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Facilitating Holistic Spiritual Formation at the Northside Church of Christ in Laredo, Texas

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes a project to facilitate holistic spiritual formation at the Northside Church of Christ in Laredo, Texas. A program consisting of seven weekly sessions of intergenerational religious experiences was enacted at the church in hopes of catalyzing growth in the cognitive, relational, affective, and behavioral domains. These sessions were constructed on a foundation consisting of the experiences of the non-class Churches of Christ—a group of congregations that has historically rejected the Bible class model—and informed by the intergenerational formation literature. Evaluation of this project showed relational and affective growth greater than what the congregation had experienced with the traditional Bible class model. Cognitive learning was at least comparable to the previous model. No changes in behavior were detected. Other congregations may be able to adapt the intergenerational religious experiences model with positive results in their own context.

Facilitating Holistic Spiritual Formation

at the Northside Church of Christ in Laredo, Texas

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Theology

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

By

Kirk R. Cowell

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This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Ministry

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Dean of the Graduate School

Date

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Thesis Committee

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Chair   David Wray

_____

Douglas Foster

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Jeff Childers

This thesis is dedicated to the members, past and present, of the non-class Churches of Christ. The strong relational web that existed among those churches in my youth provided me with a great throng of spiritual companions and mentors. The experiences we shared together shaped me in ways that I am still discovering. Many people have helped and encouraged me in this undertaking, but this specific project would not have happened if my vision of spiritual formation had not been so indelibly marked by my heritage in "the NBC network." In the youth meetings, the workshops, the singings, the late nights discussing the Bible together, they taught me how to love Jesus and sparked in me a desire to contribute to his church. In experiences at Summer Excitement and in classes at both the Southwest Bible Institute and the South Houston Bible Institute, they deepened my knowledge of the Scriptures and formed me for ministry. This project was chosen in response to a real need in my current congregation, but it serves double duty, I hope, as a note of appreciation for the spiritual heirs of N. L. Clark. I would not trade my religious upbringing with anyone else. What ministry I do is always, inevitably, the distinctive work of a son of the non-class churches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

especially vital assistance, taking time to answer my questions over email and then providing samples of his Family Bible Study curriculum for my use.

David Langford, the independent expert for this project, has shaped my thinking on intergenerational ministry for decades, through both conversation and example. I am grateful for his generosity in traveling to Laredo and giving such thoughtful feedback on this endeavor. Moreover, I am grateful for all the ways he has ministered to me through the years.

Finally, the members of the Northside Church of Christ were gracious and supportive of this project in the extreme. Again and again, I owe them thanks.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Northside Church of Christ in Laredo, Texas,[1] like many Churches of

Christ across the country, has undertaken the task of religious education primarily

through the traditional model of Sunday morning age-divided Bible classes. In

Northside's case, the Bible class model imposes certain challenges and limitations, in

part because of the congregation's size and in part because of the inherent

emphases of the schooling-instructional paradigm. Accordingly, this project thesis

sought to provide a ministry intervention that would introduce a holistic model of

spiritual formation to Northside. Specifically, the project was intended to facilitate

an experiment in spiritual formation through a series of intergenerational religious

experiences—experiences that addressed the whole person, including the cognitive,

affective, relational, and behavioral dimensions. Chapter 1 introduces the project

with a description of the formation model then in place at Northside, and a

clarification of the problem, purpose, assumptions, definitions, and delimitations of

the project. Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework of the project. Chapter 3

presents the methodological approach to the problem by describing the

intervention format, participants, sessions, and evaluation methods. Chapter 4

details the results of the intervention from three perspectives: my own, based on

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[1] Hereinafter labeled "Northside."

field notes taken during the intervention; the participants', based on a large group interview held at the conclusion of the project; and an outside expert's, based on his own observations, discussion with the participants, and the lesson plans generated for this intervention.

<div align="center">Title of the Project</div>

The title of this project is "Facilitating Holistic Spiritual Formation at the Northside Church of Christ in Laredo, Texas." The term "holistic" expresses the intention of this project to nurture growth in all areas of the believers' lives: emotions, relationships, and behavior, as well as the cognitive learning that has traditionally been the primary focus of Northside's formation model. While this project might have been aptly labeled "Facilitating Holistic Christian Education," "spiritual formation" is more readily understood as a process of growing into the image of Christ in all areas. The project does concern the education program of the congregation, but a change of terminology from "education" to "formation" reinforces the conceptual shift from cognitive to holistic growth.

<div align="center">Ministry Context</div>

One of Laredo's claims to fame is its status as the least diverse city in the United States. A 2012 study of metropolitan diversity conducted at Brown University conferred that title to Laredo, where approximately ninety-six percent of the population identify as Hispanic—nearly all Mexican-American.[2] Better known,

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[2] Barrett A. Lee, John Iceland, and Gregory Sharp, *Racial and Ethnic Diversity Goes Local: Charting Change in American Communities over Three Decades*, USA 2010 Project (Providence, RI: Brown University, 2012), 12, http://www.s4.brown.edu/us2010/Data/Report/report08292012.pdf.

but not well-grounded in data, is Laredo's reputation as a dangerous border town.

Situated directly across the border from Nuevo Laredo, Mexico, a city dealing with

horrific violence as warring drug cartels fight for control of a lucrative passageway

into the United States, Laredo has an undeserved reputation for violence,

exacerbated by the similarity of names.[3] On July 23, 2013, just over a month before

the intervention began, the city registered only its second homicide of the year.[4] For

a large urban center, Laredo is, if anything, unusually safe.

The Northside Church of Christ was founded on September 1, 1996, as a split

from the Arkansas Avenue Church of Christ (which was, in turn, a split from the

now-defunct Guadalupe Church of Christ). A controversy arose when the elders at

Arkansas Avenue hired a new minister. Some church members thought that they

had been inappropriately shut out of the decision-making process and that the

elders had made their selection without sufficient congregational input. In the

aftermath of this controversy, some of these disappointed members created a new

congregation: Northside.

For most of its existence, Northside has maintained a membership of around

thirty. That membership has not been static, however. The congregation's founder,

Chuck Owen, once noted that approximately 150 different people had been

members at Northside during its first decade-and-a-half of existence—just seldom

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[3] Molly Hennessy-Fiske, "Laredo, Texas, Battles an Image Problem," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2013, sec. U.S., http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/28/nation/la-na-laredo-safe-20130428.

[4] JJ Velasquez, "One Dead in Homicide; Two Shootings May Be Related," *Laredo Morning TImes*, July 24, 2013, http://www.lmtonline.com/articles/2013/07/25/front/news /doc51f050c81e2ea942689176.txt.

more than thirty at one time.[5] From my perspective, a few factors made growth a

challenge for Northside. The most obvious one is the language barrier. Over 90% of

Laredo residents speak Spanish at home[6], and somewhere around 43% speak

English less than "very well."[7] Services at Northside are in English, which limits our

outreach significantly. We have a few Spanish-speaking members, and a Spanish-

language Bible study was conducted for some time on Thursday nights, but that

effort was ultimately abandoned. In many ways Laredo is a mission setting, but

Northside does not have the support, resources, or training most mission sites do.

Another barrier is location. The church rents part of a small office building for

worship, and we are in an industrial, rather than residential location. Surrounding

the church are an accountant's office, a gym, an employment agency, and a baseball

field. There are no homes nearby, making it difficult to position Northside as a

neighborhood church. Typical Northside member are Protestants who were

transferred to Laredo by their employers or came to Laredo seeking work. Most do

not live close to the meeting site. They stay for a few years and move to a more

attractive location when the opportunity arises.[8]

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[5] Chuck Owen, ed., *The Church of Christ in Laredo, Texas 1937-2010: A Discussion of the History* (Laredo, TX: Mendes Printing, 2011), 101.

[6] 92.1% of the population of Laredo speaks a language other than English at home. For 98.8% of those households, the home language is Spanish. Camille Ryan, *Language Use in the United States: 2011* (U.S. Census Bureau, Aug. 2013), 13, https://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acs-22.pdf.

[7] *Language Use and English-Speaking Ability: 2000* (U.S. Census Bureau, October 2003), 9.

[8] The membership of the Arkansas Avenue Church of Christ, in contrast, is approximately two-thirds Spanish-speaking Latinos. The vibrant Latino community there may be another reason Northside has remained a congregation primarily of new arrivals to town—there is already a similar congregation with an established Spanish-language community.

Like other Northside members, my family moved here for a job: several years ago I decided to take a break from vocational ministry after an unusually difficult experience, and I cast about for a position in higher education. Laredo Community College hired me as a speech instructor, a position that I began in the fall of 2011. After visiting many of the Protestant congregations in town, we joined Northside in May of 2012. I am not employed as a minister by the church, and I have no title or formal position. Northside has never had a paid minister on staff, nor does it have designated elders or deacons. Chuck Owen was considered the church's minister for many years, coordinating the congregation's worship and education programs. After his death in the spring of 2012, Roger Valadez inherited those responsibilities. It is his name and number that appear on the church sign as the first point of contact for visitors to the congregation. During the time frame of this project, five church members shared preaching responsibilities, taking roughly equal turns as their work schedules allowed. I preach, on average, about once a month, and usually lead the singing or communion service when I am not preaching.

Because few of the church members are Laredo natives, the demographics of the congregation are nothing like the surrounding city. A majority of church members are white, with several Latino members, and a few African-American members. The congregation has historically been diverse in ethnicity and national origin and has been nicknamed the "International Church of Christ."[9]

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[9] This nickname is potentially confusing, as there is a religious movement called "International Churches of Christ" that diverged from the Churches of Christ. Northside is not connected to that movement and few Northside members are aware of it.

Northside is a family-sized church.[10] Church gatherings are warm and friendly, typically characterized by enthusiasm and high energy. My family only needed to visit once before we decided that Northside was where we wanted to be, in part because our older daughter instantly made three friends. Each worship service ends with the congregation joining hands and singing "Bind Us Together," an act of enormous ritual significance. After worship, there is a weekly potluck in the dining area, regularly attended by most members.

For a small church, the demographics are very healthy, not just in ethnic diversity but in age diversity. Three of our key families have young children.[11] A typical Sunday sees eight to ten children under the age of ten, plus one teenager. Alice Mann writes that "a healthy family-size church is usually known in its community for one vibrant ministry focus."[12] For Northside, it is the sponsoring and hosting of the local Troop of American Heritage Girls, an evangelical analogue to the Girl Scouts. We began last fall with seven girls and now have just over thirty. The

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[10] I am following the definitions of family, pastoral, program, and corporate-sized churches developed in Arlin Rothauge, *Sizing Up a Congregation for New Member Ministry* (New York: Episcopal Church Center, 1986). Rothauge defines a family-sized church as having fewer than fifty active members. And is led by an influential patriarch or matriarch figure. The process of becoming a new member in a family-sized church is much like adoption. It happens more slowly than gaining membership status in a larger church, but the eventual bond is much deeper.

[11] Given the frequency of congregational turnover at Northside, readers should understand that the specific demographic details provided here were accurate at the time of the ministry intervention in the fall of 2013, but changed soon after. In the first eight months after the completion of the project, one family with young children moved away to accept a job in the northeastern U.S.; one middle-aged married couple moved a few hours away to Uvalde, Texas; one African-American physician moved to a clinic in Nacogdoches; and one young black college athlete transferred to a different university. During the same time frame, one Hispanic man with daughters in their teens and early twenties has begun attending regularly, as has a Hispanic mother-daughter pair, and one of our key families has adopted two children. Less than one year later, the face of the church looks very different—and we still have around 25-30 on a Sunday morning, as always.

[12] Alice Mann, *The In-Between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), 4.

success of the program has been a source of great satisfaction for a church of our size, even though it has also required a great deal of time and energy.

In most family-sized churches an influential matriarch or patriarch serves as the primary leader—an informal, often untitled, but significant role.[13] In small churches that have paid clergy, there is potential for conflict if the minister tries to assert influence in a way that the patriarch does not support. Northside is unusual in that it has no clergy and the patriarch, Chuck Owen, has passed away. The loss of Chuck is palpable, and his name is frequently invoked at worship. Many sermons begin with "Remember what Chuck used to say!" Northside is now in a transitional era, navigating its first years without the founder. Wisely, Chuck had prepared the church for his death by mentoring Roger Valadez to take his place as lead administrator after his passing. Clema Owen, Chuck's wife, is a powerful influence in her own right. Roger exerts his influence casually—decisions are made by consensus of the congregation, following a discussion at the weekly church potluck. When I wanted to work with the church education program for this project, I first talked with Roger about it, then Clema, and then the other parents of the congregation, before bringing it before the entire assembly during worship one morning, with more details provided during the potluck. The discussion was light

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[13] Roy Oswald, "Appendix A: How to Minister Effectively in Family, Pastoral, Program, and Corporate Size Churches," in *The In-Between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations*, by Alice Mann (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1998), 78–80.

and there were no objections. The congregation seemed happy to have someone

pay special attention to this area.[14]

For most of Northside's history, limitations of space and personnel kept the

congregation from implementing a full Sunday School program with multiple

classes. Northside rents the front areas of a small business building. Until last fall,

our facilities consisted of two areas: an auditorium and a kitchen/dining area. Prior

to the worship service each week, there was a Bible study in the dining area

designed for adults only. When worship began, children stayed with their parents

for approximately thirty minutes, before moving into the dining area for their own

class during the sermon. But when a business that had rented rooms adjacent to

ours moved out, the congregation seized the opportunity to expand, acquiring two

small rooms suitable for children's classes and a large, open area that could be a

third gathering place. For the first time in Northside's history, the congregation had

both the room for a formal education program and enough children to be motivated

to begin one. Sunday morning religious education classes for all ages began in

September 2012, with one class for preschool children and one class for elementary

children in addition to the adult Bible study.

<div align="center">The Problem</div>

The problem that this project addressed is that Northside lacked a model for

intentional spiritual formation that holistically addressed all aspects of the

believer's life: cognitive, affective, relational, and behavioral. Without considering

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[14] It is probably also true that like most closely knit, family churches, they were also happy to support an initiative that was important to one of the members—me—as long as it was not disruptive to the church culture.

other alternatives, Northside quickly implemented a traditional church schooling

model for the religious training of the children, in essence extending to their level

the educational model that had long been in operation among the adults. This is far

from unusual among churches of any size or denomination. The Sunday School

model in its current form has held sway for over a century, and most congregations

adopt the schooling paradigm for their members without stopping to question

whether there might be a better way. Yet the classroom model, as it is typically

practiced, addresses primarily the cognitive element of a believer's faith—helping

participants to better love the Lord with their mind. While relationships built with

teachers and other class members may spur growth in other dimensions of faith—

loving the Lord with heart, soul, and strength—the curriculum itself is seldom

designed with holistic growth in view. In chapter 2 I will explain how the Sunday

School model became so pervasive as I introduce the perspective of one cluster of

Churches of Christ who never adopted it—a perspective that will partially inform

the response to this problem. In that chapter I will also draw on the

intergenerational formation literature to critique the reigning Christian education

paradigm and point to another way.

　　　　When this project began Northside stood at a crossroads in the

congregation's life. We were barely beginning the second year after the death of our

founder. We had more young children than ever before, and we had a surplus of

engaged, talented leaders. We sponsored and led an exciting and successful

American Heritage Girls troop. We had more physical space for ministry than ever

before. Decisions made during this crucial time could help set the stage for the next

chapter of the congregation's life. I saw this liminal moment as a good time to consider better, more holistic models of spiritual formation.

The Purpose

The purpose of this project was to facilitate an experiment in holistic spiritual formation through a series of intergenerational religious experiences that addressed the whole person. This project brought together insights from the intergenerational formation literature and the experience of churches that have operated without Sunday School to inform a potentially fruitful approach for holistic spiritual formation at the Northside Church of Christ. Through bringing the entire congregation together for interactive learning experiences, we sought to nurture growth in the cognitive, relational, affective, and behavioral dimensions. In other words, this project aimed to help the members of Northside grow in knowledge, trust, love, and actions.

Basic Assumptions

This project was built upon the following assumptions. First, the congregation desired to grow spiritually in all dimensions. While the models of formation then in use at Northside emphasized cognitive learning, members desired to grow in other ways as well. Drawing closer to God, building relationships among church members, and living the practices of the Christian life were all goals for the congregation. Second, all members were invested in the spiritual development of the church's children. The recent building expansion to create space for children's classes demonstrated that commitment. So, too, does the congregation's hosting of

the American Heritage Girls troop, a significant undertaking for a church of our size.

Being a community that invests in and nurtures children was central to our identity.

Third, parents desired to play an instrumental role in the faith development of their

children. Each of the congregation's parents was active in church leadership. The

development of the children was a frequent topic of conversation. Fourth, that the

congregation would support a trial period of a different approach to spiritual

development, even if it was challenging or uncomfortable at first, and would

evaluate the merits of the new approach honestly. My early conversations with key

church opinion leaders were very positive, even though traditional Sunday School

was the only approach to Christian education that they had known. Several people

volunteered their time and resources to help in this project.

<p align="center">Delimitations</p>

This project focused on the specific context of the Northside Church of Christ

in Laredo, Texas, an energetic, youthful, clergy-less, family-sized congregation in a

time of transition. All decisions regarding the specific implementation of the

intervention were made with the culture and constraints of this congregation in

mind.

<p align="center">Conclusion</p>

The Northside Church of Christ was in a period of great potential for the life

of the congregation. The presence of a large number of children—for our size—and

a recent facilities expansion had led the congregation to expand its Christian

education program, and caring members had stepped up to provide well-planned

lessons to all ages. However, like most American churches, Northside had adopted a schooling model of cognitive learning that was focused on only one dimension of growth, leaving the relational, affective, and behavioral dimension of Christian formation without specific attention. The congregation was in need of a model of spiritual formation that encouraged holistic growth. This project intended to facilitate a congregational experiment with an intergenerational formation approach that would engage all ages in a series of learning experiences designed to foster growth in multiple dimensions.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My earliest memories of spiritual formation are intergenerational

experiences. In fact, due to the unusual nature of my home congregation, virtually all

of my faith experiences took place in an intergenerational context. I was brought up

in a small subgroup of Churches of Christ known as the non-class churches.[1]

Without age-divided Bible classes or exclusive youth ministries, all worship,

ministry, and Bible study were done by the congregation together, from infants to

elderly. I remember well sitting on the floor in the living room of one member's

home, reading Scripture together and listening while Brother MacMeekin, then in

his seventies at least, shared his thoughts on the passage. Soon other adult men and

women joined him in an act of communal discernment (although they would not

have used that term). Occasionally Eric Ribble and I, the church's only pre-teens,

would join in with a question or comment as we began to emulate the spiritual

practices of those around us. This was how I began to learn the Bible and how I

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[1] For the uninitiated, the numerous subdivisions of Churches of Christ can be quite
confusing, since no denominational hierarchy exists from which to withdraw, and since all
congregations, of any stripe, are identified outwardly simply as a "Church of Christ." In short, the
subgroup I am concerned with had no outward differences from mainstream Churches of Christ
other than their rejection of the Sunday School model. For most of their history they have identified
themselves, when necessary, as the "non-class Churches of Christ," a term I will retain here, although
in more recent years many non-class leaders have taken to referring to their fellowship as the "NBC
network" or "NBC churches," a play on the television network name, with NBC standing for "non-
Bible-class." Although sometimes referred to as "antis" by mainstream Church of Christ members,
non-class leaders have avoided that terminology.

absorbed the basic principles of scriptural interpretation—not in the abstract, but as a newcomer in a living conversation. With no separate classes or small groups for youth, I had no example to follow but those of the adult believers. There was no question for me of when I would take my place among the adults. I had no other place. Later I would learn just how rare my experience was, but for me it was the normal experience of the kingdom—all ages together, joined in conversation.

Years later, as an adult, I had a conversation with David Langford, a minister in a non-class congregation in Lubbock, Texas, the Quaker Avenue Church of Christ. He described the experience of families who would visit the congregation, not knowing its unique heritage, and ask where the children's classes were. "Ah," David would answer, "we think the Bible class model is not the best paradigm for today's environment. We are forming our children through innovative family-based study and intergenerational groups." Relating this story to me, he commented, "We've now gone from old-fashioned and backward to the cutting edge of religious education!"

David was right. Recent years have seen a resurgence of interest in intergenerational formation, in part because more and more people who care about the faith formation of our children sense that a vital component is lacking, and in part because the long intergenerational heritage of the church—the normal experience in the early church and for many centuries afterward—is being rediscovered. This project was informed by a synthesis of two perspectives. The first perspective is the current understanding of Christian intergenerational formation, which I have summarized in three principles drawn from the literature:

Principle 1: The best learning happens in communities of practice.

