be real and vulnerable. Leclerc says this about post-moderns, "They intuitively understand that holiness is necessarily social and relational. If they stick with

⁵² Ken Baugh and Rich Hurst, *The Quest for Christ: Discipling Today's Young Adults* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub Inc, 2002), 30.

us, they may just be able to help us break through the wall of pretense and find the kind of radical honesty about our Christian journey that Wesley once required of everyone called Methodist.”⁵³ Christians have criticized postmodernism because of its tendency toward ethical relativism. Instead of burdening them with more rules why not give them reasons to be good? Emerging adults believe that when they submit their lives to God that he will use them for his glory.

Emerging adults are at a time in their lives when they want to make their own decisions. Their decision to attend church will depend largely on whether or not they have a transformational relationship with Christ, if the church is relevant to their lives, and a place where they feel safe to ask their questions. There are practical things that churches can put into place that make it more emerging adult friendly.

Models That Increase Emerging Adult Retention

Churches with teenagers and emerging adults have more vitality, life, and energy. This does not happen by accident, but by seeking ways to minister in a way that is relational and includes all generations. Churches that have been successful in increasing emerging adult retention have done the following: they have been intentional in providing ministry for emerging adults, they have formed a culture that is welcoming and attractive to emerging adults, they have methods in place that provides emerging adults with mentorship, they have a youth program that deepens the faith of teenagers, they invest relationally in emerging adults, and intentionally invite them into leadership positions.

1. Churches that are Intentional in Providing Ministry for Emerging Adults

⁵³ Leclerc, “Postmodern Holiness?”

There are strategies that churches can intentionally enact that increase their ability to reach and retain emerging adults. Powell, Mulder, and Griffin write about young people who stay engaged in the church in their book, *Growing Young: 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*. They identified growing churches that have young people involved in ministry and came up with six strategies for how churches can be more emerging adult friendly. These six strategies include: empowering emerging adults with significant responsibilities, empathizing with today's emerging adults, welcoming emerging adults into a relationship with Jesus, fueling a warm community, involving emerging adults in all facets of your congregation, and enabling emerging adults to neighbor well locally and globally.⁵⁴ Churches that are intentional in putting these strategies into practice will find that younger generations feel more at home there, and not only will stay engaged, but will invite their friends.

Churches that are innovative tend to be more attractive to emerging adults. Benjamin Windle (a Millennial) and Frank Damazio discuss the need to be innovative and experimentative with present ministry models in their book, *Eight Innovations to Leading Millennials: How Millennials Can Grow Your Church and Change the World*. The eight methodologies suggested by Windle and Damazio to enable a church to be more relevant to emerging adults are as follows:

1. The use of technology and social media in communication, in building community, in discipleship and Christian education.
2. The need to embrace a more relational and strategic leadership style that creates connections with people.

⁵⁴ Mulder, Griffin, and Powell, *Growing Young*.

3. The development of a more collaborative organizational structure that is team oriented.
4. The investment in dynamic programs and events that are quality and worth their time.
5. The teaching that provides depth in spiritual discipleship.
6. The building of facilities that represent your culture and invest in good coffee.
7. The teaching of a Christian financial worldview that emphasizes stewardship.
8. An emphasis on social rather than political engagement that is inclusive of all individuals and groups of people.

It is important to maintain all the core tenants of theology and at the same time reinvent methodologies to cater to a new world.⁵⁵ When done well, these methodologies will enhance the culture of the church in such a way that it will be warm and inviting to emerging adults and older adults will feel comfortable knowing the theology remains intact.

2. *Churches with an Attractive Church Culture*

When it comes to reaching emerging adults, church culture (how does this church make me feel?) is vitally important. *Growing Young: Shifting Church Culture to Reach a New Generation* by Jacob Rodriguez describes church vision, church culture and their effect on church growth. Leaders spend a lot of time and energy sharpening and casting vision, but it is the culture of the church that ultimately determines the success of a church's vision. If a church is going to effectively minister to emerging adults, then the culture of the church must be attractive to them. Older and younger generations are encouraged to dialogue and problem-solve together

⁵⁵ Windle and Damazio, *Eight Innovations*.

to creatively examine the culture of the church but also to maintain the truth of Scripture.⁵⁶ If a church is going to be attractive to emerging adults, then the generations must collaborate in order for this to happen.

This dissertation's artifact entitled, *Grace space: listening for understanding* provides a format for intergenerational conversations. It consists of a seven-week intergenerational small group that brings generations together for dinner, Scripture reading, prayer, and guided sharing. Intentionally building intergenerational relationships will provide opportunities for mentoring relationships to develop that will encourage emerging adults to grow in their faith and in their relationship with the church.

3. Churches that Provide Mentorship

All around the world the key factor that determines whether emerging adults thrive spiritually is the mentorship of committed teachers, coaches, pastors, and friends. Richard Dunn and Jana Sundene wrote *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* to provide a clear guide for mentoring emerging adults. They argue that if we fail to invest relationally, prayerfully, and proactively in the spiritual journeys of emerging adults, we will ultimately have catastrophic spiritual consequences. Adults that are further along in their spiritual journey can provide encouragement and navigational guidance in a changing societal landscape where values are no longer clear.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Jacob Rodriguez, *Growing Young: Shifting Church Culture to Reach a New Generation* (Independently published, 2020).

⁵⁷ Jana L. Sundene and Richard R. Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults: Life-Giving Rhythms for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012).

Emerging adults are not antagonistic about faith in Christ, but are rather apathetic, and indifferent about it. David Setran and Chris Kiesling have identified a “mentoring gap” during emerging adulthood that affects their spiritual formation, and they argue that trusted mentors are important shepherds that can unleash potential energy that can be used to build the Kingdom of God in the world. They wrote *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* to provide a practical theology for emerging adult ministry that combines scholarship, Christian theological vision, and concrete ministry applications. Setran and Kiesling say, “Mentors can guide emerging adults to look forward and envision future faithfulness, forming commitments and lifestyles that will endure over the long haul.”⁵⁸ Opportunities for generations to dialogue about faith and to share stories of success and failure enable emerging adults to navigate through this uncertain time in their lives.

4. Churches that Provide Ministry to Teenagers

A robust youth ministry with teenagers growing in their faith, excited about ministry and serving others sets the stage for a vibrant emerging adult ministry. This is especially important now with Generation Z growing up in a post-Christian era. James Emery White sheds light on Generation Z in America in his book *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World*. Generation Z is made up of those born after 2005 and make up 25.9 percent of the U.S. population.⁵⁹ Generation Z was born in an age of technology, and universal tolerance has been ingrained in them by the many hours of media they absorb each day. Many from this generation are growing up without parents or the church overly engaged in their lives.

⁵⁸ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 206.

⁵⁹ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 37.

White states “that nearly half of the nation’s population is post-Christian, and the younger the generation, the more post-Christian it is.”⁶⁰ White argues that the church should become counter-cultural to remain effective and relevant to Generation Z.⁶¹

Young people do not want to merely be entertained in the church but long for experiential ministry that fuels their faith and encourages godly living. Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster wrote *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* to introduce a paradigm shift for youth ministry. 1) A ministry that is relational and encourages young people to grow deep roots in their faith: 2) One that teaches them how to serve others by serving with them: 3) One that includes worship that is creative that affects their experience of transcendence, and sense of awe and wonder. The gospel must be taught to young people in a way that prepares them for mission because God needs their prophetic voices in the church, in the culture, and in their families.⁶²

When examining the relationship between emerging adults and the church it is important to research family practices and how that might affect the emerging adults’ devotion to the church. Kenda Creasy Dean argues that young people’s faith today reflects their parents’ religious devotion and that of their churches in her book *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. Young people are inspired by the modeling of mature and surrendered faith by parents and congregations. Families and churches are encouraged to be proactive in teaching teenagers about faith and giving them the cultural tools to live for Christ in the world. The church has been guilty of teaching Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

⁶⁰ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 24.

⁶¹ White, *Meet Generation Z*.

⁶² Kenda Creasy Dean and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998).

by giving teens a low commitment, compartmentalized set of attitudes aimed at “meeting my needs” and “making me happy” instead of a sacrificial life lived in obedience to Christ. Churches have lost track of Christianity’s missional imagination which leads Christians to focus inwardly instead of outwardly to a world in need of God.⁶³

5. *Churches that Make Relational Investments*

If the church fails to reach out and retain younger generations, then it will fail in its mission to reach a lost world for Christ. Steve Parr and Tom Crites write about churches that maximize in emerging adult retention in their book entitled, *Why They Stay: Helping Parents and Church Leaders Make Investments That Keep Children and Teens Connected to the Church for a Lifetime*. Parr and Crites’ research includes the study of emerging adults and record significant differences in the attitudes and experiences of those who stay involved in the local church and those who do not. They discovered that baptism of believers; strong evangelistic children’s, teen, family, and marriage ministries; welcoming college ministry; and relational pastors greatly increase the chances of emerging adults staying engaged in the church.⁶⁴

Beth Severson identifies patterns in her book, *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults* that enhance ministries to make churches more appealing to emerging adults. She encourages churches to initiate relationships with and to intentionally invest in ministries for emerging adults. She argues that emerging adults benefit by being invited to serve somewhere in the church community even before they become Christians. Engaging in evangelism and service projects both within and outside the church; provides emerging adults

⁶³ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶⁴ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*.

with a warm and inviting atmosphere where supportive friendships with all ages can develop.⁶⁵

When someone is invited to serve in the church, they know that they have something significant to offer and they feel valued. They also have a sense of ownership and will more likely stay engaged.

Churches that are intentional in building a church culture that is attractive to emerging adults and provide ministry to them will be more successful in retaining them in the church. Intergenerational friendships in the church will provide emerging adults with mentoring relationships. Creative, awe-inspiring ministry to teenagers and close family relationships will deepen their faith and result in them staying interested in the church even as an emerging adult.

6. *Churches that Develop Leaders*

Leadership development must be a constant focus in the church. Every present leader should be mentoring a future leader. Leadership development in emerging adults greatly influences their decision to stay engaged in the church. The book *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* by Robert E. Webber discusses the changes being introduced by the next generation of leaders, and projects where evangelicalism is going in the future. He concludes that emerging adults are increasingly affected by the missiological understanding of the church and believe that every aspect of the Christian life, thought, and ministry is connected to God's mission.⁶⁶ Emerging adults have a deep concern for cultural awareness and can bring cultural intelligence more naturally into ministry. When emerging adults become leaders in the church, they can greatly influence the church to be more culturally

⁶⁵ Beth Seversen, *Not Done Yet: Reaching and Keeping Unchurched Emerging Adults* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

⁶⁶ Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002).

aware and mission focused. When generations serve together in ministry, emerging adults bring inclusiveness and social issues to the forefront.

Bridging the Generation Gap

In most church foyers one will find small pockets of people grouped together that are alike in some way. Social scientist, Christena Cleveland says that we are naturally drawn to people like ourselves to keep our lives predictable and to preserve energy in social situations. We tend to form social groups of “us” and “them”. Cleveland wrote *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* to help readers better understand divisions amongst people groups and to teach how to overcome them. Diverse groups are more likely to connect and form a bond if they spend time together accomplishing tasks.⁶⁷ But does the church know how to do this?

Brenda Salter McNeil wrote *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* to equip Christian leaders to build communities of reconciliation both locally and globally. Her roadmap is both individual and systemic and helps people participate in God’s reconciling work. It is our tendency to lean in the direction of sameness and homogeneity, but it was God’s original intent in the beginning, and it still is, for us to recognize our interdependence with others who are different, and our need for reconciliation.⁶⁸ Generations working together in ministry necessitates some agreement in ways of thinking and this can be challenging because they think very differently from one another. McNeil says, “We have a tendency to deny information that conflicts with our beliefs, and we will therefore shape new

⁶⁷ Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013).

⁶⁸ Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015).

information to fit our preexisting ideas.”⁶⁹ When we recognize this tendency then we can find ways to push people beyond their desire to preserve current ways of thinking and move in a new direction.⁷⁰ Generations that serve together in ministry are more likely to connect in a way that enables all participants to be open to new ways of thinking. But working together constructively requires a certain amount of generational IQ.

Haydn Shaw is a leading expert on helping different generations work better together and sheds light on the fear the boomer generation experiences over the church sacrificing doctrinal integrity to retain millennials. He wrote *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn't Dying, Millennials Aren't the Problem, and the Future is Bright* to help readers find a way to dispel generational tensions in their important relationships. Each generation approaches God with a different set of questions and needs based on the times in which they were raised. Shaw argues that with better generational IQ we can better respond to changes without fear. Many boomers still desire to stay engaged and relevant in the church, and they are not ready to just hand it over to the next generation.⁷¹ However, boomers are in a stage of life where serving alongside emerging adults can enable them to build trust and confidence in the next generation.

An intergenerational church is one that intentionally cultivates life-giving and meaningful interaction between generations. This interaction encourages all people to stay in community and grow together as brothers and sisters in Christ instead of focusing on merely the individual and their needs. Scripture models intergenerational teaching in both the Old and New Testaments as faith in God was taught in homes and communities. Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton

⁶⁹ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 49.

⁷⁰ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*.

⁷¹ Haydn Shaw and Ginger Kolbaba, *Generational IQ: Christianity Isn't Dying, Millennials Aren't the Problem, and the Future Is Bright* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015).

explore generational theory and how it contributes to intergenerational Christian formation in their book, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*. As they compare the characteristics of the generations, they can find both potential connections and places of division. Intergenerational settings provide all generations a sense of belonging and means for vibrant spiritual formation.⁷²

The generation gap will be bridged one relationship at a time. Intentionally bringing generations together to worship, talk and serve allows them to connect in a way that forms a bond. As friendships are formed and viewpoints shared, they will be able to see that with Christ in the center of their relationship they can work together to accomplish his mission.

