TOWARD INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRY IN A POST-CHRISTIAN ERA

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Abstract: This article addresses intergenerational fragmentation within the church's teaching ministry which undermines the unity and purpose of the body of Christ. This phenomenon is the consequence of an overreliance on the social sciences which, combined with a preference for formal education models, fuels fragmentation between generations. Drawing on the Christian tradition's rich history and theology, this article describes and assesses the philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings of generational fragmentation; explores biblically and theologically how generations ought to be integrated with the teaching ministry; and suggests ways of cultivating an ethos that embodies the church's commitments.

Introduction

Who is setting the philosophical and pedagogical agenda for the church's teaching ministry? "As a field of academic study, Christian education has gradually come to accept developmentalism as its theoretical base," (Ward, 2005, p. 7) according to Ted Ward, long-time Professor of Education at Michigan State University and Trinity International University. The teaching ministry, which is the principle concern of Christian education[1] as a discipline, is overly reliant on the social sciences philosophically and pedagogically. This overreliance, combined with a preference for formal education models, fuels fragmentation between generations within our educational programs. Generational fragmentation is a reality that the church must engage as it navigates the 21st century.

Generational fragmentation undermines the church's teaching ministry because it artificially divides the body of Christ and fails to fulfill its calling

"to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12–13, New International Version). Generational fragmentation is a symptom of deeper philosophical and pedagogical issues that fall within the domain of practical theology, "that branch of Christian theology that seeks to construct action guiding theories of Christian praxis in particular social contexts" (Osmer, 2005, p. xiv).

Drawing on the Christian tradition's rich history and theology, we will describe and assess the philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings of generational fragmentation; explore biblically and theologically how generations ought to be integrated with the teaching ministry; and suggest ways of cultivating an ethos that embodies the church's commitments.

Generational Fragmentation: Its Underpinnings

Generational fragmentation is a cultural reality and therefore its presence in church education is not surprising. Generational fragmentation manifests itself in the church on two levels. The first level is the fragmentation of the body of Christ into age-based specialized ministries that physically separate one age-grouping from another. The second level of fragmentation is spiritual and is characterized by a fragmentation along the lines of spiritual maturity (White, 1988). These two types of fragmentation are related to each other because older members tend to be wiser in the faith than younger ones.

Age-based fragmentation is a cultural reality resulting from a shift from a modernistic to a hyper-modernistic or postmodern philosophical perspective. Postmodernism, according to Osmer and Schweitzer, is marked by three pursuits (Osmer & Schweitzer, 2003).[2]

The first is fueled by advances in communications technology, which permits individuals to interact across traditional boundaries and to develop a heightened awareness of differences and difficulties in communication. These advances have contributed to the development of *radical pluralism*, which "is radical precisely because it is irreducible" (Osmer and Schweitzer, 2003, p. 68). It is based on the assumption that a unifying order is not possible. This understanding of reality demands a heightened level of tolerance, especially in the areas of morality and religion, because it does not believe that individuals and their stories can be reconciled in any one religion.

The second pursuit is fueled by an increased awareness of the risks associated with scientific and technological innovation. This involves a belief that all innovations are inherently risky due to the potential global implications and, therefore, must be weighed by some agreed-upon standard before being

pursued. This understanding of risk has fostered three responses: (a) the belief that the end of life as we know it is near; (b) a pursuit of pre-scientific spiritualities, which are believed to be more "pure"; and (c) a political response that looks to outside agencies to protect people from the consequences of technological innovation (Osmer and Schweitzer, 2003; Wuthnow, 2010). This increased awareness of risk places the blame on adults for the "state of things" and thereby reinforces the gap between the young and old.

The third pursuit is fueled by a processive view of life. In this perspective, a person's identity is not fixed; rather it is continually reconstructed throughout life. Each of these "constructions" has merit and value; thus, a person must be free to reconstruct his or her self in light of the rapid changing social context, which prevents the past from being a reliable guide in the present (Osmer and Schweitzer, 2003). In this paradigm of personhood and aging, commitments are no longer viewed as lifelong; rather, they are for a season and are respected as long as they reflect a person's identity at a particular point in time. Just as an individual's identity is continually reconstructed, so must one continually reexamine, reaffirm, or discard previous commitments.