Principle 2: Different generations learn from each other as they engage in

collaborative ministry and reflect on shared experiences.

Principle 3: Genuine Christian formation results in affective and behavioral

change as well as cognitive learning.

The second perspective is the culture and practices of the non-class Churches of

Christ—the segment of the Restoration Movement that is perhaps most experienced

with intergenerational formation. Throughout this chapter, I will tell the story of the

development of the Bible class model and the reaction to that model within the

Stone-Campbell Movement. I will look at early and later critics of traditional Sunday

School and then introduce the alternative models of religious education that have

been developed within the non-class congregations. It is my belief that other

congregations, particularly other Churches of Christ (and most particularly, my own

congregation) may be able to learn from their experience.

<p align="center">The Current Practice of Religious Education in America</p>

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the Sunday School model is its

sheer ubiquity. It spans denominational lines. High church Episcopalians,

fundamentalist Baptists, Spirit-filled charismatics, intellectual Presbyterians, and

social-justice oriented Methodists have all adopted the Sunday School model as the

primary tool for religious education. When the twenty-five-member Northside

Church of Christ on the Texas-Mexico border saw the need to educate its children, it

turned automatically to Sunday School. Churches who agree with each other on

almost no points of doctrine are united in teaching their disparate doctrines to their

flocks using the same methodology. Given that the Bible class model is less than 250

years old—and scarcely 150 years old in its current form—the sheer pervasiveness of it is remarkable.

It would be less remarkable if education and Christian formation specialists were united in lauding the excellence of the Bible class model, but that is far from the case. Perhaps the first significant critique of the burgeoning Sunday School model came in 1847, with the initial publication of Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture.* Bushnell, reacting against the idea that Christian education should expose children to the doctrine and history of the faith so that they would have a conceptual foundation for an adult conversation experience, proclaimed that "the true idea of Christian education" is "that the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise."[2] Presaging later writers who would emphasize the importance of community in shaping faith, Bushnell explained:

> And this is the very idea of Christian education, that it begins with nurture or cultivation. And the intention is that the Christian life and spirit of the parents, which are in and by the Spirit of God, shall flow into the mind of the child, to blend with his incipient and half-formed exercises; that they shall thus beget their own good within him—their thoughts, opinions, faith, and love, which are to become a little more, and yet a little more, his own separate exercise, but still the same in character. The contrary assumption, that virtue must be the product of separate and absolutely independent choice, is pure assumption. . . . All society is organic—the church, the state, the school, the family; and there is a spirit in each of these organisms, peculiar to itself, and more or less hostile, more or less favorable to religious character, and to some extent, at least, sovereign over the individual man. A very great share of the power in what is called a revival of religion, is organic power; nor is it any the less divine on that account. The child is only more within the power of organic laws than we all are. We possess only a mixed individuality all our life long.[3]

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[2] Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1861), 10.

[3] Ibid., 80–81.

More than a century later, C. Ellis Nelson sounded the same basic theme in *Where Faith Begins*, arguing that the examples of faith lived out in home, church, and community were greater influences on Christian formation than classroom instruction. "Faith," he wrote, "is communicated by a community of believers and . . . the meaning of faith is developed by its members out of their history, by interaction with each other, and in relation to events that take place in their lives."[4]

The most seminal critique of the Sunday school model came in 1976, with the publication of the first edition of John Westerhoff's *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Westerhoff surveyed the landscape of religious education and concluded the problem was much greater than lackluster implementation. "The church's educational problem rests not in its educational program, but in the paradigm or model which undergirds its educational ministry—the agreed-upon form of reference which guides its educational efforts."[5] He labeled this the "schooling-instructional paradigm," and while he acknowledged that positive things have happened within the confines of that paradigm, he believed that the churches of his era were "limited by a once helpful model" and had "blindly and unconsciously proceeded as if there were no other possible way."[6]

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[4] C. Ellis Nelson, *Where Faith Begins* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1967), 10.

[5] John Westerhoff III, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 3rd ed. (New York: Morehouse, 2012). Chapter 1. Kindle edition.

[6] Ibid. Others since Westerhoff have offered similar critiques. In books and articles beginning in 1990 Thomas Groome proposed and refined his idea that "total community catechesis" should replace the schooling model. In the total community catechesis model, the goal of the religious educator is to develop faith "that engages and permeates people's *heads, hearts,* and *hands*" and that is being "*informed, formed*, and *transformed* in discipleship to Jesus in a community of disciples for God's reign in the world." Thomas Groome, "Total Community Catechesis for Lifelong Faith Formation," *Lifelong Faith* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 30. (Italics in original.) *Lifelong Faith* frequently

Churches had followed the lead of secular education models, creating on Sunday morning a one-hour microcosm of American public schools, complete with "teachers, subject matter, curriculum resources, supplies, equipment, age-graded-classrooms, and, where possible, a professional church educator as administrator."[7] The value of that model is contested among education professionals; to adopt it wholesale as the church's primary (or only) approach for the formation of children is to willingly accept unneeded limitations. Moreover, the schooling-instructional paradigm creates especially acute problems in small churches, which lack the resources to create a robust education program, and which do not have enough students for age-graded classes, yet still try—and fail—to create church schools. This is a special concern for very small, family-sized congregations such as Northside. We have enough room, at the moment. We can create somewhat sensible classes since all but one of our children are between the ages of two and eight. We do have an adequate volunteer pool, but at the cost of asking the same few people to repeatedly miss adult fellowship or the morning sermon, in perpetuity. Barring some incredibly unlikely event, this is as easy as Sunday school is ever going to be for us. If a family joins who has older children, or if one of our key families moves away, maintaining any semblance of the schooling-instructional paradigm is going to be a significant challenge. Even so, it was the undisputed choice to educate our members. Even that overstates the situation—the term "choice" implies awareness and consideration of alternatives. But in our congregation, as in most American

publishes articles related to intergenerational community formation from a Catholic perspective. Issues can be accessed at http://www.lifelongfaith.com/lifelong-faith-journal.html.

[7] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*

churches, there are no considered alternatives, just the "schooling–instructional paradigm."

<p style="text-align:center">The Rise of the Church Schooling Model</p>

Faith formation has taken place with varying levels of effectiveness across church history, but for the first 1800 years of Christianity almost all believers, regardless of time and location, were part of an intergenerational community that would have introduced new believers and young children to the doctrines and lifestyle of the faith in an organic way. The practice of intentionally, habitually dividing the church into classes according to age level is a very new arrangement. As Harkness writes:

> Ever since the development of Christian faith communities in the post-Pentecost era of Christianity, there has been a consciousness that such communities need to encourage and embody a genuine intergenenerationalism.[8]

Ever since the beginning of Christianity until the late eighteenth century, that is. In modern times, a congregation that is not habitually segregated into age-homogenous clusters is the exception. For most of us, as the Bible class hour approaches, infants and toddlers are dropped off in the nursery, young children go to their classes, teens find their way to the youth room, college students gather for their study, and the adults are often divided into three or more segments: perhaps singles, young couples, older couples, and seniors. In this framework it is completely possible—even probable—for members to be in one congregation their entire life

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[8] Allan G. Harkness, "Intergenerational Education for an Intergenerational Church?" *Religious Education* 93, no. 4 (Fall 1998): 431.

and have virtually all of their significant relationships formed with people within ten years of their own age, as they transition from one class to another.

The development of age segregation in the church originated with Robert Raikes in Glouchester, England, in 1780. He is credited with beginning the first Sunday School. In his context, it was a creative response to a great need. At the time, illiteracy was rampant, and by some estimates there were only 3500 schools in all of England, both public and private, and the private ones were often haphazardly run, with businessmen offering what instruction they could between work obligations and visits to the ale-house.[9] Some children were left to their own devices while their parents were at work, either too far from a school to attend one, or too poor to afford tuition. Others were working in the factories of the Industrial Revolution era, laboring during the week with no time to study, even if they had the opportunity. It was this situation that provided the impetus for the first Sunday School. In Raikes' words,

> The beginning of the scheme was entirely owing to accident. Some business leading me one morning into the suburbs of the city, where the lowest of the people (who are principally employed in the pin manufactory) chiefly reside, I was struck with concern at seeing a group of children, wretchedly ragged, at play in the streets. I asked an inhabitant whether those children belonged to that part of the town, and lamented their misery and idleness. "Ah! sir," said the woman to whom I was speaking, "could you take a view of this part of the town on Sunday, you would be shocked indeed; for then the street is filled with multitudes of these wretches, who, released on that day from employment, spend their time in noise and riot, playing at 'chuck,' and

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[9] Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday School Movement 1780-1917 and the American Sunday School Union 1817-1917* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1917), 12.

cursing and swearing in a manner so horrid as to convey to any serious mind an idea of hell rather than any other place."[10]

Raikes desired to bring moral reform to Glouchester, beginning with children such as these. He began a school in "Soot Alley"; his first pupils were boys and girls from the worst sections of the city. He rented a kitchen, hired a mistress, and—enforcing strict dress and cleanliness codes—set about educating his charges using the Bible as his text. In 1783, having developed a consistent and effective program, he publicized his Sunday School scheme in the pages of the *Glouchester Journal,* which he served as editor. The idea gained considerable support. Sunday Schools were begun all over England, enrolling over 250,000 within four years.[11]

The Sunday School model soon spread to America, where it was reproduced virtually unchanged, offering food, instruction, and sometimes clothing to poor children. The American Sunday School Union, established in 1824, led to the creation of an enormous number of Sunday Schools—approximately 16,000 in just the first decade of its existence.[12] These early Sunday Schools were a philanthropic response to the needy. They were not connected to established churches. The teachers were paid professionals, not volunteers. Some Sunday Schools were even government funded.[13]

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[10] Letter from Robert Raikes to Colonel Townley of Lancashire, dates November 25, 1783, cited in Rice, 437-38.

[11] Ronny F. Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday: A History of the Non-Class, One-Cup Churches of Christ* (Springfield, MO: Yesterday's Treasures, 1986), 4.

[12] Lynn May, "The Sunday School: A Two Hundred Year Heritage," *Baptist History and Heritage* 15, no. 4 (Oct. 1980): 4.

[13] Tim Stafford, "This Little Light of Mine: Will Sunday School Survive the 'Me Generation'?" *Christianity Today* 34, no. 14 (Oct. 8, 1990): 30.

In the early nineteenth century the paradigm changed. Sunday School became more evangelistic, focused on disseminating Bible knowledge in preparation for conversion. Teachers were younger volunteers, themselves often enthusiastic converts from the Second Great Awakening and subsequent revivals. It was in this era that Sunday School programs became connected to specific denominations. With the rise of public education, there was less need for Sunday School to teach basic literacy, and it became a focused program of religious instruction with evangelistic intent and missionary flavor. Conversion was the primary goal.[14]

In the post-Civil War era, however, Sunday Schools shifted yet again, this time away from crisis-oriented evangelism toward a consistent, years-long nurturing of faith. Curricula were no longer aimed toward unaffiliated youth. Now the children of the congregation were the focus. Sunday School in the late nineteenth century had taken the basic form that we still recognize today.[15] This transformation was significant: Sunday School, which had begun by teaching and evangelizing the poor, had shifted into a missionary outreach tool for the unconverted, and had now moved into the established church as a program for ongoing instruction of all believers. When the primary formative tool for Christians became age-divided classes, most churches ceased to operate as age-integrated communities of practice, trusting that this new set of practices borrowed from the world of American public education would be effective at nurturing young believers.

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

Sunday School in the American Restoration Movement

While Sunday School was first gaining ground in America, the early formative events in what would become the American Restoration Movement (or Stone-Campbell Movement) were taking place. Early leaders addressed the question of the place of this new educational model in their churches, often disapproving of this development. Alexander Campbell called Sunday School "a recruiting establishment, to fill up the ranks of those sects that take the lead in them," explaining that at Sunday School children would have their pockets filled with tracts, "the object of which is either directly or indirectly to bring them under the domination of some creed or sect."[16] Elsewhere he noted that the early New Testament churches "were not fractured into missionary societies, Bible societies, education societies; nor did they dream of organizing such in the world," and referred to Sunday School as one of the "hobbies of modern times."[17] In the early writings of Campbell, rejecting Sunday School was a natural consequence of Campbell's anti-creedal, anti-sectarian, primitivist stance. Nor was he alone in his thinking. According to Bowers and Ross, "the reformation movement as a whole was opposed to Sunday School" at least until 1833.[18]

Campbell's convictions against Sunday School did not last. By 1847, he had changed his mind completely, attributing his early concerns to over-cautiousness

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[16] Alexander Campbell, "Prefatory Remarks," *The Christian Baptist* 2 (Aug. 1824): 5.

[17] Alexander Campbell, "The Christian Religion," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 1 (Aug. 1, 1823): 20.

[18] William Clayton Bower and Roy G Ross, eds., *The Disciples and Religious Education* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1936), 25.

regarding sectarian abuses, and enthusiastically encouraging his readers "either to have in every church a Sunday-school of their own, or to unite with the Sunday-School Union in their truly benevolent and catholic institution."[19] The earliest documented Sunday Schools in the Stone-Campbell churches date to 1831 in Hanover, Indiana, and 1834 in Georgetown, Kentucky.[20] A Sunday School Society was formed in the 1840s,[21] and by 1850, Sunday School was gaining popularity among the more progressive churches, which were moving away from the primitivism that characterized much of the movement. When the American Christian Missionary Society took leadership over the National Bible Class Association, the effort to create new Sunday Schools gained momentum, with at least ten state-level Sunday School organizations created between 1860 and 1903.[22] By the very early twentieth century, the majority of Restoration Movement churches had some kind of organized Bible study program.[23]

In retrospect, it was not at all certain that Campbell and the majority of his readers and associates would embrace the Sunday School model, especially among the a cappella Churches of Christ. The same primitivist impulse that led to the rejection of instrumental music applies to the Sunday School system, and the

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[19] Alexander Campbell, "Reply to Elder A. W. Corey," *Millennial Harbinger, Series 3* 4, no. I (April 1847): 201.

[20] Bower and Ross, *The Disciples and Religious Education*, 32.

[21] Lisa W. Davison, "Educational Ministry: 1. Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)," in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, ed. Douglas Foster et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 294.

[22] Ibid.

[23] William Banowsky, *Mirror of a Movement: Churches of Christ as Seen through the Abilene Christian College Lectureship* (Dallas: Christian Pub., 1965), 234.

concerns about borrowing denominational methods that resulted in rejecting, for example, missionary societies, also have application to Sunday School curricula. In most respects, Churches of Christ follow in the tradition of the early Campbell of *The Christian Baptist*, the Campbell who was on guard against any creeping sectarian methods, any departure from biblical authority, not the later Campbell of the *Millennial Harbinger*, whose ecumenical posture would find expression among the Disciples of Christ.[24] But the popularity of the Sunday School model and its apparent benefits proved to be persuasive even among the more conservative parts of the movement. As Sunday schools shifted from community-based parachurch organizations to congregational programs under control of the local church, it became more palatable to those whose main objection was that it was an institution separate from the congregation and therefore lacking scriptural authority.[25] Over time, even though the adoption of programmatic Bible classes was in tension with the stance of early leaders and the general rejection of "innovation," Sunday school became ubiquitous.[26]

The Development of the Non-Class Churches of Christ

While Sunday school programs were taking their modern form, becoming regularized, and spreading across the country, one small segment of Churches of Christ was following the path laid out by Alexander Campbell in *The Christian*

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[24] Richard Hughes, *Reviving the Ancient Faith: The Story of Churches of Christ in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 90–91.

[25] Wade, *The Sun Will Shine Again, Someday*, 29.

[26] Ibid. Wade cites an 1855 editorial remark in *The Christian Evangelist* that it was "strange that the utility of an institution so obviously good as the Sunday-school . . . so simple and practicable, should ever have been questioned."

Baptist, rejecting Bible classes and maintaining an emphasis on family-based formation. In general, these were rural, frontier congregations, far from the wealthier urban centers that had become enthusiastic adopters of church education programs. The critical mass of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century resistance to Sunday school was in Texas. These congregations would become the non-class Churches of Christ.

The primary anti-Sunday school influences of the early twentieth century were G. A. Trott and N. L. Clark. Clark, especially, would become the prominent voice among those congregations who were opposed to age-divided Bible classes, but on all other issues in agreement with the mainstream Churches of Christ.[27]

Clark's reasons for objecting to Sunday school were laid out in a running debate with R. L. Whiteside in the pages of the *Firm Foundation* from 1906 to 1907. There is a clear line from Campbell's objections in *The Christian Baptist* to Clark's reasoning eight decades later in *The Firm Foundation.*[28] His objections fall into the following general categories: First, Sunday school is not consonant with the restoration ideal. Prewritten curriculum cedes the oversight of the local church in

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[27] Ronny Wade cites Ervin Waters as calling Clark "the father of the non-class churches in Texas," but Wade, from the non-class, one-cup churches, notes that "Clark may be accurately described as the father of the non-class group that eventually used a plurality of cups, but that is all." Ibid., 34.

[28] See the analysis in Kent Ellett, "Non-Sunday School Churches of Christ: Their Origins and Transformation," *Discipliana* 60, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 49–63. There is not, to my knowledge, any clear evidence that Clark was aware of Campbell's writings against Sunday school. It was the opinion of Clark's protégé, G. B. Shelburne Jr., that Clark's anti-class stance had developed during his early exposure to the Primitive Baptists. G. B. Shelburne Jr. Interview by author. South Houston, TX. April, 1996. Clark himself once wrote that he had "opposed the Sunday School ever since I left the Baptist Church over fifty-three years ago," a statement that seems to imply that the non-Sunday School stance was one of the things that convinced him to join the Churches of Christ. N. L. Clark, "Drawing the Line," Gospel Tidings 2 (June 1947): 6.

favor of an unscriptural organization.[29] There is no scriptural authorization for divided assemblies in general, or a school program in particular.[30] It is also unscriptural to allow women to teach in an assembly that includes men or boys.[31] Second, Sunday school is detrimental to healthy church practice. It detracts from the authority of the elders by ceding their authority to curriculum writers.[32] It hinders the union of Christians by introducing a controversial practice.[33] Some desire to begin a Sunday school to attract young people, which is a poor reason.[34] Third, it undermines the role of Christian parents, whose obligation it is to nurture their children's faith.[35] Finally, Clark believed that Sunday school had proven to be ineffective and had resulted in less, rather than more, knowledge of the Bible.[36]

In spite of Clark's strong stance in favor maintaining strong ties among all the Churches of Christ, and his insistence that disputable matters such as Sunday school, the number of communion cups, located preachers, and premillennialism were not significant enough matters to break the fellowship of believers, over time the non-

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[29] N. L. Clark, "The Sunday School Question," *Firm Foundation* 22 (Oct 23, 1906): 2–3; N. L. Clark, "The Sunday School Question," *Firm Foundation* 23 (Feb. 19, 1907): 2–3.

[30] N. L. Clark, "The Sunday School Question," *Firm Foundation* 22 (Sept 4, 1906): 1; N. L. Clark, "What Shall We Do About It?" *Firm Foundation* 23 (March 12, 1907): 1–2.

[31] N. L. Clark, "The Sunday School Question," *Firm Foundation* 23 (Jan. 15, 1907): 2–3.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.; Clark, "The Sunday School Question." (Jan. 15, 1907): 2-3.

[34] N. L. Clark, "Editorial Notes," *Firm Foundation* 23 (Jan. 29, 1907): 1.

[35] N. L. Clark, "Religious Instruction Essential to Education," *Firm Foundation* 22 (May 8, 1906): 1–2.

[36] Clark, "The Sunday School Question." (Feb. 19, 1907): 2-3.

class congregations became a separate body.[37] In 1925 a list of faithful anti-Sunday

school preachers was published in *The Apostolic Way*. By then, at least, that cluster

of churches was on a separate trajectory from the mainstream Churches of Christ.

The anti-Sunday school group was—and is—very small. Exact numbers are

hard to obtain, and estimates of the non-class population diverge significantly. In

1979, Larry Hart estimated that there were between 500 and 600 non-class

congregations, with around 25,000 members, and contended that numbers

recorded elsewhere, particularly in Stephen Eckstein's *History of the Churches of*

Christ in Texas, were "low and inaccurate."[38] Another source, Mac Lynn's *Churches of*

Christ in the United States, attempts to catalog the various subsects of Churches of

Christ, but often miscategorizes the smaller groups. In his coding scheme, the N. L.