Wesleyanism and Emerging Adulthood

The Christian mission from a Wesleyan perspective is characterological in nature and begins in the holy character of God. Ron Benefiel describes in his paper, “Christian Holiness and the Wesleyan Mission of Mercy: The Character of the People of God in the World,” how the image of God can be restored in people by the power of transforming and sustaining grace. This results in the holiness of God becoming characteristic of the people of God which motivates them to participate in God’s mission in the world. God’s transforming grace fully renews in us the moral image of God. This not only enables one to love God and others, but love becomes the natural outcome of Christlikeness. As people receive God’s holy character, they are compelled by the Holy Spirit to engage the world as Jesus did.⁷³ Can the church which is made up of people

⁷² Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012).

⁷³ Ron Benefiel, “Christian Holiness and the Wesleyan Mission of Mercy: The Character of the People of God in the World” (n.d.).

with very different worldviews come together to engage the world in a way that demonstrates unity and God's love?

Salvation involves inner holiness and the recovery of actual moral righteousness in our outward lives, but the time factor might vary. The experience of salvation and sanctification for a Wesleyan has both an instantaneous and progressive component. One is saved in an instant but there is also a life of growth in grace. Wesley's characterization of his understanding of salvation as a journey was captured by Albert Outler when he described it "as a journey from the barely human, to the truly human, to the fully human."⁷⁴ God's saving work progresses in one's life and enables one to experience a renewed, active love for God and for other people. At the same time, one recovers one's own happiness.⁷⁵

Diane Leclerc addresses the polarization that is evident in our world and in our churches in a chapter she wrote entitled, "Why Have a Right Heart: A Wesleyan Middle Way as the Way Forward for Holiness Ethics." She identifies the need to reclaim the "middle way" of Wesleyanism and maintain a Christian center. The polarization in the Church of the Nazarene is taking place along generational lines over orthodoxy or orthopraxis. The older generations (traditionalists, boomers) have a modern mindset whereas the younger generations (millennials, Generation Z's) tend to have a post-modern mindset. To the "modern" minds, orthodoxy must be preserved. For "post-modern" minds, orthopraxis is most important. She proposes that a renewal of Wesley's convictions about "orthokardia" or right-heartedness will bring about unity between the generations.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville, Tenn: Kingswood Books, 1994), 146.

⁷⁵ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 145-146.

⁷⁶ Leclerc, "Why Have a Right Heart?"

As the church experiences the power of the Holy Spirit and becomes Christlike, they are transformed and empowered to take Christ into a world of significant human need. Wesleyanism issues a call to both evangelism and social reform. Charles Finney, speaking on the sin of slavery “insisted that the spiritual vitality of the church is sapped, not by her involvement in social questions, but rather by her failure to embrace reform.”⁷⁷ He would argue that silence on the issue of reform means that one agrees with the vices of slavery and other social sins. As generations come together with a unified front, they will be successful in both proclamation and living out God’s Word in such a way that embraces social reform.

Conclusion

Literature and research confirm that the loss of emerging adults to the church is a concern and provides an accurate picture of the problem and a greater understanding of emerging adulthood. Emerging adults want to decide for themselves if they are going to be a part of a church. They are also dreaming big dreams and want to change the world. Many writers highlight churches that are successful in emerging adult retention and intentionality and contextualization is a key to ministering to them. Tech-savvy innovative churches that are strategic in providing ministry for emerging adults and provide relational collaborative leadership, creative programs, and opportunities to grow deeper in their spiritual walk will be more worthwhile to emerging adults.

Relationships are important, and our tendency to be homogeneous and to spend time with people our own age must be overcome with a desire for diversity. Emerging adults greatly benefit from a mentoring relationship with an older adult that is farther along in their spiritual

⁷⁷ Dayton, *Rediscovering an Evangelical Heritage*, 18.

journey and is willing to walk alongside them. An older adult will benefit from walking alongside an emerging adult and experiencing their passion for social change.

Ministry to teenagers provide a foundation for emerging adult ministry and should be one that allows them to experience the transcendence of God. Parents that personally invest in their church and keep their families involved, greatly impacts the emerging adult's decision about continued church involvement.

The church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition provides a theology that is attractive to all generations. As the image of God is restored in individuals and sin is forgiven and cleansed, they are motivated to participate in God's mission in the world. As the church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition gets back to its roots and focuses not only on personal transformation but also community reform then they will appeal to emerging adults as a worthwhile community.

CHAPTER 3

WESLEYAN-HOLINESS AND EMERGING ADULTS' WORLDVIEWS

Introduction

The intergenerational Body of Christ, the church, is called and equipped by the Holy Spirit to take up the mission of Christ and share it with a lost and dying world. Christ died for

everyone and desires that everyone hear the good news of the gospel and be redeemed. The Christian mission from the Wesleyan perspective views holiness as a prime motivation to participate in the mission of God. Leclerc writes, “Holiness theology was intricately intertwined with such causes as abolitionism, the rights of women (particularly to preach), care for the poor, temperance, and many other services directed to the most needy of society.”⁷⁸ Holy people are drawn and empowered by the Holy Spirit to be on God’s mission to redeem and transform their community and the world.

Doctrinal beliefs provide the anchor that enable churches to stay true to the full gospel. To remain effective and relevant in their context, methods of ministry must adapt to fit the culture. But even as churches contextualize to connect to their culture, emerging adults are leaving the church at an alarming rate because they see the church as irrelevant, old fashioned and intolerant. How can churches in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition examine and reshape their culture to be relevant to the younger generations in order to connect them to God and His Body while remaining true to her doctrinal beliefs?

Multiple generations worship together, and these generations have very different mindsets when it comes to methods of ministry. Due to the separation of age-appropriate classes and activities, these generations are not building relationships across generational lines. Moderns focus on personal evangelism while post-moderns tend to lean toward social justice issues. Both are necessary and in alignment with Wesleyan-Holiness theology, but how does the church bring these generations together in unity to be effective in accomplishing God’s holistic mission?

The Wesleyan-Holiness Worldview

⁷⁸ Diane Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2010), 119.

The church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition is the context in which the author has explored the relationship between emerging adults and the church. The Wesleyan-Holiness tradition is hopeful because of the belief that the image of God can be fully restored in people when they have received the Holy Spirit in the experience of entire sanctification. The Wesleyan-Holiness tradition has its roots in the Evangelical Revival in the 18th century in England. John and Charles Wesley, ministers in the Church of England, were founders of the Methodist movement and the Wesleyan tradition is named after them. Inclusiveness is at the heart of Wesleyanism because they teach that Christ died not only for the elect, but for everyone and that God wants everyone to be saved. Sin entered the world through the sin of Adam and Eve and corrupted the image of God in humanity. Sin has marred our relationship with our creator, our creation, ourselves, and our neighbor. But God in his love for humanity sent his Son Jesus into our world to atone for our sins and restore what was lost in the fall.⁷⁹

The Holy Spirit plays a prominent role in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition and is at work in the sinner's life drawing one to God even before one comes to faith in Christ. This is a function of "prevenient grace" and is the grace that woos us to a relationship with God. "We are not on our own in our attempt to find God. God first seeks us...we are not only saved by grace but also sanctified by grace, which results in a real inner transformation that expresses itself in outward change."⁸⁰ Once a sinner has repented of one's sins and has been justified, the Spirit is active in their lives enabling them to grow in their relationship with Christ. At a crisis point in this Christian journey in an act of consecration one becomes completely devoted to God and filled with the Spirit, empowering them to be His witness and cleansing them from original sin

⁷⁹ Ron Benefiel, "Our Wesleyan Tradition: Wesleyan Faith and Practice and the PLNU Mission" (n.d.).

⁸⁰ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 26.

and “restoring in us the possibility of love for God and neighbor.”⁸¹ This cleansing by the Holy Spirit, which frees one from the bondage of original sin and enables them to live a life pleasing to God, is also known as Christian perfection. Shortly after the Civil War, Methodist pastor John C. McClintock “declared that Christian perfection was the central theme of the Bible and the chief goal of Wesleyan piety.”⁸² When God transforms individuals and fills them with his love for neighbor then entire communities can also be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the spirit of Wesleyanism, Phineas F. Bresee founded The First Church of the Nazarene in 1895 in the Glory Barn of Los Angeles to reach out and minister to the poor. David Basic writes in his book, *The City: Urban Churches in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition*, “Bresee believed the conditions were ripe for perfect love and Christlike ministry to the lowest levels of society.”⁸³ Bresee demonstrated his commitment to the poor by giving up his prestigious position in the Methodist Episcopal Church to work with a rescue mission in downtown Los Angeles. “Bresee had tapped into his God-given passion and divine calling—a missional commitment of holiness evangelism to the toiling masses of the world.”⁸⁴ And this was the foundation upon which the Church of the Nazarene was born. But not many years after Bresee’s death in 1915, the focus of the Church of the Nazarene became more evangelistic to the neglect of social issues such as poverty and social justice. This temporary setback from a focus on social issues to a focus on individualistic evangelism and fundamentalist theology was named “The Great Reversal” by Nazarene historian, Timothy Smith. This setback was the norm for about 50 years

⁸¹ Benefiel, “Our Wesleyan Tradition” 8.

⁸² Timothy L. Smith, *CALLED UNTO HOLINESS: Volume One - The Story of the Nazarenes: The Formative Years*, First Edition (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 1962), 15.

⁸³ David A. Basic, *The City: Urban Churches in the Wesleyan-Holiness Tradition* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2020), Loc. 292, Kindle.

⁸⁴ Basic, *The City*, Loc. 292, Kindle.

until Tom Nees established Community of Hope in Washington, D.C. to begin once again to meet the social needs of his community as John and Charles Wesley had taught.⁸⁵

The Wesleys taught that salvation is not only for individual transformation but for community and social transformation as well. When one has experienced the cleansing of reigning sin and has been filled with the Holy Spirit, they are filled with God's love. This character of God's love enables them to love other people as Christ loves them. In fact, John Wesley strongly encouraged Christians to take part in works of mercy, such as visiting the sick or giving to the poor, to build one's Christian character and become more like Christ.⁸⁶ Emerging adults have a heart for confronting social issues and long to be a part of a church that is not only evangelistic but is also addressing suffering and injustice in the world. As the church recaptures the very heart of Wesleyanism which includes social justice in its ministry, then emerging adults will see it as relevant and have the desire to stay engaged. And if they stay engaged, they may provide the motivation in reversing "The Great Reversal" and revive the heart of Wesleyanism!

The Great Reversal

Before this sociological movement known as The Great Reversal occurred, there was interest in personal evangelism, but also a strong belief that "personal transformation accompanied social transformation."⁸⁷ This personal transformation led to a commitment to those in need and the building of orphanages, homes for unwed mothers, and rescue missions. In the early twentieth century a dichotomy formed between two types of Christianity: one that saved

⁸⁵ Ron Benefiel, "Wesleyan Missional Theology for Urban and Multicultural Contexts Zoom Class."

⁸⁶ Benefiel, "Christian Holiness and the Wesleyan Mission of Mercy."

⁸⁷ David Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Reconciling Evangelism and Social Concern* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 11.

souls for heaven (the evangelical wing of the church) and another (the liberal wing) that worked to change earthly social structures. David Moberg authored a book on the great reversal and argued that with the modernist-fundamentalist debate, revivalists became soul winners and taught that true social reform begins with the individual not with society. Soong-Chan Rah is a professor of Church Growth and Evangelism and of whom David Busic writes,

Soong-Chan Rah notes, “There was a time when evangelicals had a balanced position that gave proper attention to both evangelism and social concern, but a great reversal early in this (twentieth) century led to a lopsided emphasis upon evangelism and omission of most aspects of social involvement.” Moberg’s and Smith’s work reiterated that there can be no social gospel without evangelism—because welfare does not eliminate personal or spiritual emptiness. Likewise, personal evangelism that does not address unjust and discriminating social systems fails to deal with the systemic sins of society. Evangelism and social concern go hand in hand. This principle is true to Christian faith generally, and Wesleyan roots specifically.⁸⁸

The Church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition includes an emphasis on both personal transformation in Christ and social reform, and both must be addressed by the church in the 21st century. Could God be stirring the hearts of emerging adults to give social reform a platform once again? Is it possible for generations to come together to provide a more balanced ministry that includes both a focus on evangelism and social reform?

Adam Taylor argues that emerging adult believe that social justice should be a part of the Church’s DNA, and they are more likely to attend a church that is proactive in changing unjust systems. Adam Taylor wrote, *Mobilizing Hope: Faith-Inspired Activism for a Post-Civil Rights Generation* as an emerging adult, to inspire and empower his generation of Christian young people to get involved in civic activism that seeks to change unjust systems such as systemic racism. Taylor writes, “A younger generation is growing increasingly thirsty for new patterns that reflect a renewed commitment to social justice. They are responding to the ever-present

⁸⁸ Busic, *The City*, Loc. 396, Kindle.

gravitational pull toward justice that has moved their predecessors to action.”⁸⁹ Taylor is in a unique situation to speak into racial issues because he is biracial; his mother is black, and his father is white so he can identify with both sides of many racial discussions. He encourages activism that does not alienate or offend, which he believes is counterproductive. Instead, he encourages tactics that produce the transformative power to change hearts and minds.

Emerging Adult Worldview

Since post-moderns seem to be drawn toward social issues, one might come to the conclusion that they are more naturally Wesleyan than the moderns. But before coming to this conclusion one must consider several issues. First, emerging adults who stay in the church are not hearing the message of entire sanctification and therefore, are not experiencing the hope that the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition teaches. Wesleyan-Holiness churches have sacrificed their distinctive call to preach holiness as they have strived to keep up with generic evangelicalism for the sake of numerical growth. And, in a culture of consumerism, preaching the sacrificial call to discipleship is challenging.⁹⁰ Second, there are several factors that must be explored when understanding the spiritual decline of many emerging adults. These factors are theological deconstructionism, postmodernism, and Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). It is important to take these into account when addressing reasons for emerging adults losing interest in and departing from the church. Theological Deconstructionism was made popular partly by the late Rachel Held Evans in her book *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving and Finding the Church*.