These three pursuits inform how an individual and a faith community understand their theological commitments in the context of the 21st century. Since its origins, the Christian faith community has worked out its commitments in a religiously pluralistic context. Most recently, postmodernism has fueled a shift in emphasis from the needs of the community to the *primacy of the individual*. The developmental needs of the individual are preeminent over the needs of the corporate body.

In the postmodern worldview, the community is understood as a voluntary association of individuals who come together for a common cause. The church, as a faith community, is viewed as a voluntary association of religious people who more or less share the same theological and lifestyle commitments. The commitment is voluntary and ultimately meets the individuals' preferences for growth and commitment. The terms of the commitment are defined by the individual, according to his or her own needs and desires.

The problem with this way of thinking about the body of believers and one's commitment to the organization is that the church is *not* a voluntary organization. Biblically speaking, it is a group of people called together by God. The individual is accountable to God within the community context, which means his or her needs are not the primary focus, but the needs of the community are. When the needs of the individual are preeminent, generational fragmentation is inevitable.

Generational fragmentation is naturally reinforced by these postmodern pursuits, which refocus the preferences of one age-group over another, not to promote spiritual growth, but to satisfy one's own self-proclaimed needs at

the expense of others. Discussions of generational fragmentation generally highlight differences; would our understanding of generational fragmentation be enriched by examining the similarities between the generations? Robert Wuthnow, Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for the Study of Religion at Princeton University, suggests in his work *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (2007) that each generation wrestles with essentially the same questions at various stages of life.

From pre-school enrollment reminders, to VBS banners, to all-night laser tag parties, to service opportunities that meet school requirements, to "theology on tap," many churches are marketing themselves to target the unique needs of individual age groups. Breaking down the church family into categories based on age, education, and social needs is a rather new phenomenon within the history of the church. In the late 19th century, pioneering efforts were made through Christian Endeavor and YMCA movements to ensure that senior-high-aged youth and young adults were receiving solid Christian teaching and socializing within Christian circles. By the mid-20th century, a new reliance on the social sciences was imported into the church, introducing vocational specializations and age-specific educational and pastoral ministries. Sunday school buildings were built to provide a continuum of age-appropriate teaching environments, and church and para-church youth groups were popping up across the country to provide unique ministries to teenagers. Pastors with specializations in children's, youth, and campus ministries were in demand. There was a sense, which continues into our present day, that the "successful" church must provide relevant ministry to its age-based constituencies. The foundational assumption is that "more is better" and that a church that can offer ministries to multiple age-groups is more appealing to the family seeking a church home.

The benefits of a ministry that is customized for each developmental stage and age group is that there is literally "something for everyone," or at least everyone under 18. Parents are put at ease because the Sunday school room looks like a playground, the youth have their own worship service (and do not need to dress "appropriately" or be quieted by parents), and professionals are hired to design the children's, youth, young adult, and older adult ministries. Most participants will enter into these classrooms and activities willingly, appreciating the efforts that make it "user-friendly" and relevant.

However, there is a downside. When a ministry is based on the premise that each age group or developmental stage is so radically unique, the ministry becomes isolated in two significant ways. The second graders are not aware of what the middle school students are doing in Sunday school because they are on a different floor, and the middle school students do not know what their parents are doing because they are in a different worship space.

There is no sense of being a part of a larger community or church family, because the focus is on the unique needs and opportunities of a specific group; this mirrors White's concern about the unintended consequences of age fragmentation noted earlier.

Second, there is a working assumption that the present generation is so radically and sometimes freakishly unique it cannot possibly connect with generations before it. The rationale is that the middle school student of today has such different demands put upon him or her—with pressures coming from academics, sports, and peers, in a rapidly changing world with overexposure to sex and violence—that no one from another generation could possibly relate (or want to) to him or her. Therefore a professional, specialized (and young) youth worker must be hired to address these needs. It seems to be forgotten or ignored that though this generation does not have to experience the humiliation of wearing an orthodontic head brace, there are still many rites of passage that are shared with generations before it: going to a new school, having a best friend move, unrequited love, getting bad grades, not being able to open a locker, feeling lonely in a cafeteria full of kids, not making the cut for a team or a play, learning to drive, getting into your first car accident, coming home drunk, struggling with sexuality, being in love for the first time, watching your parents struggle, and the list can go on.