Clark-descended churches are labeled NCp (non-class, but employing paid

preachers); however, some congregations are erroneously labeled NC in certain

editions (non-class, opposed to paid ministers).[39] Such confusion is understandable,

as these distinctions are hard to discern from the outside, and congregations who do

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[37] It is outside the scope of this survey, but worth noting that Clark's attitude toward the disputed matters of his era was remarkably irenic, especially given the vitriolic debates that were splintering Churches of Christ into multiple factions distinguished only by very small differences. His example of holding onto strong convictions while fully accepting those who disagreed has had a strong influence on his successors and the general spirit of the non-class congregations.

[38] Larry Hart, "Brief History of a Minor Restorationist Group (the Non-Sunday School Churches of Christ)," *Restoration Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (1979): 231.

[39] David Langford has compared the 2006 and 2009 edition of *Churches of Christ in the United States* and discovered that forty-four congregations listed as NC in 2006 were listed as NCp in 2009—a large number of misattributed congregations given the total size of the fellowships involved. David Langford, e-mail message to author, August 17, 2013. Langford's effort to document the declining attendance of the non-class churches can be read in David Langford, "Current Plausibility of Non-Sunday-School Churches of Christ and the Impact of Ecumenical Sectarianism on Future Plausibility" (MS Thesis, Lubbock Christian University, 2014), 10–11.

not consider themselves part of the larger denomination may not be enthusiastic

about reporting accurate data. According to the 2009 data there seem to be 158

non-class (N. L. Clark descended) congregations, with a total membership of just

over 8,000. In my own experience as a native of the non-class fellowship, those low

numbers seem about right. Yet, in this small cluster of churches, some very

interesting things have been taking place.

Principle 1: The Best Learning Happens in Communities of Practice

In addition to the doctrinal concerns, Alexander Campbell had another

reason for his initial rejection of Sunday School. He believed that parents,

particularly mothers, were to be the primary source of their children's religious

instruction. In his 1824 address to Christian mothers, Campbell writes:

> Do not be startled when I tell you that you are by the law of nature,
> which is the law of God, as well as by his written word, ordained to be
> the only preachers of the gospel, properly so called, to your own
> offspring. You can tell them in language more intelligible to their
> apprehension, the wonders of creation; you can, from the lively
> oracles, teach them the history of our race; you can preach the gospel
> to them better than any Doctor of Divinity that ever lived. You can
> narrate to them the nativity and life, the words and deeds of Messiah;
> you can open to their minds how he died for our sins, and how he rose
> for our justification. You can tell them of his ascension to the skies, of
> his coronation in heaven, and that he will come to judge the world.
> When you have done all this, in a style which you can adopt, more
> easy of apprehension than any other - if Paul the Apostle was again to
> visit the world and call at your house, he could not preach to them
> with greater effect. Nay, you have anticipated all that he could say, and
> done all that he could do, to give the word effect.[40]

Concerns of denominational entanglement or lack of biblical precedent have

lost the urgency for contemporary believers that they had in the early nineteenth

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[40] Alexander Campbell, "Address to Christian Mothers," *The Christian Baptist* I, no. 9 (June 7, 1824): 266–67.

century, but these words still have resonance. Does the existence of a structured

Sunday School program discourage parents from deep engagement in the spiritual

formation of their children? Does the cognitive model of religious instruction

replace a better multi-faceted engagement with the faith? As Cynthia Lindner, a

minister in the Disciples of Christ, puts it, these other reasons for rejecting Sunday

School "are thought-provoking as we analyze Disciples church schools nearly two

centuries later."[41]

> Campbell argued for a personal faith and religious understanding that
> was individually initiated and relevant, untainted by institutional
> hierarchies and heresies. Church-based education, he thought,
> destroyed the individual's initiative to explore the Scriptures and
> replaced it with dogmatism. Much, much later, twentieth-century
> religious educators would argue once more for such an experiential
> approach to education.[42]

Although he would not have recognized the term, Campbell was implicitly

arguing for a situated learning approach, where parents live the Christian life in the

presence of their children, bringing children into the rhythms of godly practice and

sharing the Christian perspective with them. The ability of parents to shape

children's spirituality through intentional daily life would far outstrip the influence

of even the very best practitioners of the cognitive schooling models—even a Doctor

of Divinity.

Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross would agree. In

Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in

Ministry, Community and Worship, they address the topic of spiritual formation in

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[41] Cynthia Gano Lindner, "Teaching the Faith-Story," 150.

[42] Ibid., 151.

combined age groups.[43] Of Allen and Ross's foundational work, the most pertinent to

this project is chapter 7, "Midwives, Tailors and Communities of Practice." There

they present a situative-sociocultural perspective on learning theory that "places a

stronger emphasis on the social interaction of the learning environment than do

cognitive and behaviorist theories and promotes the idea that *the social setting itself*

is crucial to the learning process."[44] The most significant theorist to develop the

situative-sociocultural perspective is Lev Vygotsky, who believed that those learning

new concepts "must experience them and socially negotiate their meaning in

authentic, complex learning environments."[45] Allen and Ross particularly draw upon

his concept of the "zone of proximal development" to connect his work to

intergenerational theory. The idea of the zone of proximal development is that

"when a person is ready to learn the next thing, the best way to learn is to be with

those who are just ahead on the learning journey."[46]

    Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is related to the concepts of

"situated learning" and "communities of practice," phrases coined by Jean Lave and

Etienne Wenger as they studied apprenticeships, including those of midwives,

tailors, meat-cutters, and recovering alcoholics. They discovered it is important that

beginners have access to the skills and practices they are expected to learn, moving

gradually from peripheral to integral involvement, and finally full participation as a

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

[44] Ibid., 99. Italics in original.

[45] Ibid., 101.

[46] Ibid., 102.

skilled practitioner. In a community of practice setting, apprentices learn necessary skills, but just as critically, they are gradually enculturated.

> Masters . . . embody practice at its fullest in the community of practice. Becoming a "member such as those" is an embodied telos too complex to be discussed in the narrower and simpler language of goals, tasks, and knowledge acquisition. There may be no language for participants with which to discuss it at all—but identities of mastery, in all their complications, are there to be assumed.[47]

From this foundation, Allen and Ross articulate three rationales for intergenerationality in Christian formation: 1) "persons learn best in authentic, complex environments," 2) "the best learning happens when persons participate with more experienced members of the culture," 3) "persons identify with their communities of practice as they are allowed to participate legitimately in the activities to be learned."[48] A teacher focused purely on dissemination of cognitive knowledge, even if very gifted, will not provoke the same depths of growth as a community of practice learning through participation and reflection.

Similarly, Westerhoff proposed that the schooling-instructional paradigm be supplanted by a "faith-enculturation paradigm." This paradigm is dependent upon the context of a functioning community that contains at least three generations. In a later update to the original 1976 edition of his classic text, Westerhoff enumerates the essential characteristics of a formative community. Such a community needs to 1) have a common story and be shaped by that story, 2) have a common authority, 3) have common rituals that order life, 4) have a common life that is familial rather

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[47] Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), sec. Apprenticeship and Situated Learning: A New Agenda. Kindle edition.

[48] Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 104.

than institutional, 5) live for an end beyond its own survival, and 6) value diversities

of age, social class, culture, and racial and ethnic background.[49] Within this

community, believers participate in "shared experience, storytelling, celebration,

action, and reflection" that nurture and shape faith.[50] Elsewhere, Westerhoff writes

that catechesis[51] is made up of three distinctive, deliberate, systematic, and

sustained processes: formation, education, and instruction. Formation shapes the

community through experiential activities. Education reshapes the community

through critical reflection upon the experiences. Instruction builds up the body

through the transmission, acquisition, and comprehension of knowledge and

skills.[52] He, too, invokes the language of apprenticeship, writing that the Greek

words often translated "teacher" and "to teach" are just as plausibly translated

"master" and "to apprentice."[53] Moreover, the term catechizing inherently "implies

apprenticing."[54]

The implications from the formation literature are clear. If we believe that

the Christian life involves a set of learnable practices, not just cognitive information

(and we should), then novice believers, if they are to become skilled disciples, must

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[49] Westerhoff, *Will Our Childrem Have Faith?* Chapter 3. Kindle edition.

[50] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*. Chapter 4. Kindle edition.

[51] Catechesis is a term that Westerhoff was reclaiming "because it was a church word," although he admits some Protestants did not like the term because it sounded too Catholic, and some Catholics did not like it because it reminded them of practices they wanted to move away from. John Westerhoff III, "Formation, Education, Instruction," *Religious Education* 82, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 580.

[52] Ibid., 581.

[53] Ibid., 586. This insight he attributes, without specific citation, to Aaron Milavec's book *To Empower as Jesus Did.*

[54] Ibid.

have opportunity to practice Christianity alongside more mature believers of diverse ages. In so doing, they can learn from the example of those who are just ahead of them, and they will slowly absorb the ethos of the community until being a practicing disciple is part of their core identity.

And now we return to the non-class Churches of Christ. The historical surveys in the earlier part of this chapter may seem to some like a rather tedious history of an insignificant debate that birthed an insignificant sect. Yet the existence of the non-class fellowship provides an opportunity to answer a potentially useful question: if Alexander Campbell and his associates had not withdrawn their objections to Sunday school, and if Churches of Christ in general had not enthusiastically adopted the "schooling-instructional paradigm," what alternative models of religious education and spiritual formation might have been developed? We have in the non-class churches a sort of ecclesiastical control group. These congregations did not follow the rest of American Christendom into the church school model and may provide for the larger body of Churches of Christ—and perhaps Christendom in general—some alternate paths to consider.

Non-class churches, unsurprisingly, took the mounting criticisms of the Sunday school model in the mid-to-late twentieth century as a confirmation that they had taken the right approach all along. A booklet entitled "Teaching the Bible," containing articles from five of the leading non-class preachers, was widely distributed among non-class congregations in the mid-1970s. The first article, by G. B. Shelburne Jr., opens by quoting Reuel Lemmons, a prominent leader in the mainstream Churches of Christ. Lemmons wrote "There is no clear purpose for the

existence of the Bible School in the average church—it just exists because it exists"

and "We seriously doubt whether we will have Bible Schools in the 'Sunday School'

tradition of today 25 years from now . . . traditional Bible School arrangements are

already completely outmoded and badly in need of revolutionary changes."[55]

Shelburne notes that Sunday School had fallen on hard times, and he reiterates the

biblical case against Bible classes, sounding many of the same notes that N. L. Clark

and Alexander Campbell had before him.

The articles that follow his are more constructive. Each one discusses a

different context for teaching the Bible: in church assemblies, in the home, in cottage

meetings,[56] and in our daily lives. As the foreword states:

> This publication is intended to do more than show that objection to
> the Sunday School is founded on valid and relevant Scripture. It seeks
> to encourage Christians (as individuals and congregations) to employ
> every means of teaching God's Word found to be consonant to the
> Scriptures and practical according to talent and circumstance.[57]

The most interesting article, both as a historical artifact and as a guide to

Christian practice, is "Teaching the Bible in the Home," by Jack Hutton, who was

writing from the Namikango Mission in Malawi. Hutton refers to the example of

Timothy, who had "known the sacred writings" from childhood (2 Tim 3:15)

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[55] Reuel Lemmons, *Firm Foundation*, (Sept. 7, 1971) and *20th Century Christian*, (July, 1972) cited in G. B. Shelburne, "Teaching the Bible without Sunday Schools," in *Teaching the Bible*, ed. Delos Johnson (South Houston, TX: Gospel Tidings, 1975), 3.

[56] A now-obsolete term denoting informal gatherings hosted in a Christian's home to which friends and neighbors were invited for the purpose of Bible study with a goal of conversion.

[57] Delos Johnson, foreword, in *Teaching the Bible*, ed. Delos Johnson (South Houston, TX: Gospel Tidings, 1975), 2.

because of the influence of his grandmother, Lois, and mother, Eunice (2 Tim 1:5).[58]

Parents should not feel inadequate or intimidated to teach their families. Hutton

writes:

> Teaching their children is less difficult than they think. They do not
> need formal training. If they are trying to be good parents, they love
> their children more than anyone else, and they understand them
> better and have more influence on them.[59]

Although he notes that children will learn much from the attitude and example of

their parents, Hutton encourages family worship times that include Bible reading,

prayer, and hymn singing. In his vision of faith formation, the family becomes a

small worshiping community, allowing children to join in to the extent they are

capable, and offering them close observation of parents who are praying, reading,

and singing. He also asks parents to be aware of everyday teaching moments. "The

planting of seeds or a walk in the open affords learning opportunities."[60] Cognitive

dimensions of learning are still present, but affective and behavioral learning—

experiential learning—is taking place as well.

Over time, some non-class leaders began to realize that although they had

consistently communicated the need for parents to make their homes into

spiritually formative communities, most parents were struggling to put those

expectations into practice. The non-class churches of the 1960s and 70s began to

develop models to equip parents in the task. The most popular and most widely

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[58] Campbell opened his admonition to mothers with this same Scripture. Campbell, "Address to Christian Mothers," 263.

[59] Jack Hutton, "Teaching the Bible in the Home," in *Teaching the Bible*, ed. Delos Johnson (South Houston, TX: Gospel Tidings, 1975), 16.

[60] Ibid., 14–15.

used was Gene Shelburne's "Family Bible Study" curriculum.[61] In an email to me, he

explained how it came about:

> I am convinced that the best Bible and spiritual training I received
> myself was at the feet of my grandmother, who taught us all the major
> Bible stories before we were old enough to read, and from my parents,
> who provided us daily Bible reading and singing at our dinner table
> almost every day—until the busy-ness of teen obligations made such
> sessions almost impossible.
>
> Looking back at all of this, I now realize that the congregations
> where a significant percentage of our families had this kind of routine
> turned out to be our strongest churches that produced the majority of
> our future leaders. I also suspect now that leaders like my own father
> may have erred in opposing Sunday School because they
> miscalculated the number of families who would allot significant time
> and energy to the spiritual training of their kids. Their ideal was
> realized in a small percentage of our families.
>
> When I started work at Black Canyon in Phoenix in 1961, we
> had 10 or 12 young couples with kids—couples who in almost every
> case were marriages of lifelong church members to spouses who had
> little or no church background. Since our nbc[62] method of teaching all
> their kids was to require the parents to do it at home, it seemed
> obvious to B. (who preceded me there) and to me that we were
> derelict if we did not provide those young families some materials and
> guidance and encouragement in teaching Bible to their children. That
> was the catalyst for the Family Bible Study program, which in the
> decades after that wound up being used as a teaching outline for
> everything from Wednesday night church studies to home-school
> curriculum. Originally, though, we composed those lessons as a
> guide for all our church families to use that week in their home Bible
> study, and then we had the whole families gather every Sunday
> morning (in our non-Sunday School Sunday School) and the kids
> shared what they had learned while studying that week's lesson. None
> of our instruction was "cold," as it is in most church educational
> programs. The FBS approach involved home study that had most of

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[61] A note on relationships: G. B. Shelburne, Jr., who was the younger protégé of N. L. Clark, had four sons, all of whom became ministers. Gene is the second of these sons. His older brother, G. B. Shelburne III, known as B., is mentioned in this message. The Shelburnes have provided significant leadership the non-class churches, leading some, with good reason, to refer to this subsect as the "Shelburne-ite churches."

[62] "non Bible-class."

the Sunday morning students already familiar with the material being covered that Sunday. It was a sound pedagogical approach, not unlike my high school teachers assigning us homework to prepare us for the next day's lecture. (Our churches who couldn't make the FBS materials work often short-circuited the program by failing to get their people to do any substantial home study.)

After several decades of a strong Bible study program that produced two generations who know the Scriptures, at Anna Street we have slowly slipped closer to the traditional class approach (mainly because our teachers grew up in that system instead of ours), and I say with some shame that we are now producing a generation of kids who know little Bible. It may well be true that Bible study without homework is about as effective as high school Algebra without homework.[63]

The ambivalence toward Sunday School expressed here is noteworthy. On one hand, as a practical matter, Sunday School may have been better than a situation where some children received no spiritual education at all. On the other hand, Shelburne blames the development of traditional Bible classes for the lack of Bible knowledge among his congregation's children. In this, he echoes N. L. Clark's sentiment more than a century earlier that "There is a dearth of Bible knowledge among our people both old and young that is simply appalling . . . . Popular methods of instruction bear the blame for very much of it."[64]

The complete Family Bible Study curriculum was available for purchase by the mid-1970s and found an eager market in the non-class fellowship. By design, FBS lessons covered one Bible story per week. (With a total of 288 lessons, a full set would last over five years.) The curriculum included a recommended schedule for daily devotionals that built on each previous day throughout the week. Each

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[63] Gene Shelburne, email message to author, June 2, 2013.

[64] Clark, "The Sunday School Question," (Feb. 19, 1907), 2.

individual lesson included advanced questions for teens and tips for parents who

were leading the study. Several congregations used them for an all-church study,

asking parents to use the lessons either as preparation before Sunday or

reinforcement in the coming week. In February of 1991, the Houston Bible Training

Work[65] sponsored a workshop entitled "Teaching Our Children." Gene Shelburne's

handout for his lecture explains that FBS was designed to be used by the entire

family at once, regardless of the ages involved: whether they are "tiny, or ten, or

teen-aged . . . . every person can share." When these studies were used at the

congregational level, every age group came together at once, responding to the story

at whatever level they were able, and listening to the responses of those who were

older and younger. This gave every generation opportunity to hear the questions

and concerns of others, and to learn from their insights.

The congregational learning times built on the framework of the Family Bible

Study curriculum were not creating fully-fledged learning communities in the

Westerhoff sense. The FBS curriculum emphasizes telling and learning Bible stories,

and offers questions at various difficulty levels to spur cognitive engagement with

the Scriptures, but it is not often directly focused on Christian practice. Still, the

study materials do encourage the formation of a sort of community of practice

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[65] The Bible Training Work was begun by G. B. Shelburne Jr. in 1948 to prepare preachers and church leaders. It operated for a while in Kerrville, Texas, before moving to Amarillo and then Houston. The Training Work offered three years of tuition-free evening classes, and for many decades provided the primary ministry education for non-class preachers. In 1990 the name was changed to the South Houston Bible Institute. It is still in operation, although over time it has shifted from minister preparation as its main purpose to a sort of community Bible Study model. (Feel free to note the irony inherent therein.) I am a 1993 graduate of SHBI and a grateful recipient of their N. L. Clark Award for Academic Excellence, though when I received it I knew almost nothing about N. L. Clark.

within the family. For example, the first of the "Tips for Teaching Parents"[66] that are

included with each lesson recommends:

> As you study together, worship God together. Take time for the family
> to sing and to pray. By doing this, you will let your children behold
> your faith and devotion in action. And you will be more likely to keep
> God (and not knowledge of facts alone) at the center of your family's
> study.[67]

In essence, families are to create small worshipping communities—communities of

practice where children are enculturated as singers, readers, studiers, and pray-ers.

A fully rounded program would also seek to develop Christian practices outside of

the worship arts, but this is a developmental step in the right direction.

Implemented as intended, FBS could be a valuable program for Christian families.

With some adaptation, it could serve as a foundation for a more holistic program. If

nothing else, it laid the foundation for families—or, if used congregationally, church

members—to study to discuss the Scriptures together, a vital component in the

second principle of holistic formation, to which we now turn.

Principle 2: Different Generations Learn from Each Other as They Engage in Collaborative Ministry and Reflect on Shared Experiences

Articulating a full biblical theology of intergenerationality is outside the

scope of this project, but it should not escape our notice that the Christ depicted in

the gospels is remarkably insistent on bringing different generations into dialogue

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[66] This is somewhat ambiguously phrased, but Shelburne intends these to be tips that are useful for parents who are teaching their children, not tips to help children teach their parents. (That would be interesting to see, though.)

[67] Gene Shelburne, *Family Bible Study*, (Amarillo, TX: 1991.) Lesson #1—How the World Began.

together. One of the clearest examples is the account of Jesus, age twelve, sitting

with the teachers in the temple, listening and asking questions (Luke 2:41-51). Mary

and Joseph are astonished to find him there, but young Jesus seems to think that this

is obviously the right place for him to be. "Why were you searching for me? Did you

not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) This text is often read as

a sign of the extraordinary spiritual precociousness of Jesus, but it could also be

seen as an early indication of his desire to bring different generations into dialogue

together, a desire echoed in his adult instruction to "Let the little children come to

me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs"

(Mark 10:14). Here, too, Jesus is confounding expectations. The disciples have been

turning children away, but Jesus rebukes their impulse to limit his ministry to adults

only. In both of these texts, the interaction blesses all parties. Young Jesus asks

questions at the temple, but he also provides answers that astonish the teachers.