⁸⁹ Adam Taylor and Jim Wallis, *Mobilizing Hope: Faith-Inspired Activism for a Post-Civil Rights Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 13.

⁹⁰ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 16-17.

Theological Deconstructionism

Some emerging adults who grew up in the evangelical church go through a process called theological deconstructionism. They stop practicing typical spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, attending church services, and praying, to create spiritual practices that are a better fit for them. When interviewed, 21-year-old Laura described in tears, the spiritual abuse she experienced growing up in her evangelical church that legalistically encouraged the practice of spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading and church attendance. This constant harassment made her feel trapped and forced to do something she did not feel necessary to be good enough or to be a Christian. Technology plays a part in this church disconnect with the accessibility of faith-based podcasts and videos that create more individualized religious experiences for emerging adults.⁹¹ Laura has since replaced Bible reading and church attendance with a variety of podcasts that she can freely choose. Shaya Aguilar, student at Pepperdine University says, “While today’s twentysomethings are fiercely independent trailblazers who are leery of conforming to traditions, the desire for spiritual connections, community, and shared experiences continues to fuel their behavior. The struggle for most young adults is discovering what their faith looks like, how it influences their behavior, and how to embrace ambiguity rather than run from it.”⁹² Theological deconstructionism is a period of examining one’s faith from the inside looking for strengths and weaknesses and making it one’s own.

These emerging adults might have grown up in churches that did not introduce them to a transformational God or inspire them with a world-changing vision. When churches teach and preach about the love of God but do nothing to relieve the suffering of the poor or be involved in

⁹¹ Sara Bunch, “Catching the Drift,” *Pepperdine Magazine*, (Spring 2021).

⁹² Bunch, “Catching the Drift,” 43.

bringing about racial justice or reconciliation, or address other major significant issues, they leave their young people discouraged, confused and uninspired to stay faithful to the church. Sam Hailes describes deconstructionism this way: “It’s about taking ownership over what you believe and potentially letting go of some of the things that no longer work.”⁹³ It is the belief that God is part of social progress, and that ethical and moral thinking is a part of that progress. These young people are craving non-judgmental places where they can ask hard questions, but unfortunately many church leaders are more comfortable with merely providing answers rather than sitting down with them and exploring the big questions of life.⁹⁴

To enable Christians to grow spiritually in their Christian journey, Wesley taught the importance of employing means of grace in the life of the believer. The means of grace are like a funnel that allows the grace of God to flow into our lives. These means of grace are “outward signs, words, or actions, ordained by God, to be ordinary channels whereby he might convey to persons prevenient, justifying, or sanctifying grace.”⁹⁵ By practicing these means of grace such as Bible reading, prayer, church attendance, and the taking of the Sacraments, the Christian draws closer to God and experiences transformation in heart and life. By attending to the means of grace one becomes who one was created to be. Participating in the means of grace should not look like discipline, because it is never our discipline alone that enables us to be Christlike but rather our availability to receive the compassionate and merciful grace God has for us.⁹⁶

⁹³ Sam Hailes, “Deconstructing Faith: Meet the Evangelicals Who Are Questioning Everything,” Premier Christianity, (April 2019): 2, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/past-issues/2019/April-2019/Deconstructing-faith-Meet-the-evangelicals-who-are-questioning-everything>

⁹⁴ Hailes, “Deconstructing Faith” 2.

⁹⁵ John Wesley, “Journal (March 4, 1738) in The Works of John Wesley”, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols., CD-ROM edition (Franklin, TN: Providence House, 1994), 1:86.

⁹⁶ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 263-265.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism has greatly affected today's emerging adults. One of the greatest differences between modernism and postmodernism is seen in the way that knowledge is acquired. Emerging adults are finding their own reality not through facts (modernism) but through experience (postmodernism). Baugh and Hurst describe the differences in knowledge acquisition between the modern and postmodern period in this way,

In modern societies knowledge is equated with science and is contrasted with story. Science produces reliable knowledge, while story is considered unreliable and therefore not a source for knowledge...To the postmodern mind, however, knowledge must be useful, and it is acquired through experience. Emotion, imagination, and story are all valid means by which the postmodern person seeks knowledge.⁹⁷

Webber relates this postmodern way of acquiring knowledge to truth when he writes "We have entered into an era where propositional truth is not nearly so important as the experience of it."⁹⁸

Wesley did not ascribe to propositional truth either. One's experience confirms the truth of Scripture and if this is not the case, then Christians should examine their interpretation of Scripture. Wesley reexamined and reinterpreted Scripture in light of the experiences of his Methodist people. Wesley's quadrilateral affirmed the idea of *Sola Scriptura* and placed the authority of Scripture as the primary source of knowledge. But he also recognized that experience, tradition, and reason come into play when interpreting Scripture.⁹⁹ Can this experience of truth become a part of our time in Scripture and in worship?

Richard Rohr's tricycle of faith describes the ways that Christians acquire knowledge. The three wheels of the tricycle represent experience, tradition, and Scripture. Rohr makes the

⁹⁷ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*, 12.

⁹⁸ Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 196.

⁹⁹ Leclerc, *Discovering Christian Holiness*, 38.

argument that the front wheel is experience because tradition and Scripture will always be interpreted through our experiences. Even when people believe in *Sola Scriptura* or stands staunchly on church tradition, they need to realize that they hold those beliefs because of their experiences.¹⁰⁰

Emerging adults are motivated by experiencing God and there are many ways to participate in this experience. One way to experience God is through awe-inspiring worship and prayer. Another way to experience God is by ministering in the world to relieve suffering and injustice. Both are valid ways to draw one to God and experience him and his love for humanity and older and younger generations may experience God differently, but they both experience God. Baugh and Hurst wrote “Since the church in America is primarily an institution steeped in modernism, most church leaders have little idea how to connect with young adults in America.”¹⁰¹ Churches that provide ministry that enables congregants to experience God by differing means of grace may find themselves more appealing to younger people.

Emerging adults leaving the church has been described as a disciple-making problem. Many emerging adults may feel like they are spiritually healthy simply because they accepted Christ as their savior at some point in their lives. Their sins have been forgiven and they are good to go. They fail to realize that their experience of salvation is just the beginning, and that God wants them to grow in their faith and spiritual formation. It is important to help emerging adults catch a vision for true spiritual maturation that is rooted in the gospel of Christ and that penetrates to the depths of the heart.¹⁰² But discipling post-moderns can be challenging for any

¹⁰⁰ Richard Rohr, “The Tricycle: Scripture, Tradition and Experience,” Center for Action and Contemplation, Another Way to See the Bible, no. Lesson 4 (2018), https://cac.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Bible_Lesson-4_The-Tricycle-Scripture-Experience-and-Tradition.pdf.

¹⁰¹ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*, 12.

¹⁰² Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*.

church. Baugh and Hurst describe why discipleship programs with post-moderns can be so frustrating. “Discipleship programs are usually predicated on the idea that if I can convince another to follow a set of behaviors (Bible study, prayer time, church attendance), he or she will someday live a sold-out life for Christ. Your own experience tells you this isn’t true for many people, and it’s certainly not true for post-moderns.”¹⁰³ They go on to say, “Discipling others is not getting them to do what you want. It’s helping them develop a new way of thinking for themselves.”¹⁰⁴ Discipleship programs that were used decades ago may no longer work today to teach and motivate the postmodern mindset.

To the postmodern thinker, experience informs truth, and no amount of teaching or cajoling will convince them of a truth until they have experienced that truth. An emerging adult is not motivated to pray or read their Bible until they are motivated by their own experience. The goal in discipling emerging adults “is to ignite in their own imaginations an experience that is compelling enough that it convinces them of truth.”¹⁰⁵ Emerging adult spiritual formation is not a process of therapeutic self-improvement but rather a process of reorienting the heart’s affections, taking up the cross of Christ, and learning how to live for Christ in all of life.¹⁰⁶ This may not be obtained in a Sunday School classroom but learned while out in the world serving in a Honduran orphanage alongside a mentor.

Post-moderns have been raised in a culture that implicitly instills ideological and moral relativism--thus what matters most is what you do. But what one does, must stem from a renewed and righteous heart full of love. Leclerc writes that a renewal of Wesley’s convictions

¹⁰³ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*, 57.

¹⁰⁴ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*.

about “orthokardia”—right-heartedness, must be the emphasis of the church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition as the way toward holy living. Leclerc draws from Mildred Bangs Wynkoop in describing holiness as a heart so full of love that sin is pushed out, and this full heart motivates one for action. Leclerc argues that the biblical mandate to daily pick up our cross and follow Christ “leads us to fight injustice, resist any disregard of human dignity, and perhaps work against public policy that stands against the marginalized.”¹⁰⁷ The way forward in reaching the heart of Wesleyanism is to focus on the love of Christ and the love he gives us for humanity.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) is a common belief among young people that the church should be aware of because it greatly influencing how emerging adults view a relationship with God. Emerging adults steeped in MTD have religious beliefs, but these beliefs do little to form who they are as people or influence how they live. This majority posture among emerging adults is “supplanting Christianity as the dominant religion in American churches.”¹⁰⁸ Those influenced by MTD view God as distant and only interested in intervening in our lives when called upon or to resolve a problem. They see the purpose of life to be personal happiness, self-fulfillment, and enough goodness to earn one’s way into heaven. Christianity has little to do with God’s mission in the world or with building the corporate identity of God’s people in the church. MTD is a call to merely loving others and being nice.¹⁰⁹

The basic tenets of MTD are:

¹⁰⁷ Leclerc, “Why Have a Right Heart?” 70.

¹⁰⁸ Dean, *Almost Christian*, Loc. 155, Kindle.

¹⁰⁹ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*.

- There is a god who created the world and watches over it.
- God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other and he teaches this through the Bible and through most other world religions.
- The most important thing in life is to be happy and feel good about oneself.
- God is only involved in one's life when needed.
- Good people go to heaven when they die.¹¹⁰

MTD hinders emerging adults from truly understanding the sacrificial call on their lives as followers of Christ and from experiencing the transcendence of God. Setran and Kiesling note this about MTD, “Ultimately, this leads to a path in which happiness becomes far more important than an unwavering and sacrificial submission to God and his kingdom....the individual can determine which parts of the faith to keep or discard, ultimately crafting a God in his or her own image.”¹¹¹ Unfortunately many emerging adults practice MTD because they were taught it in the church. When churches have low expectations and focus on “meeting needs” rather than on radical discipleship, MTD is the natural result.¹¹²

Understanding theological deconstructionism, postmodernism, and MTD provides a clearer picture of the context in which the church ministers when they embrace emerging adults and seek to reach them. Despite these factors that discourage emerging adults from church involvement, the Holy Spirit is still active in drawing young people into relationship with him and raising them up to be active in his mission.

¹¹⁰ Dean, *Almost Christian*.

¹¹¹ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 24.

¹¹² Dean, *Almost Christian*, Loc. 540, Kindle.

Church Mission

Emerging adults want to be about changing the world for good and they want their lives to matter. It is important to emerging adults that the Body of Christ reach out to relieve suffering and to be involved in social justice issues. Unfortunately, some churches have become either self-focused or focused on other ministries and have forgotten the poor and suffering in their communities. This has been seen especially in cities as churches in the past moved away from dangerous and poverty-stricken areas and into the more comfortable and friendly suburbs. Bryan Stone writes “As the Christian church in the United States has progressively abandoned the inner city physically, economically, and spiritually, it has operated by a kind of mass dynamism toward security, comfort, and wealth The church has in many respects actually become a middle-class church with a dangerous distance from the poor.”¹¹³ God’s love motivates his followers to move into suffering with a heart of compassion, instead of away from it, and Christians of all ages can be motivated by compassionate ministries. God is on a mission and the church has been invited to be a part of it. But God’s mission can so easily be relegated to second place as Christians work hard to build up the church.

A Kingdom-oriented ecclesiology in which the work of the church in the world is the focus is one in which the church’s identity is defined by God’s mission. Reggie McNeal says, “In a church-centered worldview, we confuse what the church does when it gathers—its worship, practice of sacraments, and teaching—as the core of its identity and role. These are not the identity of the church, any more than a haircut or wardrobe conveys the essence of a person’s

¹¹³ Bryan Stone, *Compassionate Ministry: Theological Foundations* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 90.

identity.”¹¹⁴ The church must get away from its church-centered story and adopt its Kingdom-centered narrative. Christians who live out of a Kingdom-focused narrative do not compartmentalize their lives into church-life and secular-life. Instead, they see every activity and relationship as an opportunity to be a blessing and to demonstrate Christ’s love. Building a strong church becomes secondary to building God’s Kingdom here on earth.¹¹⁵

Wesleyan-Holiness denominations are marked by both individual conversion and a stress on social action that is driven by the needs of the poor and the danger of riches. David Busic says that, “Compassionate ministries-based churches are the most prevalent Nazarene presence in cities due to the fact that compassion is woven into the ecclesiological fiber of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition.”¹¹⁶ Emerging adults tend to be extremely inclusive and social issues are seen as including people instead of excluding them and they will give their hearts and lives to causes if they are significant to them.¹¹⁷ Older adults have the experience, the wisdom, the desire, and the means to put compassion into action. Could we be at a time when God will use intergenerational collaboration to draw the church back to the roots of Wesleyanism? Does the culture of the church reflect this mission?

Church Culture

Every church has a culture that sends a message to those inside and outside the church. Church culture can be described as how one feels when they walk into a church, or when one

¹¹⁴ Reggie McNeal, *Kingdom Come: Why We Must Give Up Our Obsession with Fixing the Church--and What We Should Do Instead* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), 90.

¹¹⁵ McNeal, *Kingdom Come*.

¹¹⁶ Busic, *The City*, Loc. 2158, Kindle.

¹¹⁷ Windle and Damazio, *Eight Innovations*.

describes their church to their friends. Is there a feeling of love, acceptance, and excitement? Time and effort are spent every year by pastors and church boards crafting mission statements and setting vision for churches, but how much consideration is given to the culture of the church? Mission and vision statements define what your church believes, but your culture reveals how your church behaves and how you do what you do both intentionally and unintentionally. Leaders can cast vision, but leaders cannot cast culture. Vision flows from the top down, whereas culture bubbles from the bottom up. Every church has its own unique culture and when reaching and retaining emerging adults, culture trumps everything. Emerging adults are not leaving churches because of their mission or vision statements, or lack thereof, but because of their culture. They leave because of the way things are done, how their church makes them feel, and not for the truths that are taught.¹¹⁸ Leaders who want to learn if their church culture is attractive to younger generations should seek out emerging adults and have honest conversations with them about their church culture. Open and honest relationships with emerging adults enables them to know their input is valued in their church and enables leaders to be able to see the church through the eyes of an emerging adult.

The artifact *Grace Space: listening for understanding* is a seven-week intergenerational small group curriculum that provides a safe place for openness and honesty. No one knows how to reach and retain emerging adults as well as emerging adults do. They are uniquely equipped to be a part of the mission of the church as they reach their generation for Christ. Spending time together is important if older adults and emerging adults are going to learn from each other. We are building a culture that either attracts or repels emerging adults and if a leader wants to change their church culture it will require listening to others. Leaders must be willing to confront reality

¹¹⁸ Rodriguez, *Growing Young*.

to change it. This can be difficult and will require humility but is very important because a toxic culture will cancel a leader's vision, but a healthy culture will accelerate it.¹¹⁹ *Grace Space* encourages conversations that will build relationships and shed light on aspects of the church culture that might be overlooked if leaders are unaware.

Conclusion

The Wesleyan-Holiness worldview is hopeful because the Holy Spirit is at work in the world drawing sinners to God. He is also at work enabling consecrated Christians to live a life pleasing to God in the world as the Holy Spirit cleanses the believer of original sin and fills them with His love. This love draws Spirit-filled Christians into places of poverty, injustices, and depravity to be Christ to the marginalized and to be active in their deliverance. Transformation in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition involves hope for both the individual and the community.

The emerging adult worldview encompasses social action as well, but they are not learning about the cleansing and transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the church. They are influenced by factors such as MTD that teaches them that God is there to simply meet their needs and not to transform them into his radical disciples. Many emerging adults who are disillusioned by the church go through a period of theological deconstruction in which they examine their spiritual beliefs and discard anything that doesn't work for them anymore. Real life experience plays a significant role in the emerging adults' faith journey and to the postmodern mind, knowledge is acquired through experience. Emerging adults are motivated by experiencing God and they experience him through awe inspiring worship and real-life transformation. They also

¹¹⁹ Rodriguez, *Growing Young*.

experience God by being involved in social justice issues, relieving the needs of the poor and the marginalized.

The Wesleyan context provides a rich setting for emerging adults with its theology of life transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit and empowerment to serve those in need. Is it possible for the Wesleyan-Holiness worldview and the emerging adult worldview to come together to provide an ecclesiology that is amenable to both?

CHAPTER 4

A WESLEYAN-HOLINESS MODEL THAT WORKS

Introduction

We have explored the many reasons why emerging adults are leaving the church, but one must realize that there are emerging adults that decide to stay engaged in their churches. Some emerging adults go away to attend college, but then come back to their home churches and begin vibrant ministries that reach and retain their age group. There are other emerging adults who sense a call to ministry and stay engaged in the church and eventually end up pastoring their own churches. Reasons for their staying are varied but many of them stay engaged in church because they experience a sense of belonging there, they have a vibrant relationship with Christ, have been baptized after their conversion experience, and have a high view of Scripture; they grew up attending church and have a good relationship with their parents. This chapter will explore these factors and introduce the artifact, *Grace Space: Listening for Understanding* as a tool to bring generations together to increase emerging adult retention while maintaining doctrinal integrity. *Grace Space* also encourages generations to explore a more balanced and holistic ministry together.

Sense of Belonging in Emerging Adults

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, "belongingness" is third. Once physiological and safety needs are met, people need places to belong. Belongingness characterizes a healthy community and is important in the realm of spiritual care and formation. Emerging adults especially need to

know that they belong. Abbie Smith says this about emerging adults, “College-age people don’t cut themselves, suffer from eating disorders, change majors seven times, change churches ten times or abandon church altogether because they’re flighty. They do so because they don’t know where they belong.”¹²⁰ Emerging adults that experience a sense of belonging in their church will be more likely to stay engaged. Megan G. Brown talks about this sense of belonging in her article entitled, “Relationships Matter: The Impact of Relationships upon Emerging Adult Retention”. She says this about emerging adults, “they are seeking deep relationships, safety, care, a family-feel, and opportunities to meaningfully contribute to, and be a part of, the church body.”¹²¹ Emerging adults will have a sense of belonging when they engage in authentic dialogue, are involved in ministry, experience warmth and community, and have a mentor. Relational ministry that seeks out emerging adults for conversation will enhance this sense of belonging in emerging adults and help them find their place in the church.

Emerging Adults Have a Sense of Belonging When They Engage in Authentic Dialogue

Emerging adults have a lot to contribute to the church because they are at a phase in their lives where they can think critically and can dream of a great future. Plus, no one knows the needs of the emerging adult or how to reach them better than they do. The church should be a place where emerging adults feel comfortable inviting their unchurched friends. Church leaders are wise to engage emerging adults in conversation and to consider their input when making decisions about ministry and the church.

¹²⁰ Allen and Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 49.

¹²¹ Megan G. Brown, “Relationships Matter: The Impact of Relationships upon Emerging Adult Retention.” *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 1: (2016), 19.

Sharon Parks discusses the emerging adults' capacity for critical thought when she writes,

The emerging adult capacity for critical thought also makes possible a sense of the ideal. Emerging adults can dream of a better world than that which they find around them. What's more, they long to play a role in forming that world rather than simply fitting into the real world as they presently find it.¹²²

Emerging adults can dream of a better world and want to be involved in the process of changing it. Churches can be energized with new creative ideas that come from the heart of the emerging adult as they dialogue about their dreams for themselves and their church. As church leaders and older generations dialogue with emerging adults, understanding, growth, and change occur that will benefit all parties and the church. True dialogue about significant topics can bridge the gap between the generations and enrich the church with new and innovative ideas. It will build confidence in the emerging adult that allows them to see themselves and their friends in the space called the church.

Emerging Adults Have a Sense of Belonging When They are Involved in Ministry

Being invited into ministry gives emerging adults a sense of belonging and when they use their spiritual gifts to serve with others in the church, they experience community. When serving in community, relationships with people of all ages are enjoyed, and emerging adults know they are valued because they are contributing members of the church. People of all ages like to be needed because it gives them significance. Everyone fills a unique role in the church and everyone, including emerging adults, are empowered by the Spirit to serve in the body. Powell, Mulden, and Griffin say,

¹²² Parks, *Big Questions*, 86.

When young people in your church and community know they are needed and invited into participation just like everyone else, they sense that they play a *load-bearing role* in the congregation. They become purposeful co-participants in the life of the body rather than junior participants or future members. Their voices, hands, and hearts matter *now* for the ongoing life and work of the congregation, and they know it.¹²³

Emerging adults who are invited to play a load-bearing role in ministry will more likely stay involved in the church because they know that their contribution is important and that they are making a difference in the ministry of the church and in the world.

Emerging Adults Have a Sense of Belonging When They Experience Warmth and Community

Emerging adults are drawn to places where they are genuinely accepted and loved. They will be more likely to return to a church that feels like family. Churches that exude warmth offer emerging adults a safe and loving environment to ask their questions and explore their faith. Churches that are caring and accepting create a safe place where relationships can be formed, and community enjoyed. When community is experienced in the church environment, the emerging adult will be less likely to search for it elsewhere. The church can provide a warm community for emerging adults that enables them to live out their dreams, to share their struggles, and to ask their probing questions. Packard and Hope write, “Community happens when people share life together, when they see each other repeatedly and share experiences. These commonalities lead to a feeling that people can be counted on and to a shared sense of reality and values.”¹²⁴ The church provides a safe, warm, comfortable community for these young people to receive the support and help to navigate their big decisions.

¹²³ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 209.

¹²⁴ Packard and Hope, *Church Refugees*, 40.

Emerging adulthood can be a very stressful phase of life. This is a time when significant life-changing decisions such as education, employment, and marriage are being made. They might be researching the numerous career options available and trying to decide which one to pursue. They may be deciding if they are going to continue to pursue the faith that their parents instilled in them as a child and adolescent. *Growing Young* researchers say, “Over 80 percent of the young people in the congregation we surveyed agree that their church involvement decreases their stress.”¹²⁵ Being a part of a church family and having someone older and further along in their faith journey to talk to about these big decisions can be life changing for emerging adults.

Emerging Adults Have a Sense of Belonging When They Have a Mentor

Emerging adults greatly benefit from conversations about truth, life, God, and the church with a mentor. As emerging adults are navigating through life and faith, trying to understand what is true, and what is not, they benefit from someone older to connect with and talk to during this phase of life. They need to know that someone cares enough about them to be a safe place for them to express their doubts and questions. A meaningful relationship with someone older in the congregation is a huge factor in keeping emerging adults connected to the church body. This relationship might be with an older couple who invites a young person over for dinner. It might be with someone who sends texts, cards, and care packages to them while they are in college. It might be with someone who prays for them, notices when they are missing from church, and follows up on them.

Mentoring relationships are a key to keeping emerging adults interested and connected to the church body as a whole. Parks states, “Emerging adults embody a post-adolescent quality of

¹²⁵ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 102.

new strength yet are at the same time appropriately dependent on others, particularly the presence and quality of mentors and mentoring environments—educational, economic, political, religious, and familial.”¹²⁶ Emerging adults are moving toward becoming independent but are also in need of the wisdom and guidance that an older adult can provide. Parks goes on to say, “The good mentor simply recognizes that the younger adult is still dependent in substantial ways on Authority outside the self, and at the same time the mentor is a champion of the competence and potential the younger life represents.”¹²⁷ Relational mentorship may be described as authentic guidance as a mentee walks alongside a mentor. A good mentor instills confidence in the emerging adult which enables them to make wise decisions. Scripture teaches that Jesus’ disciples learned who God was and how to live for him as they walked along with, and spent time with their mentor, Jesus.

Relational mentorship involves being available to another and listening more than speaking. Keith Anderson writes “Spiritual mentoring is not a complicated process requiring technical training and complex protocol. It is essential, authentic and maybe even natural human speech that is focused, disciplined and nurtured by training for one of the hardest things we do: listening reflectively to another.”¹²⁸ A good relational mentor asks great questions and listens more than they speak. Mentoring can be described as spiritual companionship or hospitality that is dynamic and wise, and that pays attention to the presence of God in everything.¹²⁹ As

¹²⁶ Parks, *Big Questions*, 13.

¹²⁷ Parks, *Big Questions*, 168.

¹²⁸ Keith R. Anderson, *Reading Your Life’s Story: An Invitation to Spiritual Mentoring* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016). Loc. 86, 93, Kindle.

¹²⁹ Anderson, *Reading Your Life’s Story*.

generations seek God together in an open authentic atmosphere, friendships are formed, doctrinal truth is affirmed, and the ministry of the church is more complete because all ages are involved.

A mentoring relationship is mutual in that both the mentor and mentee approach the relationship with a deep humility and desire to learn from the relationship. Scott Wilcher encourages older adults to take the initiative in building relationships with emerging adults. He writes,

When we leave our safe places to move toward a young person in imitation of Christ, we get to be ‘incarnational’, or Jesus ‘in the flesh’ to them. In those encounters, they will get a glimpse of Jesus. Some people only get a few examples in a lifetime, but most Christians can remember a time when an adult believer persistently moved toward them when they were young and demonstrated the love of Christ in a way that was important for their faith development.¹³⁰

A mentoring relationship between an older mentor and an emerging adult mentee can encourage healthy dialogue between two different cultures and can bring about spiritual growth for both parties.

Mentoring is carried out through average Christians doing what they normally do but inviting someone to join them. A young mom might invite a college student over to help with gardening and they can talk while pulling weeds together. A retiree might need some help cutting down some trees and an emerging adult might be able to help. As they work together, they can talk about their relationship with the Lord and things that matter. It is important that discipleship methods are current and tie into the culture one is targeting.¹³¹ Dunn and Sundene describe mentoring as “building a relationship with another person that encourages, challenges, coaches and equips that person to more deeply connect to the trust, submission and love of Christ that

¹³⁰ Scott Wilcher, *The Orphaned Generation: The Father's Heart for Connecting Youth and Young Adults to Your Church*. (Chesapeake: The Upstream Project, 2010), 71.

¹³¹ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*, 86.

dwells within by the power of his Spirit.”¹³² Some mentoring relationships are highly structured while others are more informal. They can be intergenerational, which is the preferred method, but may also be between peers. They may be short-term relationships of a year or less or last many years. “The non-negotiable center of a disciple-making relationship is learning from Christ in a manner that leads to a deepening relational connection to him and his trust, submission and love.”¹³³ As mentors build relationships with their mentees they have opportunities to identify growth potential, encourage them to keep their eyes on their goals, help them build trust in God, enable them to surrender to God, and to grow in all areas of their lives.¹³⁴

Trustworthy relationships are fundamental to the discipleship process and the tool *Grace Space: listening for understanding* provides the opportunity for these intergenerational relationships to be formed and experienced. Christians cannot grow nor face their sinfulness alone. Safe people are needed on the journey. Discipleship should be a relationship between people who want a mature relationship with Christ who spend time together, encourage each other, read the Bible together, and pray for each other. Discipleship in the postmodern world is teaching the Bible by modeling it in the context of real life. It is not a program but is holistic in that it defines the entire purpose of the Christian’s life, which is to become like Jesus. Even though bringing together different cultures in conversation has its challenges, the role of the church is to create the right kind of environment for this to happen.¹³⁵

Setran and Kiesling use the analogy of a tour guide to describe mentorship. An effective tour guide would never just show a tourist pictures of their trip in order to save them the trouble

¹³² Sundene and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 65.