While the adult Jesus blesses children, he also points to them as an example. "Truly I

tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never

enter it" (Mark 10:15). Similarly, while each of the gospels records the feeding of the

five thousand, John tells us that it was a boy who offered the loaves and fish that

Jesus blessed and multiplied to feed the hungry crowd. Jesus took what the young

man offered and partnered with him to create one of the centerpiece miracles of his

ministry.[68]

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[68] To these texts we could also add the reception and blessing of the infant Jesus by aged Simeon and Anna in the temple (Luke 2:22-38) and the various miraculous healings of young people, including the widow's son in Nain (Luke 7:11-7), Jairus's daughter (Matthew 9:18-19, 23-26; Mark 5:21-24, 35-43; Lk 8:40-42, 49-56), and the boy possessed by an unclean spirit (Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-45). These passages and others are helpfully collected in Allan G. Harkness,

By including children in his ministry and pointing to them as examples of kingdom living, Jesus "challenged his listeners to reconceptualize their value systems by calling into question the commonly held ideal of the maturity of adulthood," to acknowledge that "the independence, power, and responsibility normally associated with 'grown-up-ness' may be illusory and self-deluding."[69] Virtually all churches are invested in some form of ministry to children. But the example of Christ points us to a model of ministry with children—listening to their questions, but also their answers; blessing them, but also contemplating their example; allowing them to offer what they have, so that with God's blessing it may be multiplied to bless the crowds.

This will require a change in how churches view and relate to children. On this, Westerhoff's insights are worth quoting in full:

> Another example results from the unfortunate fact that the schooling-instructional paradigm encourages adults to be with children in ways that assert their power over them. The language of teaching, learning, behavioral objectives, and subject matter tend to produce a mind-set that results in the tendency to inflict on children adult ways of being in the world. It is difficult for us simply to be with the neophyte in song, worship, prayer, storytelling, service, reflection, and fellowship. We always seem to want to do something to or for them so they will be like us or like what we would like to be.
>
> But education grounded in Christian faith cannot be a vehicle for control; it must encourage an equal sharing of life in community, a cooperative opportunity for reflection on the meaning and significance of life. Surely we must share our understandings and ways with children, but we also must remember that they have

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"Intergenerationality: Biblical and Theological Foundations," *Christian Education Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 122.

[69] Ibid., 123.

something to bring to us and that what we bring to children is always under God's judgment.[70]

Again, intergenerational formation is not an opportunity for older generations to minister to younger generations, but a series of shared moments of "collaborative involvement with others."[71]

James White calls these "in-common-experiences," and they are a key component of the model of intergenerational formation he introduced in his comprehensive *Intergenerational Religious Education.* White opens by recounting the contemporary societal forces that are limiting interactions between people in different age groups before concluding that the faith community is "the institution best suited to facilitate significant cross-generational life and learning."[72] But such facilitation requires intentionality—the forces in society that are dividing the generations are affecting congregations as well. He proposes the IGRE model (for intergenerational religious education), which he defines as "two or more age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common-experiences, parallel-learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive-sharing."[73]

The meanings of the specialized terms in White's definition are not immediately clear. He chooses to combine learning/growing/living into one term to emphasize that the affective and experiential aspects of education are as important

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[70] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*

[71] Harkness, "Intergenerationality: Biblical and Theological Foundations," 122.

[72] James White, *Intergenerational Religious Education* (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988), 13.

[73] Ibid., 18.

as the cognitive, particularly in religious contexts.[74] "In-common-experiences" are

moments that can be shared equally by the young and the old. They may experience

them differently—how could they not?—but they still share the moment together.

Examples are "watching a film, hearing a story, eating the bitter herb, reciting a

common litany, fast-walking in musical chairs, or raking leaves together."[75] White

quotes Fred Rogers (of *Mr. Roger's Neighborhood*), who asked "How can older and

younger people respond to each other if they have no experiences together?"[76] In

"parallel-learning" the age groups are separated temporarily so they can work on

the same project but in different ways appropriate to each generation's skill level

and interest. Having all education done this way would defeat the purpose of IGRE,

but if this separation does not happen from time to time, frustration will result. The

key is to have all groups learning the same subject. Children may leave to watch a

dramatized presentation while adults hear an in-depth lecture or sermon, but they

are working with the same text or topic. "Contributive-occasions" are times that the

generations join together "for purposes of sharing what has been learned or created

previously."[77] This often is the next step after parallel-learning has taken place. All

ages might create a portion of a worship service or write a skit together that

concretizes what they learned while apart. Finally, "interactive-sharing" occurs

when individuals are brought together to exchange "experiences or thoughts or

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[74] This is another way of wording our first principle: the best learning happens in communities of practice.

[75] White, *Intergenerational Religious Education*, 26.

[76] Ibid., 27.

[77] Ibid., 28.

feelings or actions," with the goal of understanding another person's perspective. White notes that it is challenging to create this level of interpersonal sharing across generations and that it may be "a goal as much as a realized practice." But when it does occur, "interactive-sharing is IGRE at its best."[78]

Have the non-class churches been able to create the kinds of "in-common" experiences that lead to interactive-sharing? In at least a few contexts, the answer is yes. First, by the nature of their collective culture, the non-class churches tend to create in-common experiences naturally in situations where other congregations would be divided by age. For example, as a person raised in the non-class fellowship, I experienced extreme culture shock when I, as a newly hired youth minister in a mainstream Church of Christ, took my group of high school students to a youth rally. When I arrived I was astonished to see that there was no one there but teenagers and their (usually twenty-something) youth ministers. No older preachers, no parents, no grandparents—just kids. I had been to plenty of youth rallies before, ("youth meetings" in non-class parlance) but, in spite of the name, they were always all-age affairs. Of course, some activities were teen-only, but for most events, everyone was welcome. We teens enjoyed associating with one another, but we also interacted with adults of all ages, who shared the skits, the songs, the games, and the dynamic worship times with us. It would never have occurred to me that a church would host a youth event that was literally intended just for teens. As a youngster in the non-class movement, that was unthinkable. Each year I enjoyed a series of

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[78] Ibid., 29.

affective, experiential moments alongside older Christians and had opportunity to reflect on them together, sharing perspectives.

The closest thing the non-class churches have to a truly "teen only" experience is Summer Excitement, the non-class summer camp, held the last full week of June on the campus of Lubbock Christian University.[79] But even it bears the marks of the unique culture of the non-class movement. It kicks off with a celebratory worship service on Sunday night that is attended by the members of the sponsoring congregation (the Quaker Avenue Church of Christ in Lubbock, Texas), as well as many of the parents of the students who will be attending Summer Excitement that week. Wednesday night is traditionally "Jailbreak Night," when the teens are transported back to Quaker Avenue for worship. They act as a choir to perform songs for the gathered assembly, and then the entire congregation listens to a sermon from one of the "deans" who is teaching the teens that year. Older friends and family members get a chance to join in the camp experience for an hour and a half, participating alongside younger Christians. The week ends with a sharing session where camp participants reflect together on what the week has meant to them. This, too, is often attended by parents who have arrived to pick up their teens—and on some occasions, parents even enter in to the sharing, speaking about how they have seen Summer Excitement impact their son or daughter. No moment in non-class life is ever far away from being moved back into an experience shared across generational lines or even with the entire church community.

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[79] http://summerexcitement.wordpress.com/.

David Langford has tried to recreate some of these shared experiences on a household level in his "Faith Chronicles" curriculum, published in 2001. Langford, who holds a Ph.D. in family therapy, has long been interested in healthy practices for spiritual formation. Faith Chronicles leads families through the most significant biblical stories, twenty-four from the Old Testament and twenty-four from the New Testament. The goal is for families to learn the pillar stories of the Bible in chronological order, providing a framework for deeper understanding. For each narrative, families are asked to answer three questions: "What does this story teach us about God? What does this story teach us about [humanity]?[80] What does this story teach us about how to live in the world?" Simple coloring exercises help younger children respond, while older children and parents can go deeper in their discussion. Langford explains the value of the narrative approach:

> These three faith questions are essential questions of life, and we become aware of the answers to these questions as the stories of the Bible are planted in our hearts. It is important for children to learn the Biblical answers to these questions because there are other stories which answer them very differently. It has been said that the modern world has produced three great stories that have replaced their Biblical counterparts for many. Darwin's story of Evolution replaced the story of Creation. Freud's story of Psychology has replaced the story of the Fall and the Cross. And Marx's story of a Socialist Utopia has replaced the biblical story of the New Heaven and the New Earth. If we as Christian parents do not tell the Christian story to our own children, there are plenty of other storytellers in this world who will be glad to tell theirs![81]

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[80] "Man" in the source text, but clearly intended to mean all of humanity, both men and women.

[81] David Langford, *Faith Chronicles Parents Manual* (Bloomington, IN: Ketch Publishing, 2001), 20.

Faith Chronicles is designed for repeated use, with a child's journal that will serve as a record of their faith development. Included with the parents' manual are tips for working with children of differing age levels, guidance for handling different ages all at once, a recommended devotional schedule, and suggestions for good story-telling. The cultural links to earlier non-class efforts are apparent at every step. But perhaps the greatest contribution of the Faith Chronicles curriculum is the recommended family activity that accompanies each Bible story. The cognitive elements are mixed with family experiences that prompt reflection and lead to new insights. Some are relatively simple, such as having a backyard barbeque as the family recounts the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Others, though, encourage adults to share their own faith experiences with their children. One activity for the story of Joseph includes this suggestion:

> This would be a good time to share with your children a testimony of how God has worked out blessing from an unfortunate event in your life. Perhaps there is someone in your church who has a powerful testimony to share of God's redeeming love. Invite them to share their story with you during your devotional time. It's important for our children to hear testimonies that God is still redeeming our troubles.[82]

The activity for "The Baptism and Temptation of Jesus" prompts children to "ask mom and dad to share their baptism stories" and discuss "which relatives have had the greatest spiritual influence in [their] family?"[83] Through such discussions children are gradually enculturated into the faith and parents are prompted to reflect on their own experiences and see their lives as part of the greater Christian story. This is not just ministry from one generation to another; this is—to return to

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[82] Ibid., 38.

[83] Ibid., 47.

Harkness' definition of intergenerational religious experiences—"collaborative involvement with others."[84]

<u>Principle 3: Genuine Christian Formation Results in Affective and Behavioral Change as Well as Cognitive Learning</u>

A repeated theme of the intergenerational formation literature is that the goals of religious education must include attitudinal and behavioral change. Westerhoff defines education as "an aspect of socialization involving all deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts to transmit or evolve knowledge, attitudes, values, behaviors, or sensibilities."[85] Christian education has not done its work if behavior is left unchanged. Similarly, White writes that the goals of his IGRE model are to achieve 1) quality intergenerational relationships, 2) significant cognitive learning, 3) positive subjective impact,[86] and 4) sound lifestyle consequence. "If cognition has to do with the mind and affect with the spirit, then 'lifestyle' refers to the whole person—with all one's psychic, cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions."[87] In Churches of Christ, which lean heavily toward the cognitive dimension, much of the implicit evaluation of religious education programs has rested on the question of how well children are learning biblical content. But White challenges churches to

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[84] Harkness, "Intergenerationality: Biblical and Theological Foundations," 122.

[85] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*

[86] "Intergenerational programs are aimed at hitting the heart and emotions of people, maybe more than the head. At least by comparison with traditional religious education programs it would seem so…..Positive, growthful, subjective gains are enabled by life and learning that involve affirming interactions with other people. That participants say to one another 'You are very important!' is essential." White, *Intergenerational Religious Education*, 182–83.

[87] Ibid., 184.

look at a broader set of metrics. (I suspect that non-class methods, by their very nature, would score well on these additional criteria—at least in comparison to church schooling models. But to my knowledge no non-class church using FBS or a similar program has undertaken a comprehensive evaluation of its program outcomes.)

A final recent resource helpful to this project is *Intergenerational Faith Formation: All Ages Learning Together*, by Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald, who are working within the context of Roman Catholic catechesis.[88] This short (150-page) volume is intended to be a very practical guide to parish leaders. Their ten-step format for an intergenerational learning experience is a detailed variation of what White advocates.

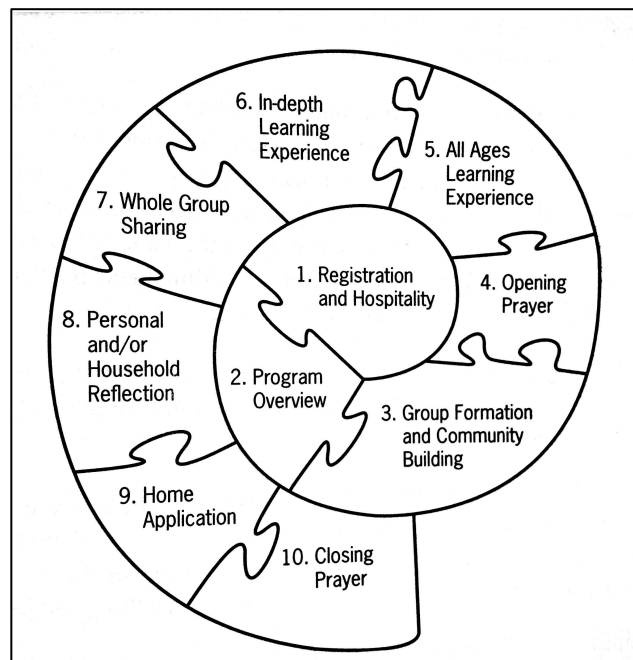*Figure* 1. Basic Format for Intergenerational Learning (Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald).

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[88] Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation: All Ages Learning Together* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Pub, 2008).

Martineau et alia recommend a four-level evaluation based on the work of

Donald Kilpatrick: 1) the reaction of the participants (did they like it?), 2) learning

(has learning taken place?), 3) transfer of learning (are participants applying

learning in their lives?), 4) results and impact (how is our community different

because of this program?)[89] If the learning is not being applied in the lives of the

participants and if the congregation is not growing in faith and practice, then the

formation program is not meeting its goals.

Can intergenerational Christian formation meet these expectations? Current

research says it can. Martineau's intergenerational learning format has been applied

and evaluated in a variety of Catholic parishes as part of the "Generations of Faith"

program, funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment. In the appendices to their

book, Martineau et alia share the results of this research. Among their findings are

that intergenerational learning strengthened the parish community through deeper

relationships; involvement in parish life increased, including worship, service

projects, and parish ministries; adult participation in faith formation increased;

families enjoyed opportunities to learn and pray together; and participants felt safe

to ask questions.[90] In short, behaviors changed, attitudes were shaped, the

community grew, and individual believers, spurred by the encouragement and

example of others, advanced in the practices of the faith.

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[89] Donald Kilpatrick, *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1994). Cited in Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald, 89-98.

[90] Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation*, 149–50.

Conclusion

From a synthesis of the intergenerational formation literature, I have drawn

three key principles of Christian education: 1) The best learning happens in

communities of practice. 2) Different generations learn from each other as they

engage in collaborative ministry and reflect on shared experiences. 3) Genuine

Christian formation results in attitudinal and behavioral change as well as cognitive

learning.

We have also surveyed the landscape well enough at this point to delineate

some characteristics of non-class culture and practice: 1) an ongoing belief that

traditional Sunday School is an ineffective means of inculcating Bible knowledge and

fostering spiritual growth, 2) a consistent belief that parents are the best teachers of

their children, 3) a related belief that parents are able to teach their children with

minimal training, if they are given good resources, 4) a preference for bringing

generations together in conversation, both at home and in the congregation, and

making special preparations to allow all ages to contribute meaningfully, 5)

similarly, a desire to connect young people to the congregation as a whole, giving

them a faith community larger than the youth group, and a variety of mentors

beyond the youth minister, 6) an emphasis on experiential learning followed by

reflection, and 7) a tendency to connect learning experiences at the church to home-

based devotions, and vice versa. There are clear parallels to other models of

spiritual formation, but these characteristics have developed more or less

organically among a subset of churches that has taken Alexander Campbell's initial

objections to Sunday School seriously for the past 190 years. Here is the best

example we have of what Stone-Campbell educational practice might have looked

like in a parallel universe where Sunday School was never developed. Even though

most doctrinal objections to Sunday School have been abandoned over the decades,

the majority of non-class leaders continue to believe that they took the better path.

As Thomas Langford, David's father, once said in a gathering of mainstream Church

of Christ leaders:

> We are seeing signs that blind adherence to the traditional Sunday
> School system is being questioned from place to place. It may be that
> we will have something to offer as churches come to place greater
> emphasis on family Bible study and small group programs in the
> home. We still believe that the Sunday School tends to inhibit parental
> responsibility and spiritual care in the home. But we admit that this
> may be a bias coming from our peculiar stance.[91]

I have no doubt that it is a bias that comes from our peculiar stance—a bias that I

share. But it is one that has served the non-class churches very well. I do believe that

the non-class churches have something to offer the majority of churches who took

the Bible class approach—thus this project.

The purpose of this project was to facilitate an experiment in holistic

spiritual formation through a series of intergenerational religious experiences

appropriate to our polity and context. Northside previously had not had the

opportunity to experience or evaluate formative programs other than traditional

Bible classes. By drawing upon the basic principles of formation from the

intergenerational literature, as well as the experiences and practices of the non-

class Churches of Christ, a closely related subsect, I designed a series of religious

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[91] Thomas Langford, "Non-Sunday School Churches of Christ: A Historical Perspective" (presented at the Abilene Christian University Lectures, Abilene, TX, Feb. 17, 1997).

experiences that introduced the possibility of alternative forms of Christian

education to the congregation.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The intent of this project was to lead the Northside Church of Christ to

consider adopting a model for intentional spiritual formation that holistically

addressed all aspects of the believers' life: cognitive, affective, relational, and

behavioral. As in many American churches, our religious education program was

rooted in a "schooling-instructional" paradigm that primarily sought the acquisition

of cognitive knowledge without intentionally addressing the affective, relational,

and behavioral dimensions of faith formation. As Westerhoff wrote regarding

religious education, the majority of American churches implemented a cognitive-

based church-schooling model and "have blindly and unconsciously proceeded as if

there were no other possible way."[1] This chapter describes a method to nurture

growth in all areas of Christian life through a series of intergenerational religious

formation experiences that address the whole person. A detailed explanation of the

strategy, format, participants, and project sessions follows.

Strategy

This project was informed by the theoretical frameworks presented in the

intergenerational formation literature as well as the specific practices of

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[1] Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?*. Chapter 1. Kindle edition.

intergenerational formation that have developed within the non-class Churches of Christ, a cluster of congregations that shares much in common with Northside but has rejected the schooling-instruction paradigm and developed alternative models of formation. Within a framework supported by research in intergenerational formation research, I drew upon model curriculum and practices of the non-class movement to inform the learning experiences at Northside.

The recommendations of the intergenerational literature I surveyed are in general agreement with one another. For the foundations of the project, I was guided by the definition articulated by James White and introduced in chapter 1 of this thesis, designing intergenerational religious experiences that were characterized by "two or more age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common experiences, parallel learning, contributive occasions and interactive sharing."[2] By designing curriculum with this framework in mind, I hoped to ensure that the three principles of intergenerational formation articulated in chapter 2 would be honored.

<u>Format</u>

This project was introduced by a sermon on September 1, 2013, that incorporated Deuteronomy 6:6-9 and Mark 10:13-16 and that introduced the idea of intergenerational learning. The congregation was already aware that we would be engaged in intergenerational education that fall, but the occasion of the Sunday morning sermon allowed me to articulate more fully a theological rationale and to

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[2] White, *Intergenerational Religious Education*, 18.

explain the basic format of the weekly sessions. All church members in attendance

that morning received a handout containing the template I would be using to

construct the intergenerational learning experiences.[3] The rest of the project was

structured around seven fifty-minute sessions of intergenerational religious

education, or IGRE.[4]

The outline for each session was adapted from Martineau, Weber, and

Kehrwald's format for intergenerational catechesis,[5] with steps 1 through 3

(registration, overview, community building) omitted because they did not fit the

weekly format and the small church context. Sessions consisted of an opening

prayer, an all-ages learning experience, an in-depth learning experience, whole

group sharing, personal or small group reflection, and a closing prayer.[6] The themes

for each session were drawn from the exodus event, for reasons explained below.

The Northside Church of Christ rents the front section of a small office

building. Our area has been converted to include an auditorium that seats

approximately thirty-five and a kitchen and dining area with rectangular tables, plus

a small children's table. In the fall of 2012, the congregation acquired an additional

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[3] See appendix B.

[4] I had originally hoped to have eight sessions in total, but illness prevented me from conducting one of the sessions, and the church schedule made it impossible to make-up that session. I do not believe that the loss of one session had a significant impact on the validity of the project, however.

[5] Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation*, 73.