¹³³ Sundene and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*, 67.

¹³⁴ Sundene and Dunn, *Shaping the Journey of Emerging Adults*.

¹³⁵ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*.

of going. Nor would they just hand them their tickets and wave them goodbye. A good tour guide goes with them, pointing out what they should see and experience. An emerging adult mentor does not merely show the emerging adult what their experience of emerging adulthood will look like, nor do they just leave them on their own to figure it all out. An effective mentor walks alongside of the emerging adult and points out places where God is at work and where they can find truth. The goal of mentorship is to open spaces within the emerging adult so they can encounter God and experience a transforming relationship with Christ.¹³⁶

Relationship with Christ, Scripture and Baptism

There are many reasons that emerging adults stay engaged in the church body, but the primary reason is that they are born again Christians and have truly experienced the forgiveness of sins and have put their faith in Jesus Christ.¹³⁷ In the Christian tradition, when sinners confess their sins, repent, and ask God for forgiveness, they are forgiven, and Jesus enters into their lives and saves them from their life of sin. They become a new creation because of their relationship with Christ. They are not only saved *from* something (sin) but saved *for* something (mission). As they grow in grace, they become more aware of God and his working in their lives. There comes a point when Christians completely consecrate themselves to God, and he entirely sanctifies them with his Holy Spirit, breaks the power of original sin, and empowers them to be his witnesses. When emerging adults experience God's forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit at work in their lives, there is a new desire to be a part of the body of Christ and be actively involved in his mission in the world.

¹³⁶ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 67.

¹³⁷ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*, Loc. 576, Kindle.

Emerging adults' view of Scripture, whether they believe that Scripture was inspired by God, influences their decision of whether or not to stay engaged in the church. John Wesley held a high view of Scripture and consistently identified it as the most basic authority for determining Christian belief and practice. He also believed Scripture to be effective in awakening people to their spiritual corruption and acts as a guide for their spiritual transformation.¹³⁸ Having a high view of Scripture influences one's commitment to Scripture and to the church. Crites and Parr write "Those who stayed in church had a higher view of Scripture than those who strayed from church. As a matter of fact, they were 25 times more likely to have strayed if they had a low view of Scripture."¹³⁹ Teaching the truth of Scripture to children, teenagers, and to emerging adults is vital in their spiritual formation and gives them the ability to stand on the convictions of their belief in the Holy Scriptures of God when they are presented with a secular humanistic view.¹⁴⁰ When Christians meditate on Scripture and use their imagination, they can experience God in a real and life-changing way that allows them to grow in their knowledge and understanding of him.¹⁴¹

Engaging in the sacrament of baptism following one's decision to become a Christian is influential in an emerging adult's decision to stay in the church. Wesley considered baptism to be a means of grace that marked the initiation of the life of holiness in the believer.¹⁴² Those who were raised attending church but were not baptized following their salvation experience were 400% more likely to disengage from the church as an adult than those who were baptized. Infant

¹³⁸ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 36-37.

¹³⁹ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*, Loc. 2326, Kindle.

¹⁴⁰ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*, Loc. 2326, Kindle.

¹⁴¹ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*, 42.

¹⁴² Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 222.

baptism is practiced in many churches, but research shows that those who were baptized as infants were much more likely to leave the church than those who were baptized following their salvation experience. “Participants baptized as infants were 184% more likely to have strayed from church compared to those who were baptized at an alternate time in their life.”¹⁴³ Baptism following one’s salvation experience and making it a memorable occasion greatly increases emerging adult retention.¹⁴⁴ This should not discourage parents from baptizing their babies but should enable parents to understand the significance of the sacraments in the life of their children and teenagers.

Family Relationships

Family relationships play a vital role to the emerging adult’s spiritual health. In fact, in Crites and Parr’s survey, the number one reason for staying in the church was “family upbringing”. They also found that most people accept Christ before the age of sixteen. Parents who take their children and teenagers regularly to church increase the chances that they will still be engaged in church after high school graduation. They also discovered that children who stay in the sanctuary with their parents rather than going to children’s church are more apt to still be in church as an emerging adult.

The emerging adults that were surveyed by Crites and Parr that grew up attending church said that a good relationship with both parents greatly influenced their decision to stay in the church. Parents who are still married and are actively serving the Lord both in their home and in the local church, affect their children’s decision to stay involved in church even in adulthood.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*, Loc. 867, Kindle.

¹⁴⁴ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*. Loc. 867, Kindle.

¹⁴⁵ Parr and Crites, *Why They Stay*.

Emerging adults whose parents divorced when they were young tend to deal with memories of hurt, abandonment, rejection, and a great fear of being alone.¹⁴⁶ This, in addition to possibly having trust issues can greatly hinder an emerging adult's relationship to the Body of Christ.

Parents should realize how important it is for them to be diligent about getting their children and teenagers to church on a regular basis. Parents of teenagers are probably tempted to keep the peace in the home on Sunday mornings and allow their teen to sleep in and just go to youth group later in the day or week. When this happens, teenagers miss out on awe-inspiring worship with the church as a whole and cease to build relationships with older adults other than youth workers. When they age-out of youth group they are so disconnected from the church that they find it easier to just leave. Parents that keep their children and teenagers attending services and attend with them will find them more connected to the church as emerging adults.

Introduction To *Grace Space: listening for understanding*

The artifact of this dissertation was developed to help the church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition move toward a more inclusive ecclesiology is a seven-week series to be implemented through the church's small group ministry. This practical tool is meant to provide a framework to bring generations together for understanding, mentorship, and to provide a venue in which the culture and mission of the church is addressed. *Grace Space: listening for understanding* is designed to provide a sense of belonging for emerging adults by inviting them into authentic dialogue with older participants about important aspects of the Christian life and the church. They will also experience warmth and community by being a part of a small group meeting weekly in someone's home.

¹⁴⁶ Baugh and Hurst, *The Quest for Christ*, 44.

Grace Space: listening for understanding is designed to bring different generations together around the dinner table for sharing. The goal of *Grace Space* is to intentionally build relationships, provide mentorship, and engage all ages in contributing to the mission of the church. As participants share portions of their life stories, different viewpoints can be heard and better understood. The setting of *Grace Space* is the dinner table which symbolizes family, food, laughter, and conversation. At the dinner table everyone talks, and everyone listens. It is a place where stories are shared, big dreams are affirmed, and friendships are formed. Every person of every age will have a voice at the table, and it provides a safe place in the presence of the Holy Spirit to seek truth together. *Grace Space* includes a simple deck of conversation cards with questions that guide the sharing portion of the gathering. The questions are designed to help each participant gain a better understanding of each other, generational issues, sources of truth, and to open doors to greater trust and unity between the generations. The setting and leadership are important in creating a safe atmosphere that empowers everyone to speak openly and honestly.

Prayer is to be at the core of *Grace Space*, and it is important for each participant to know that they are being prayed for by the facilitator and other group members each week. The group is encouraged to pray together every time they meet and invite the Holy Spirit into the group to lead and guide. When specific needs arise the facilitator can pause the group and offer that need up in prayer. Prayer will keep the focus on God and will help set the direction for each gathering.

The curriculum includes a dinner menu, an ice breaker, key Scripture passages, a prayer, the *Grace Space* card category, and the desired outcome for each meeting. The theme of each session is based on one of the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”¹⁴⁷ The *Grace Space* conversational cards that are

¹⁴⁷ Galatians 5:22-23, NIV.

used to guide the intergenerational sharing are arranged in the following categories: family background, seeking truth, church mission, your church, and relationship with God.

The small group is to be made up of 10-12 adults ranging from ages 18-95 with the goal of intentionally bringing generations together to see God, doctrinal truth, and the ministry and mission of the church from a different perspective. It is important that the group be balanced with equal numbers of emerging, middle-aged, and older adults. Each age group will feel more comfortable if they have others in attendance like themselves.

The church is one of the few places where all ages come together in unity with a singular motive and mission. Setran and Kiesling say,

In a culture where young people are depicted as ‘in the know’ and where older adults are often displayed as archaic buffoons past their prime, the church is a location in which emerging adults can demonstrate a humble posture of learning from their elders and in which older adults can display a humble posture of learning from and investment in the next generation.¹⁴⁸

To come together in unity, each generation must be willing to see things from a different perspective than their own. They must be willing to get outside of their own viewpoint and listen to the perspective of someone who is unlike themselves.

It is important to seek out other perspectives than our own, but this is not always easy to do. It takes intentionality and if we want to see things from a different perspective than our own, we must choose to change our viewpoint. We can very easily be lost in our own little world so that we have no idea about the perspectives of other people. Emerging adults tend to be drawn to other emerging adults while empty nesters and senior adults tend to spend time with others in their phase of life. Opportunities to come together to accomplish a task or for meaningful dialogue are few and far between.

¹⁴⁸ Setran and Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood*, 101.

To be in relationship with “the other” is to take on a new identity. As all engage with others who bring unique and diverse perspectives, each one can be challenged to stretch and grow beyond the confines of one’s own limited view of things and see “the other” in a totally different way. Some may be afraid of being disloyal to their original group. “But to the contrary, to participate fully in this process individuals need to have a clear sense of self on a personal level. This is called *identity security*, and it is much more than personal identity. It is a sense of connection with people that you believe are like you.”¹⁴⁹ One can connect with another’s viewpoint without losing one’s own identity in the process.

Grace Space: listening for understanding will take participants out of their comfort zone as they hear perspectives that are different than their own. The facilitator will guide the discussion in a way that allows the speaker to share without interruption. Guidelines should be read before each session to remind participants of the format. It will be the job of the facilitator to be sure everyone follows the guidelines. This will allow time for everyone to share and to keep the environment peaceful and non-argumentative. The goal is not to solve all the problems of the church or even to come to agreement over issues but to be heard and understood.

The mission of the church is a topic that *Grace Space* addresses that may spark some disagreement. “Spiritual stops” is a strategy that can be beneficial to the facilitator when negative emotions arise within the group. When disagreements occur, anyone from the group can call a timeout for a few minutes of silent prayer. This time of silent prayer will give space for the Holy Spirit to work to calm everyone down and help them remember that the goal of the group is understanding. The group can agree upon a “spiritual stop” signal and each member is empowered to use it when one feels it is necessary.

¹⁴⁹ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 70.

Atmosphere of Grace Space: listening for understanding

Participants engaging in intergenerational conversation should begin by inviting God's presence into that dialogue which will enable the relationships between the generations to be open, loving, authentic, and growing. This is not an opportunity for an individual to prove that they are right and someone else is wrong but rather an opportunity to gain understanding of "the other" in a loving and safe environment. An authentic dialogue includes participants who are devoted to God, their church, and to themselves and are not just trying to prove their point or get approval from others.¹⁵⁰ Intergenerational conversation will include views that are different from one's own and it is important to enter this dialogue knowing that, and to allow everyone to be open and honest and still accepted.

Older and younger generations in most churches spend very little time together. It is our natural inclination to gather with people that are most like us, so the different generations do not build an understanding or trust in each other. Brenda Salter McNeil came across a sociological framework known as 'Contact Theory' developed by social psychologist Gordon Allport, which suggests that relationships between conflicting groups will improve if they have meaningful contact with one another over an extended period.¹⁵¹ McNeil translated this to a theological context and adapted it to a theological framework.¹⁵² Intentionality in bringing older and younger generations together to talk and pray about reaching the next generation while staying true to Wesleyan-Holiness doctrine will allow churches to be more effective in this endeavor.

¹⁵⁰ Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time*, (New York: Berkley, 2004).

¹⁵¹ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 33.

¹⁵² Alexia Salvatierra, Comment to author, September 20, 2021.

Loida Martell-Otero, Zaida Maldonado Perez, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Latina theologians, introduce the concept of collaborative theology, a dialogical process in which genuine theology is discovered in community. This concept considers many things such as the participant's age, ethnicity, experience, and position in society--whether it is one of power or powerlessness. They say, "Discernment could be defined as the ability to perceive, distinguish, or recognize the truth from among many conflicting opinions or truth claims....Discernment is a communal endeavor: it is always to be done in the community of faith but also looking to the larger community."¹⁵³ Truth is discovered when dedicated Christians of all ages and ethnicities come together in the presence of the Holy Spirit to seek it in community.

Eric Law created a process called "Mutual Invitation" that works well with multicultural groups and would also work well with intergenerational groups to attempt to equally empower all who are involved in the dialogue. Mutual Invitation empowers each participant in two ways, first, they are empowered to share, and second, they are empowered to select the next one to share. The leader shares first, but not as an expert but as a participant in the discussion. After they share, they invite the next person to share, and so on. If anyone does not want to share, they can pass. Law says, "This process of mutual invitation decentralizes the power that is usually held by the designated leader."¹⁵⁴ This method empowers everyone who is involved in the dialogue both young and old and provides a level place to learn from each other.

Grace Space cards are divided up into five categories with twelve questions in each category. A different category of cards will be used each week. After dinner is cleared, the facilitator puts the designated cards for the gathering in the center of the table. He or she then

¹⁵³ Loida I. Martell-Otero et al., *Latina Evangélicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Cascade Books, an Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013), Loc. 680, 710, Kindle.