[6] See appendix C for full descriptions of the weekly lesson plans. The first two sessions also contain home application materials that were distributed to the participants. In the original formulation of this project, I planned to provide such materials every week, but we discovered that no one—literally no one at all—was using them. Rather than continue to distribute and refer to materials that were not being put into effect, I dropped that part of the template beginning with week 3. The fact of the utter failure of the home application materials is itself a useful datum, and will be incorporated into the analysis in chapter 4.

area that has been converted into two small children's classrooms and an open area that contains an additional adults table and an additional children's table, used on those Sundays when the dining area is over capacity.

Most IGRE sessions opened and closed in the auditorium. There were two exceptions: in session 4, which focused on the Passover meal, we began in the dining area and stayed there the entire time; in session 6 we began in the auditorium, moved into the dining area for small group discussion around the tables, and ran out of time before we could transition back to the auditorium. We also used the children's area almost every week as the location for parallel-learning activities for our preschool and early elementary children, who moved to that space after enjoying an all-ages learning experience with their parents and older siblings. Only during session 4, the Passover meal, did the children stay with the older members the entire time.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

The entire congregation, approximately twenty-five people, participated in this project. Some of the key participants were the church's three families with children (including my own family), one older woman who often leads the toddlers' activities, and the congregation's sole teenage member, a fourteen-year-old boy. I had hoped this intergenerational project would be especially useful for him since he falls between the children's and adult classes and has not been served well by our traditional age-segregated model. All participants were brought together for the opening and closing activities of each session. Some sessions featured parallel-learning opportunities, during which we temporarily divided into age-based groups.

After the opening experience, toddlers and preschoolers always went to their own classroom for activities on their age level.[7]

Description of the Project Sessions

The seven fifty-minute sessions took place on Sunday morning before worship, during the time traditionally used for Bible classes. One survey of Methodist churches showed that a weekly format was easily the most popular option for IGRE, especially so for small congregations that find the intergenerational format is more practical in their context.[8] Further, participation is higher when the usual church education schedule is used, and IGRE tends to work better in an extended format where participants have time to gain each other's trust over the weeks.[9] A downside of the fifty-minute format is reduced time for interactive sharing,[10] but the advantages in our context were significant enough to accept the challenge of making time for conversation.

The seven sessions covered the exodus experience beginning with the birth of Moses, and continuing through the burning bush, the plagues, the Passover, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the Ten Commandments. The final session was centered on Deuteronomy 6, Moses' admonition for parents to teach their children. The

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[7] This may seem antithetical to the intergenerational emphasis, but most intergenerational paradigms recommend that the ages sometimes temporarily separate to learn on their own level before coming back together for discussion. See, for example, White, *Intergenerational Religious Education*, 71–73. "Parallel-learning" is a key component of his definition of intergenerational religious education.

[8] Ibid., 40.

[9] Ibid., 41.

[10] Ibid., 43.

exodus event was chosen because it is one of the foundational narratives of the

Bible, is easily adapted into experiential learning, and reinforces the image of our

entire faith community taking a journey together. Specific plans for each session

were developed before each Sunday in consultation with other church members

involved in adult education, although I took the lead in planning and leading the

learning experiences.[11] At several steps on the journey, participants created

"souvenirs" that encapsulated their learning in visual or written form.[12] Choosing a

narrative text fit well with the formative practices of the non-class congregations,

which have emphasized learning the stories of the Bible over topical or thematic

lessons. Ending with Deuteronomy 6 connected our final session to the sermon that

began the project, reminded adults of the importance of actively sharing the faith

with their children, and led naturally into a discussion of how we had done that in

the previous sessions. The final session was largely devoted to interactive sharing of

our reflections on the experiences of the previous seven weeks and did not strictly

follow the established template.

<div align="center">Method of Evaluation</div>

To evaluate the results of the intervention, I triangulated multiple sources of

qualitative data. Any given source of data, no matter how useful, provides a limited

perspective on the research subject.   The use of multiple perspectives was

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[11] See the lesson planning guide in appendix B.

[12] The souvenir for session 1 was a wicker basket filled with prayers requesting God's help with various dangers faced by participants. In session two, we created a poster of a burning bush covered in flames. On each flame was written a way that a member had heard from God. In session 3, I had planned for us to make a chart of "American Gods," but we ran out of time. In session 4, we collectively wrote a new psalm. In session 5, children drew pictures depicting possible ways to apply the Ten Commandments based on the conversations at their table groups. See appendix C for details.

recommended to obtain "a better, more substantive picture of reality"[13] and to

improve reliability and generalizability of the results.[14] Triangulation refers to

combining these multiple perspectives and attempting to relate them to one another

"so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each."[15]

The various data sources used in this project were 1) my own perspective as

the intervention leader, 2) the perspective of participants inside the group, and 3)

the perspective of an outsider. Analysis of the data served to evaluate the extent that

the intergenerational religious experiences encouraged growth in the cognitive,

affective, relational, and behavioral dimensions. To gain these perspectives I used

the following instruments: 1) my own field notes as a participant-observer in the

Sunday morning sessions, 2) a large group interview during the final session, 3) an

independent expert.

<div align="center">My Perspective: Field Notes</div>

Because our group is small and one of the purposes of the intervention was

to strengthen relational connections across generational lines, it was important that

all church members participate fully in the sessions. A colleague of mine, Ms.

Elizabeth Moore, assisted me by taking field notes during the educational

experiences. She holds a master's degree in communication studies and is familiar

with qualitative research techniques. Following a set protocol, she observed 1) who

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[13] Bruce L Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, 2007), 5.

[14] Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossmann, *Designing Qualitative Research*, 4th Ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 202.

[15] Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 7.

was present, noting absences of church members and the presence of guests, 2) the

ambiance before the session began, 3) the level of interaction between church

members from different generations, 4) demonstrations of cognitive learning, 5)

affect displays, 6) levels of participation in session activities (including non-

participation), 7) spontaneous feedback regarding the experience, including

feedback after worship or during the weekly potluck lunch, and 8) any unusual or

unexpected occurrence.[16] At the end of each Sunday gathering, she handed her notes

to me.

On each Sunday afternoon, when I returned home from church, I expanded

her jotted notes into full sentences. I then typed and saved those field notes by date

in a Microsoft Word document. In a second column, I recorded my own initial

reflections and observations. Each document served as a data set to evaluate the

success of the intervention in encouraging holistic growth.

Insider Perspective: The Large-Group Interview

The final session, on October 27, 2013, began with a reading of Deuteronomy

6:1-9.

> Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—
> that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land
> that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your
> children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all
> the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments
> that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear
> therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well
> with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with

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[16] Appendix G contains the note-taking form that Ms. Moore used each week to record her observations.

milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deut. 6:1-9 NRSV).

Instead of the normal in-depth learning experiences, that session was an extended discussion that served as a large-group interview for data collection purposes. Ms. Moore took notes on answers as they were given and also noted significant behaviors or affect displays.

The planned questions were as follows, although additional follow-up questions were asked spontaneously in response to the answers provided by the participants: 1) What were some of the decrees and commandments they had learned? 2) How did they learn them? 3) What did they experience on their journey that they would want to tell their children about? Then, I asked about our experiences as a congregation in the previous seven weeks. 1) What have we learned on our journey together? 2) Which of the souvenirs from our journey is the most meaningful to you? 3) What are some of the significant experiences that stand out? 4) (To children) What was it like to learn with your parents? 5) (To parents) What was it like to learn with your children? 6) (To all the church) Has this exodus experience changed anything about our church? 7) Has it changed anything in your life outside the church?

We ended the final session by joining hands and singing "Bind Us Together," followed by a final closing prayer.

Outsider Perspective: The Independent Expert

David Langford, creator of the Faith Chronicles curriculum, provided an outside perspective on the effectiveness of this project. He has served for many years as a minister in the Quaker Avenue Church of Christ, which routinely uses intergenerational formation practices. David came to Laredo to observe the final session, the group interview, and also joined us for worship and lunch. The extended discussion time around the potluck meal provided him further opportunities to observe the congregation and ask questions. In addition, I provided David with a copy of the full lesson plans we used each week. I asked him to evaluate the effectiveness of our implementation of intergenerational learning experiences in fostering holistic growth and submit a written evaluation. His written evaluation served as additional data for analysis.[17]

Analyzing the Data

When all data were collected, I read and reread them multiple times to gain a comprehensive familiarity with them. Afterward, I established categories using a combination of deductive and inductive methods.[18] Because the goal of this project was to encourage holistic growth, "cognitive," "behavioral," "relational," and "affective" were predetermined deductive categories. Evidence of growth (or lack of

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[17] David Langford's written reports are reproduced in their entirety as appendix H.

[18] Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*, 311–12.

growth) in those categories was noted. Other categories emerged inductively from a

close reading of the data.[19]

To fully code the data, I followed the process outlined by Renata Tesch:[20]

1) Read all documents carefully.
2) Pick one document and ask what its underlying meaning is. ("What is this about?") Write notes in the margins.
3) Complete step 2 for several documents. Make a list of all the topics generated. Cluster together similar topics.
4) Create abbreviated codes for the topics and go back to the data sets. Write the codes next to sections of text where they fit. See if new codes emerge from this preliminary analysis.
5) Find descriptive wording for the topics and turn them into larger categories, grouping related topics together.
6) Make a final decision on the abbreviations for each category and create an alphabetized list of the codes.
7) Bring together clusters of data belonging to each category and perform a further analysis.
8) If necessary, recode the data.

When the data are fully coded and organized according to the chosen

categories, viewing the disparate perspectives side by side should lead to deeper

understanding. As Charmaz writes, generating codes "facilitates making

comparisons."[21]

With the data now coded and categorized, I further analyzed them in an

attempt to identify themes. I was guided in this by the three approaches described

by Van Manen:

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[19] By going repeatedly through the data sets line by line, generating, revising, and assigning categories, the tendency for the researcher to impose his or her own beliefs on the data is attenuated. See Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), 515. This process is known as "coding" the data. See John W Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 192.

[20] Renata Tesch, *Qualitative Research: Analysis Types and Software Tools* (New York: Falmer Press, 1990), 142–45.

[21] Charmaz, "Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods," 515.

1) The wholistic reading approach, in which the researcher asks "What

sententious phrase may capture the fundamental meaning or main

significance of the text as a whole?"

2) The selective reading approach, in which the text is read several times and

one asks, "What statements or phrases seem particularly essential or

revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described?" Such

statements are then underlined.

3) The detailed reading approach, in which every sentence is examined and

the researcher asks "What does this sentence reveal about the phenomenon

or experience being described?"[22]

I analyzed the coded data further to find patterns (areas of agreement and

congruence across the data sets), slippages (areas of contradiction and

disagreement in the data) and silences (gaps in the data that may prove to be

significant).[23] The goal of such analysis is to test for consistency, not to create it.

Where multiple perspectives agree, we can have greater confidence that an accurate

picture of the research focus is emerging. Areas of disagreement and incongruence

may reveal where different perspectives are in tension with one another, indicating

that some aspects of the phenomenon that are still unclear and require further

investigation. Gaps in the data may also be significant. For example, in this project

there was no indication anywhere in the data of a behavioral change in any of the

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[22] Max Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990), 93.

[23] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 199–201.

church members as a result of the intergenerational religious experiences, although that was one of the goals of the intervention. The implications of that gap will be addressed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

This chapter has described an approach to holistic spiritual formation that is informed by significant models in the intergenerational formation literature and the culture of the non-class Churches of Christ. An eight-week experiment in intergenerational Christian formation was conducted at the Northside Church of Christ in Laredo, Texas. At the conclusion of the experiment, I brought together multiple perspectives in an attempt to understand how the congregation experienced, responded to, and was shaped by the intergenerational program. The analysis yielded insights that could help the church as it considered future approaches to the spiritual formation of the congregation.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The stated purpose of this project was to facilitate an experiment in holistic

spiritual formation through a series of intergenerational religious experiences

appropriate to our polity and context. Holistic formation is defined as growth in the

cognitive, affective, relational, and behavioral dimensions. Hoping to facilitate such

formation, I led the congregation through six weeks of intergenerational religious

education sessions that drew upon the experiences of the Israelites in the exodus

event.[1] In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the project, three data sets were

created: (1) field notes from each session, which represent the observations of a

non-participant observer in combination with my own reflections and

interpretations, (2) a large group interview conducted with all of the project

participants, and (3) the outside perspective of an independent expert, David

Langford. Langford evaluated the project lesson plans and observed the group

interview. He was also given the opportunity to interact with the congregation and

ask his own questions. This chapter contains an analysis of each individual data set

as well as an analysis of the triangulated data.

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[1] See appendix B for the general template for these experiences and appendix C for detailed lesson plans.

Evaluation Results

Project Session Field Notes

In the established coding protocol[2] "cognitive," "affective," "relational," and "behavioral" were pre-established categories, and I carefully examined the field notes for insights into the participants' learning in those areas. Here I will present the results in order from most to least significant.

Affective Learning

Perhaps the most striking difference between our traditional classroom-based education system and the experiment in intergenerational religious experiences was the increased opportunity for emotional response. In part, this was due to the move from lecture-based discussion to experiential and interactive learning. The chosen format, which involved the participants experiencing something together and then reflecting on that experience, naturally lent itself to heightened emotional response. One particularly striking example, concerning a grieving woman, will be explained below, but the field notes contain multiple instances of the participants smiling and laughing together in a manner that participants indicated exceeded their usual experience in the traditional class model.

Further, it is clear that simply having young children in the room with adults changed the emotional atmosphere. On several occasions we noted that the room became immediately more serious when the children stepped out for a time of

[2] See 61-62.

parallel-learning and then brightened again when they came back in to share the results of their learning. Some adults would laugh as the children returned, even in the absence of a particular reason to do so beyond the mere presence of happy youngsters.

Another common experience was that of the adults smiling or laughing at something a child said or did. Session 2, for example, had begun with a rather downbeat emotional tone: it was raining outside and the attendance was down. After the opening prayer, I projected an illustration of the Hebrew slaves making bricks and asked the group what life was like for the Israelites while they were in Egypt. The children became very active, answering the question and asking their own. One child, the young son of a visitor, asked "Why are the people naked?" (The male Hebrew slaves wore nothing but simple wrapped cloths around their waists in the illustration.) That prompted my own four-year-old to call out, "That man is naked!" The adults laughed, but they, too, began to speak up, answering the children's questions and offering their own observations. The energy level of the room changed dramatically.

Later in that same session, an even more striking but very different affective response took place. All participants age six and up were divided into groups of four and five persons while the preschoolers were in a different room. I distributed flame-shaped pieces of red poster board to the participants and asked them to write down one way that they had heard from God. They were then to discuss their answers with the other members of their group.[3] Adults were the first to speak, but

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[3] A list of all responses can be found in appendix D: Responses to the Burning Bush Exercise.

the children were attentively listening to what the grownups had to say. One young woman in her twenties had recently experienced a death in her family and wrote "loss of grandpa" on her flame. As she began to talk about trying to connect with God through her grief, she was overcome and began to cry. Older women hugged and comforted her, and some began to cry themselves. Children all through the room noticed this and watched carefully. My daughter, then age seven, was in the group with the grieving woman. She came over to me and hugged me while she processed this sorrowful moment. She and the other children were able to see an adult grappling genuinely with sorrow and frustration in her faith and also observe the empathetic, comforting responses of other adults, as well as a spontaneous turn to prayer.

While that moment stands out as a time of particular emotional connection, the pattern of "experience, discuss, reflect" that we repeated in each session lent itself to other small moments of affective response, which were noted in the observations for each session.

<u>Relational Growth</u>

A second area of interest was relational growth. Would the intergenerational format prompt deeper relational connections between participants? In some ways, the answer is clearly yes. For example, in speaking to the mother of the young boy who asked "Why are the people naked?" I discovered that her child is mildly autistic and had never before participated in a class discussion without prompting. She was delighted that he felt comfortable enough to begin asking questions and was gratified that the adults in the group took his questions seriously and responded to

him. That same morning he also asked "Why is that bush on fire?" to which an older man responded "The burning bush represents God." Even that simple question and response represented far more interpersonal interaction than the young boy had experienced in his previous Sunday School classes. For him, it was a notable step in relational growth.

At times the relational growth was clearly connected to a significant moment of affect display, such as the small group comforting and praying for the grieving woman, but even more routine moments could prompt greater connection between participants. In an activity that took place during session 6, small groups sat at tables and discussed how to positively live the moral vision of the Ten Commandments.[4] The children in each group were asked to illustrate the answers given at their tables, which led to frequent moments of adults talking together with children. Significantly, the majority of the interactions we noted were non-related adults talking with nearby kids about how to draw the concepts being discussed or asking what the drawings meant. Several times this activity created moments of intergenerational, interfamilial teamwork.

Other activities were less successful at achieving that level of interaction. One thing we noticed was that in the absence of specific instructions to do otherwise, children and adults would quickly separate from one another. That happened for virtually all of the fifth session, which involved a simple recreation of a Passover meal in the church's dining area. I had pictured that as a time for families to talk together about the elements of the Passover meal, but as we entered the dining area

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[4] See appendix F for the notes each table took on their conversation.

each child moved immediately and automatically to the small table they eat at for potluck meals, leaving their parents behind at the adult tables. While that should have been easily predictable, it had not occurred to me that I would need to specifically ask the children to stay with their families. Similarly, when we showed film clips as part of the sessions, the children would sit front and center, leaving their parents behind. It became apparent that there are multiple occasions where we have trained children to segregate from the adult members. At Northside, keeping the different ages interacting requires careful planning and overt instructions.

Adult-child interaction is only one component of relational growth. When reviewing the adult-adult interactions recorded in the field notes, I found multiple moments of significant interactions that strengthened congregational relationships. Small group discussions were characterized by boisterous conversations between participants, often with smiles and laughter. This is in sharp contrast to the less energetic feel of the previous Bible class model, in which there was seldom more than one person talking at a time, and almost all interactions were between a participant and the teacher. While the presence of the children was a blessing, the active learning components of the IGRE model yielded benefits independent of the intergenerational aspects.

One peculiarity at Northside is the large age gap. At the time of the project, there was only one member between the ages of eight and forty, a fourteen-year-old boy. Too old for the children's program, he was the sole teen in a group of adults and often seemed uninterested in what was going on. One of my hopes for the project

was that the intergenerational model would appeal to him more than the age-divided classes. Unfortunately, there is no outward indication that he found this model more appealing. When he appears in the notes, he was usually disengaged, with a flat affect display. Moments of interaction between him and an adult member are relatively rare.

Behavioral Growth

Behavioral growth is difficult to observe in six weeks of religious education, but one aspect of the project is notable for what failed to happen. The Martineau template adapted for this project[5] included a home application step. Materials were to be distributed to families for further learning and action at home. We did this for the first two weeks of the project, but none of the families were making use of them, so we dropped that step from the template. The home application was where I was expecting to see the most clear behavioral changes, but it did not work in our context. "We were just too busy to do it," said one family, and the others quickly agreed.

With the failure of the take-home activities, the only evidence for behavioral growth during the project came from the response of the participants to the session activities. The active-learning and small-group discussion components of the lessons created opportunities to engage in Christian practices that were not readily available in the previous classroom model. The aforementioned spontaneous prayer session in response to a grieving woman and the comfort offered to her in that

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[5] Appendix B.

moment is the most significant example, but over the course of the project the

participants wrote praises together, discussed their spiritual journeys, and talked

about how to develop Christian practices in their lives. The written responses to the

Ten Commandments reflections[6] capture just a portion of a very lively and vigorous

conversation. That conversation was itself a Christian behavior that was being

practiced, but it also pointed the way toward other areas of behavioral growth that

could be cultivated.

Still, it is impossible to say from the field notes whether the IGRE sessions

resulted in real behavioral change outside of the Sunday morning experience. No

participant explicitly mentioned growing in Christian practice as a result of the

project. Further, while it is clear that children and recent converts to the faith had

the opportunity to see more mature Christians praying, studying, and ministering

together during the project sessions, there is no way to know what impact this may

have had on their own behavior based on the data collected in the project and the

observable behaviors.

Cognitive Growth

Cognitive growth was evident in some of the sessions. Children were engaged

by the stories and film clips, asking questions and offering interpretations of what

they had seen. At the beginning of session 4, several early elementary and preschool

children were able to successfully recall at least one of the ten plagues, which had

been taught the week prior. In session 6, the children were asked to draw pictures

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[6] Appendix F.

that illustrated how to live out the Ten Commandments, and they were able to do that and explain what their drawings represented. In five of the six sessions, the youngest children were temporarily separated from the adults to engage the story on their own level. On three of those weeks they were able to report what they had learned when they returned to full assembly. (On one week we ran out of time to hear from them. On another occasion the children were not able to explain their learning, but their activity time had been disrupted by one consistently unruly child, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the lesson.) Adult cognitive learning was demonstrated repeatedly through their engagement in discussion, both whole-group and small-group.