¹⁵⁴ Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb*, (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1993), 83.

invites someone to begin by choosing a card from the stack. That person chooses the top card, reads the card aloud and then answers the question. When they are finished answering the question, then they choose and invite the next person to either share from the same card that was just answered or they can draw a different card. Sharing should be no longer than five minutes each and the speaker should be able to share without being interrupted. After everyone has had an opportunity to share, then the leader can open the table to allow encouragement and interaction.

The color of the cards is intentional because studies have shown that there is a link between color and emotion. The color teal was chosen for the cards because studies show that most people's favorite color is either blue or green. According to the ecological valence theory, people prefer these colors because they are associated with enjoyable environmental features such as clear skies, clean water, and beautiful vegetation. Blue and green are also associated with calmness and relaxation which leads to a better listening environment.¹⁵⁵

The tool *Grace Space: listening for understanding* is designed to achieve the following goals: to present a more collaborative leadership model and to build intergenerational relationships in the church that maintains doctrinal integrity. As leaders invite older participants to their group, they should invite members that are open to emerging adults and their viewpoints. This will ensure that facilitators of *Grace Space* invite emerging adults to be a part of a group that truly wants to hear what they have to say. Relational leadership with the heart to collaborate is important to the emerging adult generation and *Grace Space* builds community in a way that encourages collaboration. It provides a place where their experiences and ideas are heard and

¹⁵⁵ "What Is the World's Most Relaxing Color? A New Survey Just Found Out," IFLScience, accessed June 27, 2021, <https://www.iflscience.com/editors-blog/what-is-the-worlds-most-relaxing-color-a-new-survey-just-found-out/>.

validated. *Grace Space* also provides a venue for intergenerational relationships to be formed and nurtured. These relationships play a key role in passing the Christian faith onto the next generation.

Collaborative Leadership

Grace Space can benefit pastors and church leaders as it provides a structure to hear the perspective of emerging adults. Authoritative power, or someone in charge, such as a leader telling them what to do, does not connect with emerging adults. Relationship with an authoritative figure does connect with emerging adults. Emerging adults are motivated by the opportunity to be creative and collaborative together in teams. To them, leadership is about creating connections with people, and they want to feel a sense of ownership before they get involved. “Leadership is about relating, listening, collaborating and empowering, not about commanding or demanding.”¹⁵⁶ “Because I said so” no longer works as a motivator for emerging adults because they want their diverse opinions to be heard, respected and fluid work processes encouraged.¹⁵⁷

Emerging adults want to belong to a church where their pastors and leaders are available, and their unchurched friends will feel comfortable. Unchurched friends will feel more comfortable when they understand what is being said. Leaders should be encouraged to use their own faith language to communicate at church and in groups such as *Grace Space* instead of Christian jargon that can come across as exclusive. As pastors and leaders make themselves available through text, face-to-face communication, and social media they will find themselves

¹⁵⁶ Windle and Damazio, *Eight Innovations*, Loc. 582, Kindle.

¹⁵⁷ Windle and Damazio, *Eight Innovations*.

making a more natural connection with emerging adults and their friends.¹⁵⁸ One's leadership style plays into creating the culture of a church, the predominant atmosphere in which the church functions and determines how successful they are at reaching the next generation for Christ. Inclusive conversations with emerging adults are key in providing a culture that is attractive to everyone.

Intergenerational Relationships

Susan Scott, author of *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life One Conversation at a Time* hits the nail on the head when she says, "We resent being talked to. We'd rather be talked with."¹⁵⁹ This statement is true for everyone, but especially for emerging adults who are finally experiencing the freedom of personal decision-making. Confronting an issue together means searching for the truth with honesty and understanding. It is important for participants to resist the temptation to become defensive while challenging opposing views. Everyone must understand that their way of thinking may be challenged and that is okay. If a decision needs to be made, even those who opposed it, will support it if they believe that their perspective was sought out and valued.¹⁶⁰

Social scientist Margaret Mead is known for her cultural anthropological work on island cultures of the South Pacific. She studied how culture is transmitted from generation to generation and for this to take place the presence of at least three generations is necessary. The key is communication, dialogue among the generations and willingness to learn from one

¹⁵⁸ Seversen, *Not Done Yet*.

¹⁵⁹ Scott, *Fierce Conversations*, xvii.

¹⁶⁰ Scott, *Fierce Conversations*.

another.¹⁶¹ These three apply to the transmission of the Christian faith from generation to generation as well and the tool, *Grace Space: listening for understanding*, provides the format to dialogue and learn from one another.

Social relationships or community are an important part of our lives as social human beings. Henri Nouwen describes *community* as a “supportive and nurturing way of living and working together The desire for community is most often a desire for a sense of unity, a feeling of being accepted, and an experience of at-homeness.”¹⁶² American sociologist, Robert Wuthnow, found that all Americans, both young and old have fewer social relationships than their parents or grandparents did, and that emerging adults lack the support that they need during this crucial time in their lives.¹⁶³ Older adults who are also in need of community and have much to offer the younger generations are often marginalized in our society and have little opportunity to interact with or help those coming behind them.

Some churches have successfully embraced intergenerational faith communities that offer a sense of belonging, ministry opportunities, and spiritual formation to all ages together. Instead of breaking the age groups into their separate ministries as most churches do, these intergenerational faith communities stay together to grow and to serve in community. Emerging adults who have relationships with all generations in the church will be more connected and is more likely to stay engaged in the church. Older adults can provide stability and guidance to emerging adults at this crucial time in their lives especially if emerging adults are seeking relational mentorship.

¹⁶¹ Allen and Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 92.

¹⁶² Henri J. M. Nouwen, Donald P. McNeill, and Douglas A. Morrison, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life*, Revised ed. edition (New York: Image, 2006), 60.

¹⁶³ Allen and Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 59.

Serving Together

The format of *Grace Space: listening for understanding* provides an opportunity for the intergenerational group to serve together out in the community. Intergenerational serving opportunities provide the generations a chance to work together under a single purpose to be Christ's hands and feet in a way that also enables individual giftedness and generational characteristics to serve others and enjoy the experience of being the body of Christ out in the world. As participants serve together it will naturally produce conversation that strengthens relationships. When people of different ages work together it brings in more experience and different views and models the body of Christ to those outside the church. Serving together enables each age group to see how each generation has something to offer to the service project. When different generations unite under a single purpose, their focus will tend to be on the task rather than on their differences.¹⁶⁴ Serving together as the body of Christ, meeting needs in the community alongside each other will bring the generations together in a way that provides a sense of belonging and furthers the mission of the church.

Grace Space Leadership and Guidelines

As with any good curriculum, dedicated and creative leaders are needed to put it into practice. *Grace Space: listening for understanding* requires a facilitator and a host/hostess that represent different generations. These roles are very important and much of the success of the group will depend on these leaders. Both facilitator and host/hostess should be mature Christians with a heart for all generations and a heart for the church. They should fully comprehend that they are providing the venue to bring generations together. They are not expected to have all the

¹⁶⁴ Allen and Lawton, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*.

answers to bring about unity between the generations. They can be assured that the Holy Spirit will be at work within those groups, and as they follow his guidance the group will achieve its goals.

The Role of Grace Space Facilitator

The role of a *Grace Space* facilitator is very important for the success of the group and he or she can be an emerging adult or an older adult. There may be cofacilitators where an emerging adult and older adult team up to facilitate a *Grace Space* group. The facilitator will provide leadership and guidance before and during the gatherings. They will need patience, love, and self-control to allow everyone to feel comfortable in sharing. It is important to provide space for everyone around the table to talk without being interrupted. One must see themselves as a facilitator and not a teacher, because the goal is to listen. The facilitator does not try to change anyone's viewpoint, but rather encourages talking and listening so that mutual understanding can occur. Disagreement should be expected because one is bringing different cultures and different viewpoints together to talk. When disagreement occurs, the facilitator must remind the group that *Grace Space* demonstrates to participants that they can entertain viewpoints that are different than their own and still be friends.

Grace Space Guidelines

Grace Space Guidelines provide a framework for the group gatherings each week. They will enable the group to function in a way that maintains mutual respect. The following guidelines should be read and agreed upon by each participant every time the group meets. These guidelines will assure members that they are in a safe place where their contribution is respected

and valued. The guidelines are simple and as follows: Maintain confidentiality, listen without interrupting, listen without judging, limit sharing to five minutes or less, and be sure this space is filled with grace. These guidelines provide the framework for a successful group meeting and can be adjusted to fit the group's needs if necessary.

The Role of Grace Space Host/Hostess

The role of a *Grace Space* host/hostess is to provide dinner and a comfortable place for intergenerational dialogue to occur. The ideal location to meet is in the host/hostess' home but if this is not possible then another place such as the church can be used. The first week the host/hostess provides dinner for the group but the following weeks each participant will be asked to provide a food item for the meal. A menu and signup sheet are provided for the host/hostess to use each week. The host/hostesses must resist the temptation to provide the dinner every week because contributing to the meals empowers participants and provides each participant with ownership to the group. It is important for the host/hostess to work closely with the facilitator to ensure that the gatherings are as comfortable as possible. When needs arise within the group the host/hostess should be prepared to meet them to the best of their ability.

Conclusion

If emerging adults have a sense of belonging in the church, then they are more likely to stay engaged. This sense of belonging is experienced when they engage in authentic dialogue, get involved in ministry, experience warmth and community, and when they have a mentor. A life-changing relationship with Christ, a reverence for Scripture, and positive family relationships greatly contribute to emerging adult retention. Crossing generational boundaries

enables both generations to stop seeing each other as “us” and “them” but rather as a team in the body of Christ. Truly listening to others who may have a different viewpoint allows walls to come down, hostilities to lessen, and collaboration to begin.

The tool *Grace Space: listening for understanding* is designed to build intergenerational relationships in the church and to present a more collaborative leadership model. *Grace Space* invites emerging adults to be a part of an intergenerational group that shares their experiences, beliefs, and stories with each other. Relational leadership with the heart to collaborate is important to post-moderns and *Grace Space* builds community in a way that encourages collaboration. It provides a place where their experiences and ideas are heard and validated. *Grace Space* also provides a venue for intergenerational relationships to be formed and nurtured. These relationships play a key role in passing the Christian faith onto the next generation.

Chapter 5

*GRACE SPACE: LISTENING FOR UNDERSTANDING***In Summary**

The church is beautifully diverse, and that diversity reflects the kingdom of God and should be celebrated. Brenda Salter McNeil says, “We need our differences in order to reflect the glory of God, which is our mission and human calling.”¹⁶⁵ This diversity is seen in the many generations that make up the family of God called the church. A church family consists of babies in the nursery, children and teenagers in their classrooms and adults in the Sanctuary. They are worshipping the same God in the same church building but spending most of the time with people who think and act like themselves, with little opportunity to build bridges between the generations.

The church is the body of Christ, and each part works with the other parts to reach out and to minister to a lost and hurting world. These various parts make up one body, but these parts

¹⁶⁵ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 27.

look, think, and act very differently. Each part is important, and each part is needed. But not every part is well represented in the church. Emerging adults are not staying engaged in the church and the church is not complete without them. Every generation contributes to the mission of the church in their unique ways, and this can especially be seen in the emerging adult generation. Churches greatly benefit from the passion, energy, and ideas that come from emerging adults. This is especially played out in meeting needs in the community and in dealing with social justice issues. Intentionality is needed to minister effectively to every age group, especially to emerging adults.

Churches that have a significant emerging adult population have most likely been successful in creating a sense of belonging for them, and worship that allows them to experience God and his glory. Post-moderns acquire knowledge through their experiences and churches that encourage congregants to experience God through prayer, praise, and worship will enable post-moderns to come to know God and form a relationship with him. Emerging adults have a sense of belonging in a church when they are welcomed into a friendly culture and experience warmth and community. They experience a sense of belonging when their opinions are sought out and when they are invited to be involved in a load bearing ministry. Emerging adults greatly benefit from meaningful interaction with Christians older than themselves. When generations serve together to make an impact in their community and meet real needs, they experience life and ministry together and build intimacy with those within the church family. This intimacy with others in the congregation is key in keeping emerging adults engaged in the church.

Intimacy can be described as shared experience. As generations share experiences with each other they have the potential to build intimacy. John Ortberg says, “When we share experiences with other people—the good times, the bad times, and all the mundane in-between

times—we're sharing our lives with them. And that builds connection, which is another essential component of intimacy.”¹⁶⁶ It is important for everyone to be fully present in these shared experiences and to realize that being with someone who thinks differently than they do, may require patience and sacrifice. But the results are well worth it because as one puts the other person's wants and needs above their own and invests time in them, they feel valued and loved.¹⁶⁷

This dissertation includes a curriculum entitled, *Grace Space: listening for understanding* that is designed to bring generations together in a small group format. Intimacy is best attained in a group through the establishment of mutual purpose, mutual respect, and the facilitation of authenticity. Mutual purpose and mutual respect are important when bringing any group together for dialogue, especially a diverse group such as *Grace Space*. Mutual purpose is when everyone in the group perceives that they are working toward a common outcome in the dialogue, and that everyone cares about that goal. A shared goal is a great place to start. If a group is going to be successful, the mutual purpose must be one that motivates all participants. Mutual respect is the continuance condition of dialogue, and it must be maintained to keep everyone engaged. It will be the responsibility of the facilitator of *Grace Space* to model mutual respect and guide the gathering in such a way that it is maintained. If participants begin to perceive disrespect in a conversation the interaction goes from the shared goal to defending dignity.¹⁶⁸ If this occurs then a spiritual stop might be in order to silently pray, regain control, and to refocus on God and on the purpose of the group.

¹⁶⁶ John Ortberg, *I'd Like You More If You Were More like Me: Getting Real about Getting Close* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2017), 6.

¹⁶⁷ Ortberg, *I'd Like You More If You Were More like Me*.

¹⁶⁸ Kerry Patterson, ed., *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*, 2nd ed (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012).