Overlapping Domains of Growth

It became clear through the coding process that it is often difficult to separate different areas of growth. When participants are moved to tears by a discussion, that is an affective response, but it results in relational growth and the practice of Christian behaviors. When an autistic boy engages in asking questions about the Bible, it is cognitive growth, but when others respond to him and engage him, it is also relational growth. The most effective moments in the project shared this quality of engaging multiple areas of growth at once.

Enthusiasm for the Project

One theme in the field notes is repeated unsolicited expressions of enthusiasm for the intergenerational religious formation project, particularly in the early stages. After the end of the first session, one woman remarked to me "On a

scale of one to ten you were a twenty! The concept is really great! You interested all the people!" An older man remarked, "That was great! I'm looking forward to next week." Two weeks later, a woman who was going to miss a week due to her travels asked if we could video-record the session for her to see later.

One of the cultural peculiarities at Northside is a tendency to frequently refer to prior events during Sunday worship. This project was no exception. During the sermon following the first session, the speaker remarked, "Interactive learning is the best kind of learning . . . we are blessed to have this." Later, he mentioned, "It was great to see the children learning about Moses and the dangers he faced." In the worship service following session 2, the same man said, "I hope everyone enjoyed Sunday School this morning. I know I did!"

<u>Use of Technology</u>

One minor theme in the field notes regards the use of technology in the project. Most weeks utilized a laptop computer and projector at the beginning of the session. We projected Bible passages, pictures, and video clips, usually for the "All-Ages Learning Experience," which is step 2 on the template. To my knowledge, such technology had not previously been used at Northside, and that introduced a notable new factor to our experience. It was specifically mentioned twice following the first session. Once was during worship, when the speaker said, "Thank you, Kirk, for bringing technology and other new things to our congregation." Another was during the potluck lunch, when I overheard a woman saying, approvingly, that although having a projector is new to us, she has seen them used often in other congregations she had visited.

The Large Group Interview

The large group interview was conducted on the morning of October 27,

2013, as the seventh and final session of the project. It began with a reading of

Deuteronomy 6:6-9, followed by a multimedia presentation that reviewed the

previous six sessions and a reading of the communal psalm generated during the

fifth session.[7] Afterward, I asked the participants to respond to a series of planned

questions.[8]

Affective Learning

When asked what experiences during the project were emotionally affecting,

one adult male participant mentioned laughing at a funny video clip shown during

session 6. Several participants agreed that processing experiences together through

small group discussion was emotionally affecting, especially dealing with grief and

loss. The young woman who had recently lost her grandfather particularly

mentioned the morning that she cried with others discussing that loss. Interestingly,

two participants talked about responding emotionally to the biblical stories. One is a

mother of young children who remarked "the story of baby Moses was difficult to

experience." It made her think of how anxious she would be placing her infant in a

basket in the Nile. An early elementary aged girl also mentioned how sad it was that

the Israelite slaves were whipped and beaten.

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[7] Appendix E.

[8] See 57-59.

Relational Learning

In response to a question about what worked particularly well during the project, one person responded that spending time together was the most valuable thing. "That's what Christianity is, it's about raising children into Christ." An older woman commented, "The group discussions were really good and gave everyone an opportunity to discuss their feelings." Similarly, a middle-aged man said, "Small group break-out sessions where we had to talk to each other helped bring us closer together." In response to the question "is there anything different about our church [because of this project]?" another woman said "we are closer together." In the context of the interview, I believe that she, like the other commenters, was referring to deeper emotional connection experienced in the small group discussion times.

When asked whether it was useful to have adults and kids all studying the same stories together, most of the parents visibly nodded yes. In response to a very open-ended question ("Is there anything else you would like to tell me?"), an older man with no children in the church said, "I think it went very well. Mixing youth and older folk is a good educational environment."

There were no responses made in opposition to these comments. In general, the participants agreed that the congregation was relationally closer and that the presence of children and adults together had worked well.

Cognitive Learning

Cognitive learning was demonstrated by the ability of the participants to give solid answers to general knowledge questions. In response to the question "What did the Israelites learn in the exodus experience?" adults answered that they learned

the Ten Commandments, the consequences of disobedience, and the power of God displayed in "the miraculous aspects of their rescue."

When asked "how did God rescue the Israelites?" a four-year-old boy answered, "God saved Moses." A five-year-old girl said "The water all came up and they walked through it." A seven-year-old girl added that God had covered Pharaoh's army with water so they could not get to the Israelites, and an eight-year-old girl mentioned that God had appeared as a pillar of fire. The session that covered the events of the Red Sea crossing had taken place three weeks earlier, so the cognitive recall was good for children of that age over that length of time, at least comparable to what I would expect children to remember three weeks after a traditional Bible class lesson.

One young adult woman mentioned during the interview that she was glad the children were with the adults for this project because "I'm still learning these stories myself. Presenting it on a kid's level helped me to learn." For her that was a positive aspect of the model, particularly in regard to the all-ages learning experience at the beginning of each session.

Behavioral Learning

The group interview yielded less evidence of behavioral change than the other three domains of growth, coming up only once in the responses. One man said, "Exodus helped us focus on a key part of our mission—not just to grow ourselves, but to help our children grow. I think you've brought us some tools that will help us, not just at church, but at home." Outside of the comment, there were no indications that behavioral change was a result of the project. The man who made that comment

has no children at home, so his comment is unlikely to be reflective of his personal experience.

<u>"What Worked Well?"</u>

As previously mentioned, participants thought that it worked well to have all ages together, and they appreciated the small-group discussion times. When asked what worked well during the IGRE sessions, we noted the following responses:

(1) Three people specifically mentioned the use of technology, especially video clips and projected graphics.

(2) Two people mentioned the public reading of Bible stories presented on a child's level.

(3) One person mentioned the "souvenirs" we made together, saying specifically that "the props were really helpful."

When asked what advice they would give to another congregation that was considering a similar intergenerational religious formation program, participants pointed to

(1) The need for session leaders to have partners who can provide focused attention on different age groups for the parallel learning sessions.

(2) The need to have "buy-in" from the congregation, especially the assistance of parents of young children.

(3) The need to have the congregation involved in prayer.

(4) The need for congregations to choose a topic for which good resources are available. "Exodus has a lot of good resources

One person recommended something that we did not try, which is advance preparation—letting participants know what the text for the following week would be so they could study ahead of time.

"Would We Do This Again?"

Participants generally agreed this format is something that would be worthwhile to try again in the future, with one person specifically suggesting a similar IGRE project that covered the life of Jesus. Several respondents indicated that this could be a good annual event. There was no evident support for using IGRE in a habitual or ongoing way as the regular program of the church.

The Independent Expert

David Langford served as the independent expert for the project. He studied the IGRE lesson plans generated for this project and sat in on the large-group interview. He was also provided the opportunity to ask the participants his own questions and to interact with them informally before worship and during our weekly potluck luncheon. He submitted two reports, one based on his reading of the lesson plans and one based on his observations of the congregation. [9] His perception of the congregation's experience with the project is largely framed around the theme of adult hesitation to include children in their education program—hesitation that was largely overcome as the congregation experienced unexpected benefits from the intergenerational model.

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[9] These reports are reproduced in full in appendix H. The valuable suggestions he offers for improving and strengthening the curriculum will be of great assistance to other congregations who consider adapting this approach to their own contexts.

Langford notes that all participants had a generally positive experience, but "equally obvious was the fact that most people did not expect the experience to be so positive." The adult participants expressed concern that an all-ages class would be tedious because the lessons would be on a child's level and because the presence of children would be disruptive for adult learners. In Langford's terms, "their concerns were in fact warranted but their experience was not made negative because of those concerns." As previously noted, one adult found that stories aimed at a child's level were very helpful to her own learning—something Langford sees as a benefit that would not have come without including children. Similarly, the woman who was emotionally affected thinking about Moses' mother placing him in the ark was particularly aware of her concern and care for her young children because they were with her learning the story together. On both cognitive and affective levels, the presence of children brought benefits that would have been less pronounced in an age-divided setting. Langford also stated, "Many observed that the experience of witnessing the children of the church learning biblical truths had an edifying value all its own, perhaps not more valuable than the insights of an adult class but surely not less."

Further, while the children were sometimes disruptive, their disruptions and slowness to obey created interesting echoes of the exodus narrative Northside was studying. Langford wrote, "It was observed that just as the children of Northside do not always comply with the careful and thought out plans made to help them learn and grow, neither did the children of Israel comply with Moses' plans for them. Being exposed to and experiencing the unique frustrations associated with teaching

children enabled the adults to rationally process particular insights about the story of Israel they likely would not have had in an all-adult class."

Langford also observed that "many of the adults seem to enjoy the results of accommodating the children more than they expected," due to the active learning experiences designed to meet the needs of the younger members, experiences that the adults enjoyed but that had not been part of their experience in previous Bible classes.

Finally, in response to one participant's comment that the experience of all ages learning together sent "many powerful messages," Langford notes that by seeing their parents engaged in these sessions, children learned that spiritual growth is something for adults, not just for youngsters. But the parents were also sent a message because this intervention was "modeling for parents the value of their own involvement and presence in their child's spiritual formation . . . . It was not lost on the group that a major text in their study of the Exodus was Deuteronomy 6:6-9."

<u>Interpretation of the Results</u>

The value of collecting three data sets—the field notes, the interview, and the outsider perspective—is that they can be juxtaposed to attain a fuller picture of the intervention and its results. By bringing them into conversation together, we can attain a higher level of confidence in the observations that agree in multiple data sets. Areas of disagreement can help illuminate situations where the results are in question or one perspective was mistaken.

For this project all three sources of data were in general agreement regarding the results of the intervention. Evidence of affective and relational growth is clear, and the intervention resulted in several notable examples of growth that would likely not have happened under the previous model. The field notes and the group interview agree in the value of small group discussion to relational bonding within the congregation. Evidence for cognitive growth is also apparent, with no indication that less cognitive learning took place than would have occurred in the Sunday School model, and some examples of cognitive learning were enhanced by the IGRE format. The interview revealed the value of presenting stories on a child's level for at least one adult participant, something that the independent expert agreed was significant. All perspectives show the value of experiential and active learning to cognitive growth.

Conversely, none of the data sets yield evidence of notable behavioral growth. The intervention either did not impact the behaviors of the congregation or did not do so in a way that was evident to the outside expert, the participants, or me.

Finally, both the interview participants and the outside expert agree that this format is something that would be valuable for the congregation to return to in the future, especially for teaching formative biblical narratives.

The triangulated data agree that the intergenerational religious formation format had a positive impact on the congregation and that the intervention was successful in meeting at least three of its goals for holistic growth. While some aspects of the project would likely be adapted or improved in a subsequent experience (Langford gives suggestions for improvement in his full report), this

initial experience worked well in our context and brought valuable benefits. In the next chapter I will discuss my conclusions and the implications of this project for Northside and other congregations that are interested in the intergenerational approach to religious education.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This thesis project was designed to address a specific need in the context of

my local congregation. Northside has adopted the schooling-instructional model of

religious education, which focuses on cognitive learning in age-divided classrooms

modeled after the American educational program. While there are strengths in the

schooling-instructional model, there are also downsides in our context. One

practical concern is that in a small, family-sized church it is difficult to maintain a

full system of age-divided classes. Further, while the traditional schooling-

instructional model often does well for cognitive learning, it lacks intentional focus

on relational, affective, and behavioral growth. The intervention introduced a seven-

week experiment in an alternative educational paradigm, intergenerational religious

experiences. This final chapter will discuss the significance of this project for me and

the congregation, the implications for churches in other contexts, and fruitful

directions for future study in intergenerational spiritual formation.

Significance and Implications

Personal Significance

The original impetus for this project was my desire to provide a better

spiritual formation experience for the church's children, especially my own children,

ages seven, four, and two at the time of the intervention. From that initial interest grew a larger realization that many of the same concerns I had about our approach to the children's program applied equally to the adult class. In fact, over the course of the intervention, I came to understand that, if anything, the adult class was in greater need of renewal. Both were rooted in a schooling-instructional model that emphasizes cognitive learning, but children's classes, with their mix of artistic engagement and creative play, engaged the students more holistically than the adult class, which was nearly all lecture. My desire was to bring the adults to the children to bless them, but the reverse happened. While there were advantages to the program for all members, the far greater impact of the intervention was on the adult participants.

Sustainability

Another factor in choosing the intergenerational model for this intervention was my concern that age-divided classes will be difficult to sustain in such a small congregation. I still doubt the suitability of the Sunday School model as an ongoing program for our congregation, but in the course of the project intervention, I found that creating intergenerational curriculum that worked in our context was a more daunting task than I had anticipated. The IGRE model works well in our context, but developing all-ages learning experiences, in-depth learning experiences, whole group sharing experiences, and household reflection times from scratch each week required a considerable time investment. Facilitating an adult discussion is relatively simple, and there are innumerable quality curricula premade for children's classes, but there is much less available for intergenerational programs.

To continue with this level of active engagement appropriate to all ages would take an enormous effort. This sort of intergenerational program as an ongoing project of the church would require either a dedicated staff member (which is not an option at Northside) or a less ambitious template.

Part of the difficulty in our context is the extreme age divide we are crossing, with nearly all the children under the age of eight and nearly all the adults over forty. In practice, that meant the all-ages experience had to be something that a preschooler could understand and enjoy, while also engaging adult learners. That is possible—we managed to do it through video and dramatic storytelling—but it is a challenge. Three of our families—mine included—were participating in this project alongside their toddlers, which creates another set of challenges. An intergenerational program that covered middle school on up would, I think, be easier to sustain. The interview revealed that most participants thought of this type of program not as a viable replacement to the Sunday School model, but as an annual special event that supplemented and balanced the Bible class program, and there is wisdom in that. I think we could also sustain less frequent intergenerational education days on special occasions, or we could have days when parents join with the class of a specific age group. If, in eight years, the church membership were largely the same, and most of the children were ten years of age or older, it would be useful to revisit the idea of an ongoing intergenerational program as the chief education model for the church. The special needs of preschool children make that less viable now.

One aspect of the program that could be—and should be—incorporated into the educational life of the congregation is the emphasis on experience, discussion, and reflection together. The adult classes could easily make room for that, rather than continuing the primarily lecture-based classes we have now. From my perspective, one fruitful future direction at our congregation would be to begin the Bible class hour by gathering the church together for a dramatic or experiential shared time of learning before dividing into adult and children's classes for interactive learning and reflection, while maintaining a goal of integrating the children with the adults more frequently and for longer times as they grow older

Ecclesial Significance

In some ways, this project seemed remarkably well timed for our congregation. The young woman who had lost her grandfather was able to express that grief with a small group of supportive church members—a moment of great significance for her that simply would not have happened in our previous lecture model. Before the project she attended services sporadically; now she is with us each Sunday. The IGRE sessions are not solely, or even mainly, responsible for that—her loss prompted a general reassessment of the role of faith in her life—but they were a valued aid in the process. The family of the autistic boy who visited us saw him engage in his learning and interact with others in ways that they had not seen in their home church. They returned twice more even though they were committed to another, much larger, church in town.

The interviews revealed that the participants felt relationally closer after the intervention and they enjoyed their discussions together. That deepened relational closeness continues now that the intervention is completed.

In the months following the project, the next Bible class leaders continued to begin by bringing all ages together to hear a Bible story before the children went to their own class. They were trying, I believe, to maintain some of the feel of the project sessions. However, in the absence of the videos, illustrations, and dramatic readings the children were not engaged at the same level they had been during the intervention. Eventually we drifted completely back to the old model. In part, I think this was a misdiagnosis of what worked best from the intervention. It was not just having the children with us; it was the focus on experiential learning and reflection. Those aspects were not carried over into the next classes. The practical challenge of bringing change to Northside is the very diffuse nature of our leadership. Permanent change may require a second interaction followed by a focused discussion regarding the learnings we would like to incorporate into our educational program on a routine basis.

Generalizability

The brief review of the intergenerational religious education literature in chapter 2 makes a strong case for the need to foster intergenerational formation in Christian congregations, regardless of their size or setting. Chapter 2 also established that the relevant literature strongly supports the claim that spiritual formation should be intentionally holistic, addressing the cognitive, behavioral, relational, and affective dimensions of the participants. These broad, intertwined

claims are applicable to the entire body of Christ. Some form of holistic,

intergenerational religious education is needed in all churches. Indeed, though

intergenerationality has been diminished almost to the point of vanishing in many

congregations, it was the natural state of the church for most of its existence. The

need for connections between generations—for adults to model the faith to children

and for the childlike faith of the children to bless and impact adult believers—is

clear. On the large issue—"should we create a community that learns and ministers

together across age ranges in our congregation?"—I cannot see supporting any

answer other than a resounding "yes."

A closely-related accompanying question regards what shape the

intergenerational formation program takes. The Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald

model that I adapted for this project has worked well in other contexts and is well

supported by their own study of the results.[1] This intervention yielded good results

at Northside, where we were working with a small budget, a volunteer-only

leadership, and very young children—in retrospect, a more challenging context than

I had initially realized. At a congregation with older children, a bigger budget, or a

dedicated staff member to take this on, I expect the results to be equally good, if not

better. By necessity, a very large church might be forced to select only certain age

groups to integrate, or they might need to adapt their facilities to accommodate

multiple smaller break-out sessions after the initial all-ages learning experience.

I follow Langford in agreeing that this model is particularly well-suited for

narrative texts. The exodus worked well, but a similar program could be built

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[1] Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation.*

around the patriarchs, the story of King David, the life of Jesus, the parables, or numerous other narrative texts. The program could be done from non-narrative texts as well if the facilitator were gifted at finding or creating engaging all-ages learning experiences that reinforced the concepts being taught.

Langford also suggests making the purposes of such a program, and of its component parts, explicit to the participants. I would do that if replicating this elsewhere. The sermon that preceded the IGRE sessions served that purpose in part, but a more robust explanation would have been useful. Having gone through this experience once in our context, I would be more confident in emphasizing the likely benefits of this model to adults. I tended to speak of this intervention as something we were doing for the children, which would also bless the adults, rather than—as I should have—speak of it as a project intended to help us all grow together.

<div align="center">Questions for Future Research</div>

As mentioned in chapters 3 and 4, this intervention originally included a take-home component that simply did not work in our current context. In losing the take-home component, we lost a potentially valuable aspect of the program, limiting the impact to only what we could achieve on Sunday morning. Clearly, the take-home component has worked in other contexts—it is a part of the Martineau model, and Gene Shelburne had a vigorous homework component in his small, non-class church context for many years.[2] In similar future projects, I would seek ways to bring back the home component.

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[2] See his email to me on 37-38.

One notable difference between the expectations for home study in the Shelburne-style Family Bible Studies and the project intervention at Northside is that for Shelburne the homework was in preparation for the Sunday morning lesson soon to come. In this project, home materials were intended to be a means of reflection upon the Sunday morning experience that had previously occurred. It is possible that families are more likely to go through the home experiences together if they know that they will be asked to share the results of their study with the rest of the participants a week later. Furthermore, the Family Bible Study curriculum was clear that it was primarily intended for families to experience together at home. The congregational component, when it existed, supplemented the work done at home. For this intervention, we emphasized the congregational component. A congregation that desires to see full use of the take-home materials should consider 1) making them, at least in part, preparatory for the Sunday experience, 2) framing the intergenerational program as primarily a home experience that is supplemented by the congregation, and/or 3) creating some means of gentle accountability for doing them, such as giving stickers to the children of families who bring completed materials to church each week.

Despite these recommendations, it should be noted that the sample size at Northside is far too small to expect that other congregations will have the same experience with the take home materials we did. We have three regularly attending families. It is possible that the early weeks of the intervention were an exceptionally busy time for each of them and that we would see very different results using the same template at another time. Perhaps if we had ten families with children, the

other seven would have all completed and benefited from the home materials. We simply cannot be certain with the limited data we have.

Future researchers should consider alternative methods of data collection designed to answer the questions that were largely unanswered by the group interview, particularly regarding the behavioral growth of the participants. A focused individual questionnaire might serve that purpose better, either alone or in conjunction with an oral interview. Catholic parish leaders who adopted the intergenerational strategies of Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald were asked "If someone were to ask you 'how do you know learning is taking place through the intergenerational learning sessions,' what would you say?"[3] Leaders of a congregation that adapts this intervention might well ask "If someone were to ask you 'how do you know behavioral change is taking place through the intergenerational experience,' what would you say?" One might also ask "compared to the standard classroom model of Sunday School, are the intergenerational experiences better, worse, or about the same at prompting behavioral change?"