Being a participant in a small group such as *Grace Space: listening for understanding* encourages authenticity. Many people have suppressed their real feelings from others for a very long time as they accommodate the needs and desires of others. In a safe place where thoughts and feelings are sought out and validated, one can be authentic. Authenticity is a process of individuation when one stops comparing themselves with others and living in a way to gain approval from others and chooses to live their life.¹⁶⁹ Susan Scott says that “Authenticity is a powerful attractor.”¹⁷⁰ When group members feel free to be their true selves, and everyone is authentic, then others respond in a positive way and the group will be far more productive. If group participants are going to be authentic, then they must be assured that they are in a safe place where confidentiality is maintained, and that their viewpoint will not be ridiculed or brushed off as unimportant.

Artifact Summary

Grace Space: listening for understanding is designed to bring generations together in a seven-week small group setting that includes dinner, Scripture readings, prayer and sharing around the table guided by *Grace Space* conversation cards. The *Grace Space* cards are designed to help each participant gain a better understanding of generational issues, the church, the mission of the church, sources of truth, relationship with God, and to open doors to greater trust, deeper intimacy, and unity within the generations.

Grace Space is greatly needed at this time in our world and in our churches with the polarization of the generations. *Grace Space* empowers all ages to safely share their story and viewpoints knowing they will be heard and still cared for. Every person knows they are valued

¹⁶⁹ Scott, *Fierce Conversations*.

¹⁷⁰ Scott, *Fierce Conversations*, 73.

when their viewpoint is heard and considered. They are valued even if their viewpoint is different than others in the group. *Grace Space* will teach the group that it is possible to experience intimacy and to minister alongside of others even with differing viewpoints. *Grace Space* provides a venue for understanding, discovery, and for collaboration to occur among generations that were raised in very different cultures. It provides space to get to the core issues of faith that unite the generations rather than polarize them. Spending time in a diverse group challenges participants to stretch and grow beyond the confines of their own limited view. As one sees from the perspective of others, they can identify with them. Participants might even go through a transformation process in which they take on a new identity because of being in relationship with “the other”. McNeil says, “Identification begins with an attempt to understand the other, and it delves ever deeper as participants take ownership of each other’s stories. Identification is where former strangers begin to create a new community.”¹⁷¹ It is within this new community that collaboration can occur that contributes to mission accomplishment.

Implications on Future Plans

The curriculum *Grace Space: listening for understanding* can be adapted to fit any group. Any future plans for *Grace Space: listening for understanding* might include creating additional *Grace Space* conversation cards with different categories to encourage even deeper sharing into faith and church issues as a group. As participants meet to talk, serve, and enjoy time together, trust and intimacy will grow, and they will begin to feel more comfortable sharing at a deeper level with each other. As groups meet and share what is provided in *Grace Space*, other topics may arise that need to be addressed in this format. These additional cards can be made up to deal

¹⁷¹ McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*.

with areas that are significant to their particular church body. *Grace Space: listening for understanding* might include deeper doctrinal issues that must be addressed, but only after intergenerational relationships have been established.

Serving together as an intergenerational group on week six is an experience that will bring participants together in ministry. When Christians serve, they are most like Christ and *Grace Space* can include more opportunities to do ministry together. Expanding the serving opportunities to allow generations to spend more time together in mission would build intimacy and be a model for the church of intergenerational ministry. *Grace Space* groups might go on a weekend mission trip to help a smaller church with maintenance on their building or begin a regular ministry together such as doing nursing home services once or twice a month. Emerging adults are at a place in their lives where they can dream big dreams and they have a heart to change their world. Serving in tangible ways with older adults encourages relational mentorship, which is a benefit to all generations.

If others were to build on this project one might create a *Grace Space: listening for understanding* app that could be downloaded on each participant's phone that include the *Grace Space* cards and instructions. This app would allow communication among members through the Signal app. This can provide opportunities for *Grace Space* users to ask questions, share ideas and troubleshoot with other groups that are using the curriculum.

Conclusion

The church in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition is uniquely positioned to bring generations together in vibrant transformational ministry that inspires, disciples, and develops emerging adults as leaders and at the same time maintain doctrinal integrity. The church should

be encouraged because inclusive ministry that meets both individual and social needs is at the very core of its being. The Holy Spirit is at work drawing people to himself and empowering them to be on mission—God’s mission. Both orthodoxy and orthopraxy are necessary, but emerging adults tend to focus on orthopraxy and are stirred by the call to meet social justice needs and to help the marginalized. Older adults tend to focus on orthodoxy, doctrinal integrity, and want to see it maintained in the church. When these generations are brought together in the church and empowered by the Holy Spirit, they can do great things for God in a world in need of love, hope and forgiveness.

Too many times our differences create barriers when we need to come together. We tend to avoid difficult subjects when we need to discuss them. Jonathan Brooks says this about those in the church, “In order to truly love one another we must have difficult conversations and name the ways we hurt others and ourselves. We also must not look for reasons to separate ourselves from one another but for ways to unite around those things we have in common.”¹⁷² Loving one another means spending time together, understanding each other and focusing on those things that unite rather than those things that divide. Without really knowing someone of a different generation well or without hearing their stories, it is easy to dismiss them as someone not worthy of one’s time.¹⁷³ However, when those who are different sit down and really listen to one another, hearts and possibilities open up to each other.

Grace Space: listening for understanding provides a venue to bring generations together for the purpose of understanding and building relationships. Centering this experience around the dinner table provides warmth, good food, and an atmosphere for casual conversation. The goal of

¹⁷² Brooks and Baraka, *Church Forsaken*, 136.

¹⁷³ Brooks and Baraka, *Church Forsaken*.

Grace Space is to understand someone's viewpoint, not to change it. With time and understanding, relationships will grow, and the group will experience deeper trust and intimacy with each other. They will all experience a sense of belonging and the generation gap will not seem so vast. Commonalities will come to the surface, and they will be able to see core beliefs that are important to all generations. As they grow to respect each other's viewpoint, participants will realize that each one has a place in the church and on God's mission.

If participants come to the table humble and hungry for truth and understanding, minds and hearts will be changed for the good and God's truth is discovered. The church is beautifully diverse and is called to serve the one God and Father together in the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Emerging adults have a significant place in the body of Christ and their passion and gifts are needed. The church, in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, provides Spirit-filled worship that inspires emerging adults and allows them to experience the transformational power of God. It also encourages them to follow their heart as the Spirit leads them to serve in a world full of need and injustice. The church brings generations together to accomplish Christ's mission in a world that needs personal and social transformation. Both orthodoxy and orthopraxis are crucial aspects of Christian faith and as generations come together in prayer and conversation, the church will make more significant progress in accomplishing its mission.

Churches that work to understand emerging adults and provide them with a place for community, serving opportunities, and mentorship will increase emerging adult retention. The church can be the spiritual anchor for emerging adults and a non-judgmental place for them to ask their questions and find purpose and meaning for their lives. The Wesleyan-Holiness context provides a rich setting for emerging adults with its theology of life transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit and empowerment to serve those in need.

The church is built on the faith of Jesus' disciples and his disciples come from all generations. Churches like GCN are stronger when all generations are involved in the ministry of the church. Youth groups that include emerging adults in leadership give them a load-bearing role and gives teenagers someone to look up to. Boomers that open their homes to emerging adults for them to meet for Bible study and fellowship are blessed by their time together. Emerging adults and older generations that serve together in places like Washington D.C., Guatemala, Paraguay, and Honduras, to make their life better are accomplishing tasks that could not be done alone. By engaging all generations, the church can provide ministry that is authentic, doctrinally sound, and transformational and that keeps emerging adults involved. Jesus empowers each generation in a unique way to carry on his mission and as the generations work together, they will accomplish his mission here on earth.

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APPENDIX A

GRACE SPACE: LISTENING FOR UNDERSTANDING

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Table of Contents

Introduction	
Facilitator Instructions	
Host/Hostess Instructions	
Leaders' Prayer Guide	
Group Guidelines	
Opening Meditation	
Week One: Love	
Week Two: Kindness	
Dinner Signup Sheet	
Week Three: Faithfulness	
Dinner Signup Sheet	
Week Four: Peace and Gentleness	
Dinner Signup Sheet	
Week Five: Patience	
Dinner Signup Sheet	
Week Six: Goodness/Serving Together	
Dinner Signup Sheet	
Week Seven: Joy	
Dinner Signup Sheet	
Conversation Cards:	
Family Background	
Your Church	
Seeking Truth	
Relationship with God	
Church Mission	
Tips, Guidelines, Objectives	

APPENDIX B

GRACE SPACE: LISTENING FOR UNDERSTANDING

INTRODUCTION, INSTRUCTIONS, PRAYER GUIDE, AND GROUP GUIDELINES

Grace Space: listening for understanding ***A Seven-Week intergenerational Small Group***

Introduction

Welcome to *Grace Space: listening for understanding*. The church is one of the few places where all ages come together in unity with a singular motive and mission. Even though the church is made up of all ages, they are often segregated and have few opportunities to interact.

Grace Space: listening for understanding is a practical tool meant to provide a framework to bring different generations together to better understand one another, to provide mentorship, and to provide a venue in which the culture and the mission of the church are addressed.

The setting of *Grace Space* is the dinner table where stories are shared, big dreams are affirmed and friendships are formed. Every person of every age will have a voice at the table and it provides a safe place in the presence of the Holy Spirit to seek truth together. The first five weeks are held in a home and the facilitator uses the conversations cards. The sixth week provides an opportunity to serve together out in the community and the final week is a celebration of the group by doing something fun together.

The goal is listening to another viewpoint that might be different than your own. It is not to change anyone's viewpoint or to prove that one is right and the other is wrong but to better understand the other. The goal of *Grace Space* is recognizing that even though generations may have different viewpoints, God can still use them to accomplish his mission together. As generations listen to each other and build relationships, fears such as the fear of compromising doctrinal integrity will abate.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Facilitator Instructions

- Invite 10-12 people from your church to take part in a seven-week intergenerational small group called *Grace Space: listening for understanding*. Include a variety of ages from emerging adults to senior adults.
- Be sure to set a beginning and an ending time for each evening and stick to that time frame.
- Dinner is included each evening. The first dinner is provided by the host/hostess. Sign-up sheets are provided so that the host/hostess can allow participants to share in providing food for the following dinners.
- Each week includes a dinner menu, an ice breaker, Scripture to share, a prayer, the category to be discussed from the *Grace Space* cards, and the desired outcome for that evening.
- Welcome each participant and start the evening with dinner. You may want to use your ice breaker question over dinner.
- After dinner read the Scripture passages and pray the prayer provided.
- Set the cards from the category for the evening in the center of the table and read the guidelines.
- The facilitator can go first by drawing a card and answering the question. He or she then invites the next person to either use the same question or draw another card.
- That participant then answers that question and invites the next person to either draw another card or answer the question from a card that is already drawn.
- When everyone has had a chance to share then the facilitator can allow some comments and discussion. The goal is to gain understanding of each other's perspectives not to change the other person.
- End the evening on time in prayer.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Leaders' Prayer Guide

- Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in deciding who to invite to the group.
- Know that the Holy Spirit goes before you drawing each participant into a deeper walk with him.
- God's prevenient grace is already drawing non-Christians to himself. If you feel led to invite someone who is not yet a Christian know that the Lord is already working in that person's life.
- The Lord will use your time together to convince participants of the truth. You need to allow the Holy Spirit to be at work in each person. Pray that the Lord will enable you to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Pray that participants ask the right questions that allow you to help them draw closer to the Lord.
- Pray for each participant by name before the gathering. Pray that they will come with an open heart to the Lord.
- Pray that each participant will recognize sin in their lives and will confess that sin and repent of it.
- Pray that they will be set free from the grip of sin and the Holy Spirit will enable them to live a life pleasing to God.
- Pray that participants will desire a deeper walk with God and will surrender their lives completely to him in entire sanctification.
- Pray that there will be a spirit of grace every time that you meet with your group.
- Pray that even though everyone will not agree with each other there will still be acceptance and love extended to each other.
- Pray that the love and acceptance experienced in your group will spread throughout the church.

Grace Space: listening for understanding**Group Guidelines**

- Maintain confidentiality
- Anyone is free to pass if they do not want to speak
- Listen without interrupting
- Listen without judgement
- Anyone can call a timeout for a moment of silent prayer
- Limit sharing to five minutes or less
- Be sure this space is filled with grace

APPENDIX C

GRACE SPACE: LISTENING FOR UNDERSTANDING

WEEKLY SCHEDULES AND MENUS

Grace Space: listening for understanding**Opening Meditation**

To be read aloud before dinner the first week.

As we begin this journey together we acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is present with us and is guiding our dialogue. May his presence and power enable us to respect one another as Christ has called us to do. We know that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came to earth to live among us, and died on the cross so that everyone might be saved. We must remember that his salvation is not only for us to experience transformation, but for our entire community to benefit as well.

When we confess our sins to God, ask for his forgiveness, and receive Jesus into our lives, we are saved, and obtain the beautiful gift of eternal life. But, it is important to remember that we are also set apart to live a life in service to God and to our neighbors, especially to those who are suffering. We want to continue to grow in our relationship with God and to come to the place of complete surrender and are filled with the Holy Spirit.

We thank God for this safe place where we can listen to each other and gain understanding. God, please help us to know when to speak and when to sit back and just listen. Even though we are all different with different viewpoints, God has brought us together on this journey for a few weeks. God, please enable us to be an encouragement to our brothers and sisters in this group.

May the Holy Spirit fill us and empower us to be his witnesses and to live a life that is pleasing to God. It is God's holiness that motivates us to participate in his mission of reconciliation together. Help us to love one another as God loves us and to listen more than we speak. Amen.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week One: Love

Dinner

Lasagna, Green Salad, Garlic Bread, Dessert, Drinks

Ice Breaker

Each person says their name and an animal that describes their present mood.