Conclusion

This thesis records the efforts of my doctor of ministry project to lead the church through an experiment in an alternative model of Christian education, the intergenerational religious experiences model. I had hoped that the intervention would help the church grow holistically, in the cognitive, relational, affective, and behavioral domains. Based on the data collected, I can say with confidence that the

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[3] Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald, *Intergenerational Faith Formation*, 87.

participants experienced relational and affective growth much greater than I would have expected in the schooling-instructional model, while maintaining cognitive growth. Behavioral growth was not shown in the data, either because it did not take place or because our data collection was insufficient to detect it. Still, the program was a success in most of its goals, and some form of intergenerational formation experience is likely to become an annual event for the congregation. Congregational leaders have spontaneously continued to create times of intergenerational interaction since the conclusion of the intervention. The consensus view that experiential learning and group reflection was effective for prompting cognitive, relational, and affective growth may serve as a catalyst for ongoing changes to the traditional model.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-4920 • Fax 325-674-6785

August 22, 2013

Mr. Kirk Cowell
Graduate School of Theology
ACU Box 29405
Abilene Christian University

Dear Mr. Cowell,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Facilitating Holistic Spiritual Formation at the Northside Church of Christ in Laredo, Texas" has been approved for a period of one year (IRB # 13-068).

If this project is continued beyond a one-year period, you need to submit an additional request for review. Please notify this office when you have completed your study.

If any problems develop with the study, please inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs promptly.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Mark Billingsley, M. A.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

cc: Dr. David Wray

APPENDIX B: TEMPLATE FOR INTERGENERATIONAL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES[1]

Opening Prayer

All-Ages Learning Experience
>An "in-common" experience that engages all ages. (Drama, simulations, games, storytelling, etc.)

In Depth Learning Experience
>Three potential formats: whole group, age-group (parallel learning), learning activity centers (either intergenerational or age-specific). Exodus journey "souvenirs" will be created at this stage.

Whole Group Sharing Experience (contributive occasion)
>Goal: participants share what they've learned with each other, and discover new ways to apply the learning. Groups share the highlights of their in-depth learning experiences with the rest of the community. (Describe a project or activity, give a verbal summary, share a symbol of their learning, offer a dramatic presentation, etc.) Sharing can be to the entire community or a smaller group.

Household Reflection (interactive sharing)
>Learners move to personal application of their learning. Reflection integrates learning into their lives, leading to change and growth. As participants to answer to simple, open-ended sentences like "I learned….I discovered….I was surprised by….I was moved by….." After reflection, they can share with a partner or small group.

Home Application
>Home application can be: resources for follow-up activities for parents and children, an opportunity to craft a concrete action plan—whatever tools the participants might need to continue learning, serving and praying at home. Skills-based activities should be practiced on site. Questions in home journals will ask the participants to document their cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning.

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[1] Adapted from Martineau, Weber, and Kehrwald, 72–78.

Closing Prayer Service

    The closing prayer service reminds participants what the learning is all about: celebrating and building the kingdom of God. Symbols and responses generated during the session can be incorporated into a closing prayer service.

APPENDIX C: WEEKLY LESSON PLANS

Week 1: Baby Moses Placed in the Nile

Opening Prayer

All-Ages Learning Experience
> Exodus 2:1-10 is read aloud from the TNIV, while illustrations scanned from *My First Hands on Bible* are projected on the wall.[1] Afterward, an excerpt from *The Prince of Egypt* is shown.[2]

In Depth Learning Experience
> Parallel learning format: Children under 10 are invited to go to kids' area to color pictures of baby Moses and discuss what dangers God has spared them from. Teens and adults discuss the text together.

Whole Group Sharing Experience
> A chart is on the wall with empty columns for "Physical Danger," "Spiritual Danger," and "Emotional Danger." The group is discusses what each of these means, and each person is asked to say which is the most significant kind of danger God has rescued them from. Post it notes are placed in the various columns to keep track of responses.
>
> Then, each group member is given index cards and asked to write down a danger that they are facing—one that they desire God's help with. The cards are collected in placed in a basket that represents the one baby Moses was placed in; thus entrusting those concerns to God.

Household Reflection (interactive sharing)
> Younger children return and show the older group the pictures they have colored. They also talk about ways that God has kept them safe.
>
> The anonymous concerns from the index cards are read.
>
> The group sings one verse of "Amazing Grace" together:

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[1] Renée Gray-Wilburn, *My First Hands-On Bible* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2011).

[2] Brenda Chapman, Simon Wells, and Steve Hickner, *The Prince of Egypt* (Dreamworks Animated, 2006).

Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come
Tis grace has kept me safe thus far
And grace will lead me home

Home Application
Home application pages are distributed to families with children. (See next page.)

Closing Prayer Service

A prayer is offered which incorporates the children's discussion and the index cards, asking for God's help and thanking him for how he has worked in our lives to the point.

EXODUS JOURNEY

Week 1: Baby Moses on the Nile
Take home ideas to integrate the Bible into your family routine. (Choose at least one idea to use this week. We will talk about them next week.)

Idea 1: (Demonstrated at church today, but your young children would probably give you different answers later this week when they've thought about it more). Re-read Exodus 2:1-10.
How did each of these people feel? What how did Moses' mother feel when she placed him in a basket in the river? How did Moses sister feel when she watched her baby brother floating in the river? How did Pharaoh's daughter feel when she found him? And how did Moses' mommy feel when she was asked to come take care of him?
What emotions did you feel today? When did you feel happy? When did you feel sad? Did you ever feel angry? What should we pray for as a family?

Idea 2:
Introduce the background of the story by reading Exodus 1.
What emotions do you think the midwives felt when Pharaoh ordered them to throw the baby boys in the Nile? Have you ever felt like that?
The midwives lied to Pharaoh. Was that wrong? Why or why not?
Pray together asking God to help your family be brave when other people pressure you to do something wrong, like the midwives were brave and saved the Hebrew baby boys.

Idea 3:
Re-read Exodus 2:1-10
God kept Moses safe while he was on the river until he reached a safe home. What are some family stories about people who made it safely through dangerous situations? Parents, this is a good time to tell your own stories to your children or call or visit a relative to hear their stories.
Pray together, thanking God for keeping our family safe.

Week 2: Moses at the Burning Bush

Opening Prayer

All-Ages Learning Experience

> After everyone is gathered, ask questions that draw on prior knowledge. "What was life like for the Israelites in Egypt?" "How did Moses feel when he saw his people being mistreated?"

> Exodus 3:1-15 is read aloud from the TNIV, while illustrations scanned from *My First Hands on Bible* are projected on the wall. Afterward, an excerpt from *The Prince of Egypt* is shown.

In Depth Learning Experience

> Parallel learning format: Children under seven are invited to go to kids' area to color pictures of the burning bush and discuss how we hear from God.

> Teens and adults discuss the following questions: "How did people hear from God in the Bible?" "How do people hear from God today?"

Whole Group Sharing Experience

> A poster on the wall depicts a silhouette of a branchy bush. Red pieces of poster board, shaped like flames, are distributed to the older kids and adults, who are divided into groups of four to six. Each person is asked to write on a flames a way that they have heard from God. They share their answers with their small groups as they write.

> As the groups conclude their discussions, the flames are collected and glued to the bush silhouette, forming a burning bush composed of the congregation's experiences hearing from God.

Household Reflection

> All of the flames are read aloud. Some participants are asked to volunteer to share their stories and experiences. Young children rejoin the older group to show off their art and discuss their answers to how we hear from God.

Home Application

> Home application pages are distributed to families with children. (See next page.)

Closing Prayer Service

> A prayer is offered which incorporates the burning bush responses and the children's discussion, thanking God for the various ways he communicates to us.

EXODUS JOURNEY

Week 2: The Burning Bush
Take home ideas to integrate the Bible into your family routine.

Read Exodus 3 and 4 together again.

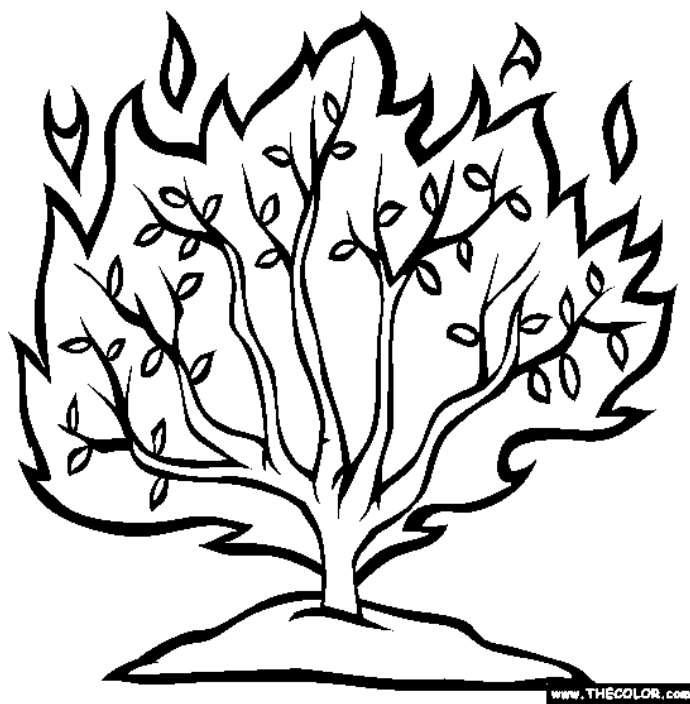Discuss the following questions together:

Who spoke to Moses from the burning bush?

What did God ask Moses to do?

Moses was scared to talk to Pharaoh. How did God help him have courage?

Are you ever scared to do something you need to do?
(Parents, answer this, too!)

Pray together asking God to give you courage.

Week 3: The Plagues

Opening Prayer

All-Ages Learning Experience
> A story, "The God of the Slaves Vs. The Gods of Egypt: The Ten Plagues as Told By an Egyptian Boy," is read aloud (see below), while pictures depicting the various plagues are projected on the wall.

In Depth Learning Experience
> Preschool children go to the nursery area to read the plague story from a children's Bible and act it out. (Buzzing loudly like gnats, jumping like frogs, putting red circle stickers on their skin for boils, hiding under thick blankets in darkness.)
>
> Teens and adults discuss the theology of the plagues. What does is mean that the magicians could replicate some, but not all, of the wonders? Is God still competing against other gods?[3]

Whole Group Sharing Experience (contributive occasion)
> Create a chart of "American Gods." What are the chief gods of our culture? What are their powers? How does the church resist these gods and counteract their influence?

Household Reflection (interactive sharing)
> In groups of four or five, discuss the most important insight each person had today. Pray for one another.

Closing Prayer Service
> Closing prayer focuses on God's victory over all other gods, including the gods that seek control over our lives and those that clamor for worship in our culture.

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[3] Adapted from an activity in Langford, *Faith Chronicles Parents Manual*, 39.

The God of the Slaves Vs. The Gods of Egypt:

The Ten Plagues as Told By an Egyptian Boy

Written by Kirk Cowell for the Northside Church of Christ, Laredo, Texas

When I was a little boy, my people had slaves. It's true. They were a people called Hebrews. They came from a different land. They spoke a different language. They even had a different religion. I thought their religion was pretty silly. Do you know what they believed? They believed that there was only one God! It's true! They believed that there was one God who made everything. They said he made the skies and the water and the land and the trees and the animals and the people and the sun and the moon. They said that there was just one, powerful God who could do anything.

That's not what we believed in Egypt, of course. We had a much better religion. We had lots of gods and goddesses! Dozens and dozens! And I knew all about them, because my father was one of the chief magicians of Egypt! He led our people in worshipping all the gods, and he worked beside Pharaoh in the royal court. We had too many gods for me to tell you about all of them, but one of my favorites was Wadjet, the snake goddess. She protected our land. Wadjet was so important that her symbol appeared on the headdress of the Pharaoh. My other favorite was Ra, the sun god. Every day he made the sun appear in the sky and filled our land with bright light. The light helped our crops to grow, and it let us see the world so we could work and play. Every day we gave thanks to Wadjet for

powerfully protecting our land, and we gave thanks to Ra for filling our land with light. Because of gods like Wadjet and Ra we were a mighty country. So when the Hebrew slaves talked about their one true God, we just laughed and laughed. If their God was so powerful, why were they helpless slaves? Our gods were the real gods.

At least, that's what we used to think.

Everything started to change the day two old brothers, Moses and Aaron, asked to see the Pharaoh. They said that the Hebrew God wanted Pharaoh to let all the slaves go free. Pharaoh laughed. He said, "Your God would have to show me a pretty big miracle to get me to free the slaves!" When he said that, Aaron dropped his wooden staff on the floor, and the staff became a living snake!

My dad was right there watching the whole thing. Pharaoh told him and the other magicians to turn their staffs into serpents, too! No one had ever done anything like that before, but my father prayed to Wadjet, and asked Wadjet to help him do this miracle. He and the other magicians threw down their staffs, and they all turned into snakes, too! We all cheered at how powerful Wadjet was!

But then Aaron's serpent, the one the Hebrew God made, ate all the other snakes. We stopped cheering and just stared. And Wadjet wasn't one of my favorite gods anymore. She couldn't do anything to stop Moses's God.

But the next day the sun came up and light filled our land, and I knew that Ra was still up in the heavens, watching over us. We could count on him, at least.

Pharaoh is a powerful leader, and he trusted in our gods. Even after Aaron's snake ate the magician's snakes, he refused to let the slaves go. And we thought maybe that was the end of the story.

But not long after, Moses and Aaron were back again. They said if Pharaoh didn't let the slaves go, they would turn the Nile River into blood. I thought that was ridiculous. The Nile was such an important river that it was protected by several gods. Hapi was the essence and spirit of the Nile. Neith, the warrior goddess watched over the large fish. Hathor protected the smaller fish. To attack the Nile you would have to overcome at least three of our gods. There was no way that could happen!

But then, they did it. Aaron struck the river with his staff, and he turned the Nile into blood. It was stinky and disgusting. A giant blood river! Yuck! All the fish died. Hapi, Neith, and Hathor hadn't done anything to stop it. I was starting to get worried.

But the next day the sun came up and light filled our land, and I knew that Ra was still up in the heavens, watching over us.

Pharoah stood strong. He refused to let the slaves go. So Moses and Aaron came back, again and again and again. Every time they did something new.

One time Aaron raised up his staff over the rivers and ponds, and frogs came pouring out, thousands of them, one right after another. Frogs were everywhere! In the river, in the palace, on our chairs, in our bowls, even in the oven. We couldn't sleep because of the frogs; we couldn't rest, and we couldn't cook our food. Any everyone prayed to Heqet, the frog goddess, and she did nothing to stop it. Nothing!

Then, Aaron struck the ground with his staff, and the soil started turning into gnats. Little annoying, biting gnats buzzing everywhere. We hated it. We cried out to

Geb, the god of soil and dust, but he was helpless to keep the dust from turning into more gnats. My dad said "this was done by the finger of a real God!"

After that, Aaron sent a swarm of flies—horrible, buzz, buzz, buzzing flies all over the place! You know how annoying it is when one fly keeps buzzing around you and landing on your face. Imagine that is happening with twenty flies all at once and it never stops, day or night! We begged for Uatchit, the fly-god, to stop what Aaron was doing, but Uatchit was did nothing. And here's a really weird thing. There were no flies at all where the slaves lived. Every now and then a fly would start to go that direction, but then it turned around and came right back to us. I thought I saw a slave laughing about that once, but I was too busy swatting flies to pay attention.

It got worse. When Pharaoh still wouldn't let the slaves go, Aaron and Moses sent a disease to our animals—the horses, donkeys, camels, cows, sheep, and goats. They all died, just like that. Bulls were sacred symbols of the god Ptah, but he couldn't keep them alive. Cows were sacred to the goddess Hathor, but she couldn't keep the cows alive. Sheep were sacred to the ram-god Khnum, but he couldn't keep the sheep alive. All of them together were unable to stop the God of Moses and the slaves.

I was starting to think that our Egyptian gods maybe weren't so powerful after all. Even so: the next day the sun came up and light filled our land, and I knew that Ra was still up in the heavens, watching over us.

Pharaoh still refused to let the slaves go. Moses and Aaron came back. They threw ashes up in the air and the wind carried the ashes all over the country. Every time a speck of ash touched an Egyptian, it turned into a painful kind of sore, called a

boil. We were covered with them. It was so awful that we tried not to move. We just stood as still as we could. Even my dad and the other magicians were covered with boils. They couldn't stand up, and they couldn't do their work. We whimpered little prayers. "Sekhmet, goddess of epidemics, save us! Serapis, god of healing, end our pain! Imhotep, god of medicine, give us something to make this stop!" But none of the gods of Egypt answered our prayers.

Then Moses sent a plague of hail, giant icy hailstones so big they destroyed entire trees, but Nut, the goddess of the sky, couldn't stop him.

Then Moses send a giant swarm of locusts, noisy, hungry insects, all through our land. They ate anything that the hail hadn't destroyed, which wasn't very much, to be honest. Just to try something, we called on Nepri, the god of grain; Ermutet, the goddess of crops; Seth, the god of crops; and Thermuthis, the goddess of the harvest. But this was getting embarrassing. Our gods were nowhere to be seen. My dad had given up completely. He begged Pharaoh just to let the slaves go before our whole country was destroyed. "Our Gods are powerless against the Hebrew God!" he said. But Pharaoh would not listen.

I had one bit of hope left. The next day the sun came up and light filled our land, and I knew that Ra was still up in the heavens, watching over us.

But Moses and Aaron weren't done yet. They asked Pharaoh again to free the slaves, and again he refused. And in spite of everything I had seen them do so far, I was not expecting what they did next. Not at all. I could never have imagined it.

They made the light disappear from Egypt. Completely. There was no light at all. *Zero light*. No moon, no stars, no lamps…no sun. We couldn't see anything. No

one moved. The darkness was so thick, you could feel it. I begged Ra to do something. He was the mightiest of all the Gods of Egypt! He controlled the sun! He was the bringer of light! I called out in the darkness, "Ra! Please bring back the sun!" All around me, other Egyptians did the same thing. It was a huge chorus all over the land! "Ra, show us the sun! Ra, show us the sun! Ra, show us the sun!"

Ra didn't do anything. We sat in the darkness for days. I mean, for nights. I mean, I don't even know how long it was. How do you measure time when you can't even see?!?! I had a lot of time to think, though. I thought about all our gods and goddesses, and how none of them could stop the God of the slaves. I thought that maybe the slaves' religion wasn't so silly after all. Their god could do everything, and our gods could do nothing. We thought we were a powerful land, but our gods were weak. They looked like a weak people, but their God was powerful. I realized there was someone mightier than even Ra. I decided to learn more about the God of the Hebrews.

> The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out defiantly in full view of all the Egyptians…for the LORD had brought judgment on their gods. – Numbers 33:3-4

Week 4: Passover

Opening Prayer

All-Ages Learning Experience
>   Gather everyone in the dining area.
>
>   Briefly recap the story of the first nine plagues, then say:
>
>   "Blood, Frogs, Gnats, Flies, Livestock, Boils, Hail, Locusts, Darkness….
>
>   "But nothing worked. Pharaoh's heart was hard. He refused to let the people of Israel go. The people of Egypt respected Moses. They were willing to hear him. But Pharaoh was not.
>
>   "So God took one final step—one that he didn't want to take. He took away the oldest boy in each family. In ancient Egypt the oldest boys were trained to be leaders. They inherited more of the family property than other children. They had more opportunities. They were going to take Egypt into the future."
>
>   Read Exodus 11:4-8, then 12:21-30. As verse 22 is read, dip a brush in red paint and brush large red streaks across white poster board that has been taped above and to the sides of the main entrance.

In Depth Learning Experience
>   All participants will share in a mini-Passover meal.

Whole Group Sharing Experience and Household Reflection
>   During the meal, each person will be asked to reflect on the elements of Passover, and share their reflections with those gathered at the same table. Afterward, Psalm 136 will be read, with the participants shouting out "His love endures forever" in each line. Then they will be asked to write a verse from their own history with God on an index card so that together we can write our own version Psalm 136. To help guide this process, several copies of the "Passover Reflections" page below will be left on each table, and one person per table will be asked to serve as host of the meal.

Closing Prayer Service
>   The closing prayer service will thank God for the many ways that he has rescued his children.

Passover Reflections

As you eat the lamb, answer this question: how did God rescue you?

As you eat the bitter herbs, answer this question: What bitter experiences has god brought you through?

As you eat the bread, answer this question: What do you think the next step in your faith journey is?

After we read Psalm 136, use the index card to add your own line to the song of praise. What has God done?

(Examples: He reconciled my family. He brought me supportive friends when I was struggling. He helped me be a better parent."

Week 5: The Red Sea

Opening Prayer

All-Ages Learning Experience
>Read Exodus 14:5-14 from the New Living Translation. Have all participants read verse 14 together, "The Lord himself will fight for you. Just stay calm."

>Watch the Red Sea crossing scene from *The Prince of Egypt*.

In Depth Learning Experience
>Young children go to the children's area to make Red Sea models following the instructions found in *The Hands-On Bible*.[4]

>Teens and adults read together Exodus 14:15-18.

Whole Group Sharing Experience
>This event—the saving act of God as the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, is one of the foundational stories of Israel. It is told and sung about over and over in later Scriptures.

>Questions for group discussion: What is our story? How do we tell it to each other? How do we tell it to outsiders?

Household Reflection
>In small groups, share one specific way you could tell yours story this week. Pray for one another.

Closing Prayer Service
>The closing prayer service will thank God for his salvation and ask for his help telling the story faithfully.

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[4] Group Publishing, *Hands-On Bible* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub. : NLT : Tyndale, 2010), 72.

Week 6: The Ten Commandments

Opening Prayer

All-Ages Learning Experience
>   Everyone watches a brief video from *The Way of the Master* television
>   program that features a mnemonic for memorizing the Ten Commandments.

In Depth Learning Experience/ Household Reflection
>   Move to the dining area and sit at tables. Divide into three groups. Each
>   group is given three or four of the commandments, and asked to discuss
>   three things:

>>   How could we rephrase this positively? (For example, "You must not
>>   murder" could be positively rephrased as "Rescue the dying/Respect
>>   life/Care for sick.")[5]
>>   Why does God want us to live like this?
>>   How do we put this commandment into practice?

>   To help keep the conversation on track, a leader at each table is asked to
>   record the answers from the discussion on the papers provided. (See below.)

>   Children are also included in the groups. They are given paper, pencils, and
>   crayons and asked to illustrate the ways we can put the commandments into
>   practice.

Whole Group Sharing Experience
>   As the groups conclude their discussion, they share the results of their
>   conversation with all the other participants. The children's artwork is
>   displayed.

Closing Prayer Service
>   The closing prayer service will thank God for his commandments and ask for
>   his help in living them out.

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[5] Adapted from an activity in Langford, *Faith Chronicles Parents Manual*, 40.

APPENDIX D: RESPONSES TO THE BURNING BUSH EXERCISE

Congregation – prayer – often written accounts with God

He gives piece of mind when family is in serious illness

When we sing and pray.

Money change

His allways there when I'm scared

Scripture

Prayer journal & singing

Trials & tribulations - getting out of God's way

Seeing God's light shining through others

Meditation

Loss of grandpa

Pray alone

Things going my way when they are not supposed to

Pray

Prayer

Through prayer, Scripture, church lessons

Guidance

Lord's supper

Reading

God helps in shool when hope is almost gone

APPENDIX E: PSALM 136 ½

One of the exercises during session five was for each person to write their own line of praise to contribute to an updated psalm of praise. Each line present here was written on an index card by one of the participants. I then arranged them into this psalm, which was read aloud during the final session.

Psalm 136 ½

The Praises of the Northside Church of Christ

He has surrounded me with mentors and teachers.

His love endures forever.

He brought me a godly wife.

His love endures forever.

He brought me my wife when I was in rough times.

His love endures forever.

He brought me joy and peace of mind.

His love endures forever.

He rescued me from evil habits.

His love endures forever.

He orchestrated the perfect timing for our last birth.

His love endures forever.

Not only was Dad able to be at the birth, he was able to stay much longer than we originally thought.

His love endures forever.

He prepares the way for his people.

His love endures forever.

He has brought me a sense of protection, comfort, and love.

His love endures forever.

He brought his son into the world.

His love endures forever.

He raised his son with a powerful hand!

His love endures forever.

He saves even from the power of death!

His love endures forever.

His persistence in saving me has changed my life forever.

His love endures forever.

APPENDIX F: NOTES FROM TEN COMMANDMENTS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Table 1: Responses to Commandments 1-4

Commandment: "I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. You must not have any other god but me."

Rephrase it positively:
God is your rock + savior.

Why does God want us to live like this?
Reliance on God is crucial to our well-being.

How do we put this commandment into practice?
Remember our baptism and take time to be thankful for Jesus and his death.

Commandment: "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. ⁵ You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me.⁶ But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands."

Rephrase it positively:
Pay attention to God and honor him.

Why does God want us to live like this?
There is a sense of peace because he is our rock and shepherd.

How do we put this commandment into practice?
By praying and meditating on God and giving thanks.

Commandment: "You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name."

Rephrase it positively:
Honor and praise him. Hollowed.

Why does God want us to live like this?
He doesn't want us to be frustrated.

How do we put this commandment into practice?
Prayers meditation Thanksgiving.

Commandment: "Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ You have six days each week for your ordinary work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy."

Rephrase it positively:
Think about God—give time for God.

Why does God want us to live like this?
To reconfirm our need and focus and God.

How do we put this commandment into practice?
Coming to worship
Taking time to read and pray

Table Two: Responses to Commandments 5-7

Commandment: "Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you."

Why does God want us to live like this?
You reap what you sow.
Parents are your first gift, so honoring them is natural – eventually you may be [a] parent.

How do we put this commandment into practice?
Show love and respect – even with what good agree [?]
Submission

Commandment: "You must not murder."
Rephrase it positively:

Nurture life
Love your neighbor

Why does God want us to live like this?
God is love and is the [gwn?] of life

How do we put this commandment into practice?
What God has put together, let no man put asunder
Taking of the living/creation
Not damaging nature
Gift of service

Commandment: "You must not commit adultery."

Rephrase it positively:
Love your husband/wife all the time.

Why does God want us to live like this?
Peace, happy family, example, learn, health

How do we put this commandment into practice?
Taking time to nurture
Positive communicate
Forgiveness
Understanding
Compromise
Agreement
Learn to say I'm sorry
Prayer – devotional time
Thankful
Becoming one – as God commanded
Expressing love

Table 3: Responses to Commandments 8-10

Commandment: "You must not steal."

Rephrase it positively:
Be content with what you have.
Be happy with what you have.
*Respect other's possessions [Asterisk in original.]
Show love for one another.
Spiritual more important than material.
Heart condition.

Why does God want us to live like this?

How do we put this commandment into practice?

Commandment: *"You must not testify falsely against your neighbor."*

Rephrase it positively:
Be truthful with your neighbor.
Honesty
Truthful
Loving your neighbor.

Why does God want us to live like this?
Be a better person. / Happier.

How do we put this commandment into practice?
Disciple yourself
Understand the consequences

Commandment: *"You must not covet your neighbor's house. You must not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor."*

Rephrase it positively:
Live simply

Why does God want us to live like this?

How do we put this commandment into practice?
Not being showy.

APPENDIX G: FORM FOR TAKING FIELD NOTES

Date: _____

Field Notes: Intergenerational Religious Experiences

<u>Protocol</u>
1) Who is present? (Note absences of church members and the presence of guests. Sign-in sheet may accomplish this.)
2) Describe the ambiance before the session begins.
3) Note the level of interaction between church members from different generations, describing specific interactions.
4) Demonstrations of cognitive learning.
5) Affect displays
6) Levels of participation in session activities (including non-participation)
7) Spontaneous feedback regarding the experience, including feedback after worship or during the weekly potluck lunch
8) Any unusual or unexpected occurrence.

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APPENDIX H: REPORTS FROM THE INDEPENDENT EXPERT

A Response to the Intergenerational Religious Experiences at the

Northside Church of Christ

Cowell's template for intergenerational curriculum is a helpful addition to

the curriculum options for the Church. The current educational market continues to

produce an over-abundance of spiritual formation materials that are age specific in

scope leading to learning environments that necessarily segregate members

according to ages and sometimes unintentionally undermine the primary role of

parents in spiritual formation. Given the ideals expressed in passages like

Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and the prevalence of such communal descriptions of the

Church in the New Testament as a family and a body, Cowell's model is helpful both

in assisting the Church to reinforce the parental role as well as develop material that

allows for the context of learning to reflect content imperatives such as is found in 1

Corinthians 12:12-27. The following observations and suggestions are offered to

assist in these purposes.

 1. Making purposes explicit   I would like to see in the materials provided to the

participants a general explanation of the purpose and value of the approach being

used and how each component of the materials (i.e. all-age experiences, in depth

learning experience, whole group sharing, home application etc..) addresses those purposes and represent those values. Rather than merely providing an alternative methodology for biblical learning, I would like to see some advocacy for the importance of such materials to parental support and community building in the congregation. While this may be implied in the materials it would be good to see it more explicitly stated somewhere.

2. In Depth Learning Experiences   One of the strengths of age-specific curriculum is the attention given to age-appropriate learning strategies. A common weakness of inter-generational and family oriented materials is less attention and creativity given to age-specific learning strategies. Age-specific strategies and inter-generational learning need not be an either/or issue. Cowell utilizes three strategies to incorporate both: whole group learning, parallel group learning and learning activity centers that may be age-specific or intergenerational. This demonstrates that an inter-generational curriculum need not ignore age-specific learning strategies (e.g. the use of art, drama and crafts in the "In Depth Learning Experiences"). Rather, inter-generational models take particular care not to neglect incorporating age-specific strategies into the community learning experience. At the same time teens are enabled to experience more mature conversations in the community.

However, the "In Depth Learning Experiences" components seem a little under developed still. If one is going to include an age-specific component, I'd like to see a little more instruction and guidance given. For example in Weeks 1 & 2 after

the children color the Bible story pictures, rather than simply instruct teachers to discuss "what dangers God has spared them from" and ""how we hear from God" it would be helpful to provide a list of the possible answers children might give to such questions and guidance for ways teachers might follow up in their conversations with them. Even though many teachers may do this intuitively, having such materials would be helpful.

On the other hand, the reenactment of the Passover Meal experience is an exemplary learning experience that brings the generations together in a powerful way allowing each age group to engage the experience at its own appropriate level. If this could be done as a lunch or dinner experience (rather than a morning class) and the whole church be involved the impact would be even greater I think. In my opinion, this kind of experience is inter-generational learning at its best. I would like to see more such experiential learning opportunities in the material that different ages can participate in equally. Such experiences create indelible memories in all participants (especially younger ones) and, in my opinion, generate more insightful questions among the older.

3. Home Applications   It is not surprising that the take home exercises disappear after week 2. A major reason churches often take over the primary role of spiritual formation in children is because families feel they haven't the time or talent for the job. However, even if families are not participating at the level one might desire, there are still reasons to continue to include the family component. First, it provides the continual reminder that they have an important role (indeed the most

important) to play and any participation even if it is inconsistent, makes a difference. Second, there are usually some families who are ready to make the commitment and it seems unfortunate to deny them supportive materials simply because they represent only a small percentage. Third, the home component maintains integrity in the development of the curriculum for future churches that may use it, even if the current church is not maximizing its potential.

In developing the home application it would also be wise to take into consideration the various age levels that families may be dealing with and incorporate options that address the different levels. The home activities for weeks 1 & 2 rely greatly on providing questions for parents to ask their children. Parents could be given more options to choose from including activities particularly designed for the different ages of their children. The suggestion in Week 1 for parents to tell their own stories of God delivering from dangerous situations is a strategy that works for all ages and brings up one of the strengths of Cowell's materials, the use of story.

4. <u>Maximize Use of Story</u>   Cowell uses a variety of strategies in his curriculum to maximize the power of story as a heuristic device . From the simple use of bible story books and films like the Prince of Egypt to incorporating parental stories of danger into family devotionals as illustrations of God's continual protection to the multiple opportunities to integrate the children's personal experiences into the larger story of God. Storytelling is one of the most effective strategies to engage all levels of learners both individually and collectively.

Cowell maximizes the strategy by creating an original script that tells the story of the ten plagues from the point of view of an Egyptian boy. I found this very compelling generating several ideas in me for how this might be enhanced. The story is effective as a strategy for teaching about the multiple Egyptian gods. However, whether intended or not, beyond being a way to illustrate the religion of Egypt, it also allows this Bible story to be understood from an additional perspective, that of a child. This is beneficial for both adults and children. Obviously children will be more able to identify with the story; but also adults will be able to expand their understanding beyond the perspective of an adult to seeing how these events might have affected young Egyptians, a perspective probably most Bible readers do not typically take.

I was reminded of the classic film "Vantage Point" which retells the story of an assassination from the points of view of several different people present. I began to think of other perspectives that might be used to tell the same story of the plagues. The child's perspective addresses issues regarding his own security that is rooted in parents and home. How would the story be told from the perspective of an Egyptian adolescent who may have questions about his faith of origin, or of an Egyptian parent who wonders if one's family can be entrusted into the care of such gods, or Egyptian officials whose concern is for the stability of the nation or even the elderly who begin to wonder about the genuineness of the faith they have trusted in for so many years. And of course there are the perspectives of all the various Hebrew characters. Once one begins to enter into the dynamic of story and character, people are enabled to discover fresh insight into the truths of Scripture.

Story is something everyone understands. By treating the various biblical narratives as just that, narratives, it allows all the narrative components to aid in learning. People generally understand narrative components like author, character, setting, plot and conflict, resolution etc. These devices help young and old alike understand more deeply the biblical stories. How would this story be told differently if told by Hebrews and Egyptians, young and old, male and female etc.? What are the various conflicts and plotlines in the story? In what way is the story of Israel our own story and what implications does that have for us?

<div align="center">Concluding Remarks</div>

Nothing I've suggested is particularly original or novel. I have only tried to highlight a few elements that perhaps could maximize the curriculum's attempt to bring the ages together in learning and nurture the community of faith. I am encouraged to see such work like Kirk Cowell's and hope he will continue to use his creative talents to produce materials that honor and nurture the communal nature of the Church.

Northside Church of Christ Intergenerational Sunday School

Urie Bronfenbrenner gives a scathing indictment of public education in the West in

*The Ecology of Human Develop*ment.[1] The brunt of his critique is the assumption that

children learn better when removed from real human society and placed in

arbitrary settings that deprive children from meaningful and multiple experiences

with both older and younger humans. He rails at the fact a child can graduate from

high school and never once meaningfully care for a baby or elderly person. He

argues public schools are "one of the most potent breeding grounds of alienation in

American society" (p. 231).

What Bronfenbrenner decries is the larger issue of the erosion of community

in Western society. Young people especially are deprived without an environment

nurtured by the rich diversity of people, especially different in ages.

Bronfenbrenner of course is not alone in his warnings. A growing literature warns

of the erosion of community in western culture.[2]   In different ways all of these

voices agree that society is poorer when the rich interaction of multiple associations

is systematically replaced by institutions and lifestyles that isolate people from each

other. One might think the Church would be less vulnerable to such cultural trends

since the value and importance of community is emphasized in Scripture not least

by the many communal metaphors used to describe the Church (e.g. body and

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[1]   Urie Bronfenbrenner, The Ecology of Human Development (Boston, MA: Harvard Press, 1981).

[2]   Robert Nisbet, Quest for Community (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1981), Robert Bellah, Habits of the Heart (Berley, CA: University of California Press), Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2000), Robert Wuthnow, After the Baby Boomers (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Press, 2007).

family) and also the ubiquitous "one-anothering" ethic in Scripture. However the Church seems no less vulnerable to the loss of community.[3]

For these reasons it was refreshing to observe Kirk Cowell and the Northside Church of Christ's attempt to buck this trend and experiment with an educational model that attempts to gather members rather than sort them. Since I was able only to observe the last class in their series in which participants reflected on the inter-generational learning experience, my observations and insights are necessarily limited. However, even this single visit provided observations perhaps worthy of comment and reflection.

The most obvious observation initially was the generally positive experience everyone, young and old, seemed to have. Equally obvious was the fact that most did not expect the experience to be so positive. Northside is a small church, 20-30 in attendance, so to do this project all had to participate. In a larger church one could have had volunteers already inclined and perhaps sympathetic toward the values of such an educational model. At Northside clearly some were uncertain whether or not this would be rewarding. The reasons given for their uncertainty are revealing.

Several expressed concern that a class that included both children and adults would be difficult because 1) the class would have to be focused on the children's level and 2) children could be disruptive to the learning experience of adults. It turned out their concerns were in fact warranted but their experience was not made

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[3] Holly Allen and Christine Ross, Intergenerational Christian Formation (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2012), Chap Clark *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009).

negative because of those concerns. One observed that lessons constructed to facilitate learning in children were surprisingly helpful in her own understanding as well. Looking at stories through the eyes of the children brought new insight. Another observed that the story of the baby Moses had a far greater emotional impact on her when her own child was in the room learning with her. Many observed the experience of witnessing the children of the church learning biblical truths had an edifying value all its own, perhaps not more valuable than the insights of an adult class but surely not less. Though it was not mentioned by any of the participants, I noticed one of those unique values in the worship following the class. An adult who was leading the meditation before the communion referred back to what they had all learned together in the story of the Exodus that morning in class. It seemed to me that moment of sharing had a more poignant and inclusive feel because the speaker was able to refer to the common class experience of most in the room.

Some adults acknowledged that having children in the class did at times make things more disruptive as children are less likely to sit still and participate in an orderly question and answer format. But one observed that the process of having to adapt to the learning needs of children was instructive to him. It made him realize how we must adapt to everyone we might teach, not just children.

A thoughtful comment was made in response to the need to adapt and accommodate to children. Ironically the study was about Moses and the Exodus of Israel. It was observed that just as the children of Northside do not always comply with the careful and thought out plans made to help them to learn and grow, neither

did the children of Israel comply with Moses' plans for them. Being exposed to and experiencing the unique frustrations associated with teaching children enabled the adults to rationally process particular insights about the story of Israel they likely would not have in an all-adult class.

Interestingly, many of the adults seem to enjoy the result of accommodating to the children more than they expected. The learning style of children requires more active learning, interactive experiences and creative play, something adults often forget how to do. Having children in the class enabled adults to experience the blessings of learning in ways other than simply rationally processing.

I observed the hesitation expressed by these adults in having an intergenerational learning model were based on assumptions that proved to be correct; intergenerational study will in many ways be more inconvenient, complicated and "messy" than the neat, simple, discussions adults are prone to prefer. Rather than embrace such challenges, it is easier to set aside children for their own "age-appropriate" experiences. But there are consequences to setting the children aside (or any other particular age group such as the elderly). There is nothing wrong with facilitating an environment more conducive for adult rational study. But inter-generational learning has its own unique value. Real community by its nature is inconvenient, complicated and "messy." Life in community isn't so easily separated into age appropriate realms. In real community people's experiences encroach all kinds of "boundaries" and force people to deal with each other. Given how much of the Scriptures are written to facilitate how to live as a

"body" and a "family" it seems wise to actually learn at least some of those lessons in community so that the context of our learning matches the content.

One final comment is in response to an observation by one adult that the experience of adults and children, parents and children learning together sent many powerful messages. One message was sent to the children as they observed their parents continuing to learn the Scriptures. Spiritual growth is something for adults as well as for children. A second message was to the parents. By embracing this model the church expresses the value of adults and children learning together and thus modeling for parents the value of their own involvement and presence in their child's spiritual formation. A possible side effect of the traditional Sunday School is an unintended message to parents that their children are better off taught by those who are "more trained." This model emphasizes not only the training but even more the actual presence of adults in the spiritual formation of children, how much more true for the parents. It was not lost on the group that a major text in their study of the Exodus was Deuteronomy 6:6-9!

Having said all of this it was also noted that not all learning goals are best met using an inter-generational model. The Church would be wise to discern and choose appropriately from multiple learning models. The inter-generational model works better with narrative portions of Scripture. It would not likely be the model of choice to explore the deeper theological themes in Romans or Hebrews. But we don't have to exclusively choose one or the other; both have their place in the spiritual nurture of the Church. We should not however presume that the inter-generational learning experience will be less theologically insightful to the adult. It

may in fact open up to us deep theological truths we would not otherwise discover, insights that will inform those other portions of Scripture we may study without the children present. It is my sense that the members at the Northside Church of Christ in Laredo would concur.

BRIEF VITA

Kirk R. Cowell was born in Biloxi, Mississippi on June 8, 1972, and raised in Weatherford, Texas, where he attended Weatherford High School. He graduated from Abilene Christian University in 1994 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Bible, and again in 2002 with a Master of Divinity. While on a mission survey trip to southeast Asia during his graduate studies, he met Sandy Long, whom he married in 2001. Together they have two daughters, Aletheia and Tessa, and one son, Aidan. Kirk has served as a preaching minister for congregations in Houston, Texas; Las Cruces, New Mexico; and Durham, North Carolina. He is currently a speech instructor at Laredo Community College and a member of the Northside Church of Christ.