Scripture

John 13:34 *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*

Ephesians 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it might benefit those who listen.*

Prayer

Read the Opening Meditation aloud to the group.

***Grace Space* cards category**

Family Background

Desired Outcome

A new appreciation for each other as we hear each one's story that includes their family background. Our family background greatly influences what we believe and what we do with that belief. Listening to someone is one way to show them love. The Scripture for this week teaches about love—Jesus' love for us and his command to love others. In fact, the way that we show our love for Christ is by loving one another. Ephesians 4:29 teaches us to build one another up in our speech. The way that we talk to one another either tears them down or builds them up. We want to be people who build each other up with our speech.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Two: Kindness

Dinner

Taco Salad, Tortilla Chips, Salsa, Dessert, Drinks

Ice Breaker

Each person says their name and completes the sentence "I know I am loved when..."

Scripture

1 Peter 4:9-10 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Prayer

May we know the kindness that God has extended to us and may we have hearts to serve others with kindness.

Grace Space cards category

Your Church

Desired Outcome

To understand the culture of your church from the perspective of different generations. To shed light on elements of the church that might not be pleasing to God or does not show kindness to some within the church or those outside the church. Is it possible that your church makes one generation feel welcomed and another one not? Are there some people that are not welcomed into your church? In 1 Peter we are instructed to serve others and to offer hospitality without grumbling. The church is a household of God's grace to everyone.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Two: Dinner sign-up

Dinner Menu

Taco Salad, Tortilla Chips, Salsa, Dessert, Drinks

Thank you for providing:

Lettuce_____

Taco Meat (Beef) _____

Taco Meat (Chicken)_____

Shredded Cheese_____

Sour Cream_____

Tortilla Chips _____

Salsa _____

Guacamole _____

Dessert_____

Drinks_____

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Three: Faithfulness

Dinner Menu

Meatball Subs, Macaroni Salad, Chips, Dessert, Drinks

Ice Breaker

Say your name and your all-time favorite dessert.

Scripture

John 8:31,32 *To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.*

John 14:15,16 *Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."*

Prayer

Lord, help us to see how faithful you are to us and give us the ability to remain faithful to you. Help us to know the truth and allow it to set us free. Guide us through our sharing tonight and may the Holy Spirit fill us and enable us to live surrendered lives.

***Grace Space* cards category**

Seeking Truth

Desired Outcome

This evening might be difficult because there may be disagreement in how one understands truth and seeks it. Remember that the goal is to listen and to try to understand a different viewpoint. You are not here to change anyone else's viewpoint. The Holy Spirit is present and he will guide each and every one who is open to his leadership.

Grace Space: listening for understanding**Week Three: Dinner sign-up****Dinner Menu**

Meatball Subs, Macaroni Salad, Chips, Dessert, Drinks

Thank you for providing:

Meatballs in Marinara sauce_____

Sliced Provolone Cheese_____

Sub Rolls _____

Macaroni Salad _____

Chips _____

Dessert_____

Drinks_____

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Four: Peace and Gentleness

Dinner

Egg Casserole, Fruit, Hash Browns, Bacon or Sausage, Juice

Ice Breaker

Each person says their name and the name of their first pet.

Scripture

Ephesians 4:1-7 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Prayer

Help us receive grace from God so that we can humbly extend grace to others. Be present with us and allow us to experience your peace. May we respond to one another with gentleness and love. Fill our hearts with your Holy Spirit and empower us to live lives that are pleasing to you.

Grace Space cards category

Relationship with God

Desired Outcome

As each person shares about their experience and relationship with God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit their story should encourage others in their spiritual journey. In the midst of diversity, the Triune God brings about unity through the bond of peace. We all can come together around the common bond of our relationship with God.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Four: Dinner sign-up

Dinner Menu

Egg Casserole, Hash Browns, Fruit, Bacon or Sausage, Juice

Thank you for providing:

Egg Casserole _____

Hash Browns _____

Fruit _____

Bacon or Sausage _____

Juice _____

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Five: Patience

Dinner

Chili, Cornbread, Toppings, Green Salad, Dessert, Drinks

Ice Breaker

Each person says their name and one thing that really gets on their nerves.

Scripture

Hebrews 10:23-25 *Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Romans 15:1 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.*

Prayer

Thank you for being so patient with me Lord. Help me to be loving, grace-filled and patient with everyone you bring into my path. Help me to see that sometimes I am the one who extends grace to others and sometimes I am the recipient of grace.

Grace Space cards category

Church Mission

Desired Outcome

To come together over the core issue of God's mission for his church. To learn different methods to go about God's mission and to understand the need to contextualize in order to remain effective. You will see that God puts different burdens on each one's heart and this completes the body of Christ in the world instead of dividing it. Seek unity in the midst of diversity to better understand God's mission in the world.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Five: Dinner sign-up

Dinner Menu

Chili, Toppings, Cornbread, Green Salad, Dessert, Drinks

Thank you for providing:

Chili_____

Cornbread_____

Shredded Cheese_____

Sour Cream_____

Green Salad with dressings_____

Dessert_____

Drinks_____

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Six: Goodness/Serving together

Dinner

Sandwiches, Chips, Fruit, Cookies, Drinks

Ice Breaker

Today we are serving together so say your name and complete this sentence, "Today I am looking forward to..."

Scripture

Galatians 6:10 *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

Colossians 4:5-6 *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

Prayer

Thank you for an opportunity to serve someone today. Please enable us to be your hands and feet and demonstrate your goodness to those we serve and to each other. Help us to be open to what you want us to learn from this experience together.

Possible Serving Opportunities

Serve dinner at a homeless shelter
Do yardwork for a senior adult in your church or community
Visit a nursing home together
Paint a room in a homeless shelter
Weed and mulch at a local school building

Desired Outcome

To reach out into the community to help meet a need. Serving together will build community within your intergenerational group. You will witness firsthand what each one has to contribute and how God put you together to accomplish a task.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Six: Dinner sign-up

Dinner Menu

Sandwiches, Chips, Fruit, Cookies, Drinks

Thank you for providing:

Sandwiches_____

Chips_____

Fruit_____

Cookies_____

Drinks_____

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Seven: Joy

Dinner

Baked Potatoes, Chili, Toppings, Green Salad, Dessert, Drinks

Ice Breaker

Each one completes this sentence, "This group helped me to better understand..."

Scripture

Romans 15:13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

1 Peter 1:8,9 *Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

Prayer

Help us to experience your joy tonight as we spend this time together. Help us to see that you are the source of our hope and joy. May the friendships that have been built through this group time not end tonight but continue in the months and years ahead.

Possible Fun Activities

Game night (Allow each generation to choose a game)
White Elephant Gift Exchange (who says that is only for Christmas?)
Visit a museum
Go out for ice cream sundaes
Meet in a park for a picnic and walk

Desired Outcome

To laugh and have fun together. Experience the joy that each one can have by spending time with someone of a different age and life stage. To bridge the generation gap and to build community and unity in the middle of diversity by enjoying time together.

Grace Space: listening for understanding

Week Seven: Dinner sign-up

Dinner Menu

Baked Potatoes, Chili, Toppings, Green Salad, Dessert, Drinks

Thank you for providing:

Baked Potatoes_____

Chili_____

Shredded Cheese_____

Sour Cream_____

Green Salad with dressings_____

Dessert_____

Drinks_____

APPENDIX D
GRACE SPACE: LISTENING FOR UNDERSTANDING
CONVERSATION CARDS

Family Background

Where are your parents from
and where were you born?

Family Background

In what faith tradition were you
raised?

Family Background

What are two practical
expressions of your faith in your
daily life that you learned
growing up?

Family Background

Is there freedom in your family to
live out your chosen spiritual
path?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Family Background

Did your parents take you to church or a faith community as a child?

Family Background

Did your family read the Bible and pray together on a regular basis?

Family Background

Were you raised in a culture that is different from the one in which you live now?

Family Background

Do you follow a different faith tradition than your parents?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Family Background

Do you feel loved and cared for by your family?

Family Background

Did you grow up feeling strongly connected to your extended family?

Family Background

Describe a family tradition that was important to your family growing up.

Family Background

Are there specific habits or practices that are important to you to effectively live out your faith?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space


listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Your Church



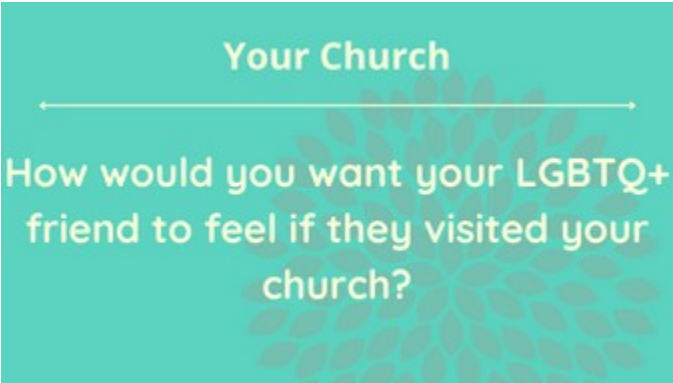
How would you want a new believer to feel if they visited your church?

Your Church



How many people in your church of a different age or ethnicity than yourself do you know well?

Your Church



How would you want your LGBTQ+ friend to feel if they visited your church?

Your Church



Do you wish there were more intergenerational opportunities at your church?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space


listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Your Church



←————→

Tell about a time that you felt especially loved and cared for at your church.

Your Church



←————→

How is your church perceived by your generation?

Your Church



←————→

What would happen if a homeless person walked into your church during a service?

Your Church



←————→

How does your church make you feel?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space


listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Your Church




Do the leaders in your church
listen to you?

Your Church



Do the leaders in your church
value your contributions to
ministry?

Your Church



How different is the church today
from the one in which you grew
up?

Your Church



Does your church love and care
for those outside of the church?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Seeking Truth

How do you determine what is trustworthy?

Seeking Truth

When your worldview is challenged, how do you seek truth?

Seeking Truth

When your worldview is challenged, how do you seek truth?

Seeking Truth

Is God knowable and how?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Seeking Truth

Is the Bible a reliable source for truth?

Seeking Truth

What is truth and can it be known?

Seeking Truth

Does God speak to you? If so how does he communicate with you?

Seeking Truth

Do you communicate with God?
If so, by what means?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Seeking Truth



How does life experience come into play when seeking truth?

Seeking Truth



Tell about a time that God used someone in your life to speak truth into you.

Seeking Truth



Are the doctrinal beliefs of your church based on truth?

Seeking Truth



How might theological truth be derived through community?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Relationship with God



How do you describe God?

Relationship with God



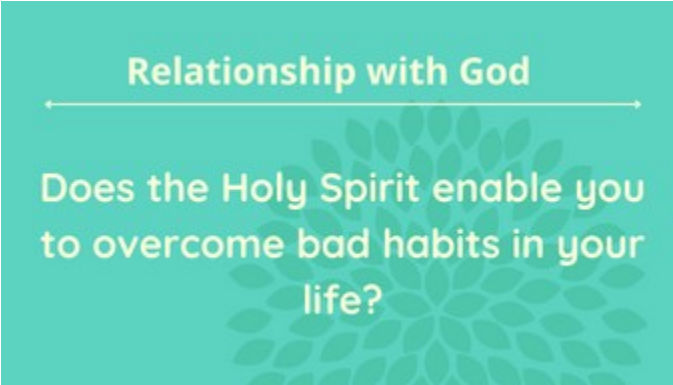
How do you describe Jesus?

Relationship with God



How do you experience each person of the Trinity in your life?

Relationship with God



Does the Holy Spirit enable you to overcome bad habits in your life?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space


listening for understanding

Relationship with God



Do you believe that God wants the very best for you?

Relationship with God



Does a relationship with Christ give one peace and joy?

Relationship with God



Do you think you can be a good person without God's help?

Relationship with God



Does one have to change their behavior to have a relationship with God?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Relationship with God



How do you define sin?

Relationship with God



How would you describe a holy life?

Relationship with God



How does God make you feel?

Relationship with God



How do you describe the Holy Spirit?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Church Mission



What is the role of the church globally?

Church Mission



Where should the church be making a bigger impact?

Church Mission



Describe what a church looks like that is on God's mission?

Church Mission



What is the greatest challenge hindering the church's mission in America?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Church Mission



Should the church be active in social issues such as poverty, abortion, and racial justice?

Church Mission




How do you define the Gospel?

Church Mission



How do you define the mission of the church?

Church Mission



Are there ways that you feel called and equipped to be involved in the mission of God?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

Church Mission

Can the church focus on both personal and social transformation?

Church Mission

How can the church connect with other organizations that are meeting needs in the community?

Church Mission

What elements in the church are sacred and timeless?

Church Mission

How can the church better connect with different cultures and ethnicities?



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

APPENDIX E

GRACE SPACE: LISTENING FOR UNDERSTANDING

TIPS, GUIDELINES, AND OBJECTIVES

Facilitator Tips

- Listen well to each person
- Affirm and encourage everyone as they speak
- Keep sharing to five minutes or less
- Don't allow others to interrupt the speaker
- Avoid correcting those who are speaking
- Be sure that confidentiality is maintained

Host/Hostess Tips

- Greet each person as they enter
- Provide dinner around a table and comfortable conversation
- Clear the dishes after dinner to prepare for dialogue
- Make sure water is available
- Provide tissues if needed
- Be sure everyone is comfortable

Grace Space Guidelines

- Maintain confidentiality
- Listen without interrupting
- Listen without judging
- Anyone is free to pass if they do not want to speak
- Limit sharing to five minutes or less
- Be sure this space is filled with grace

Grace Space Objectives

- To provide an opportunity for different generations to dialogue
- To better understand someone who thinks differently than you do
- To discover commonalities between generations
- To learn new ways to serve together
- To build relationships that will enhance ministry to all generations



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding



Grace Space

listening for understanding