By building a ministry based upon age-specific developmental needs and emphasizing the uniqueness of this present generation, we have isolated the generations within our churches from each other and from the wisdom of those who have gone before them. In efforts to target individual needs and to "market" ministries towards the church consumer, our churches are now finding themselves with multiple silos of ministry that are generationally fragmented and disconnected from the church family. The lack of community, which can be observed in our neighborhoods, has now imported itself into the church walls. This mirrors White's concern about the unintended consequences of fragmentation along the lines of spiritual maturity.

Wuthnow makes significant observations about this current generation that could affect shifts in the paradigm churches use to construct ministry models. His premise is that the younger generations are *not* radically different than generations that have come before them; they are dealing with many of the same issues that were presented to previous generations. The "season of life" issues surrounding puberty, dating, college, vocation, marriage, celibacy, real estate, finances, child-rearing, and retirement are the same issues individuals, couples, and families have always encountered.

The difference with the younger generations is that they have been identified as so radically different by the older generations (and the church) that they are traveling through these milestones alone or with little input and support from previous generations. This alienation, or fragmentation, is not a

generational preference or intent; rather, it is the result of changes or shifts in social patterns.

Wuthnow's (2007) observations are important for the church to hear and consider as it discerns new models for ministry. He claims that the basic premise of social science research is that religion is embedded in social environment and is thus influenced by this environment. "*What people do religiously depends on their opportunities to do it, and what they believe is shaped by their life situation*" (p. 20, italics added). Understanding their life situation and the opportunities available to today's generations may be the starting point for strategizing effective ministry.

Wuthnow offers seven keys for understanding the "life situation" of the younger generations who are (and are not) to be found in our churches:

1. Delayed Marriage: In the 1970s, married couples in their 20s were in the majority with their peer group. In 2000, just 30 years later, a married couple in their 20s is in the minority. Young adults are opting to stay single or cohabitate, and if they are marrying, it is at a much later age than their peers just a generation before. Because selecting a mate and marrying are among the most significant developmental tasks in the journey toward adulthood, this delay has created an extension of adolescence for a large portion of our society. The impact on the church is huge: young singles are coming back to the church in smaller numbers, and when they do return, they are coming with a large gap in their church experience and a deep history of alternative habits.

2. Children—Fewer and Later: Another major marker in an individual's journey towards adulthood is parenthood. Birthrate studies show that women are having fewer children than women of previous generations, and when they have children, they are much older, which is creating different housing, job, and economic needs than for previous generations (Wuthnow, 2007, p. 26). The impact on the church can be felt in the sheer drop in the numbers of children being born and entering into church families. Having children is often the motivator young adults identify as bringing them back to church. As the gap between leaving their family of origin and creating their own widens, the absence of young adults from the church is extended, and in many situations, established as a permanent pattern.

3. Uncertainties of Work and Money: In response to the heightened financial pressures and uncertainties, this generation has seen a rise in dual-income families. Wuthnow (2007) correctly points out that this is not simply due to economic demands, but is also a result of a cultural shift in attitudes towards consumption, debt, and saving money.

Two incomes are required to sustain the lifestyle that many young adults desire and have come to expect. This phenomenon impacts community life, as well as church involvement, because families simply have less time to offer.

This generation has also witnessed more transition in their professional life. Though this could be attributed to their lack of need to commit, it may be more closely tied to Osmer and Schweitzer's (2003) description of the processive view of life. It can also be argued that this generation has seen a more volatile business environment, watching businesses rise and fall and jobs come and go. These trends have engendered a sense of an unpredictable future, which has impacted the willingness of young adults to plan and to commit to institutions for the long term, including the church.

4. Higher Education: More young adults have graduated from college or attended college than any other time in this history of the United States (Wuthnow, 2007, 36). Having said this, Wuthnow also notes that about 25% of young adults have actually earned a college or graduate degree, putting them in the clear minority of our nation's population (2007, p. 37). Most of the church studies are based upon research done with the college-educated individuals. To get a clearer picture of today's church and the educational and pastoral needs that are presented, one would need to consider the 75% who have little or no formal higher education.

5. Loosening Relationships: Many would argue that young adults have fewer social relationships than their parents or grandparents did. One can look to communities and notice that neighborhoods are not as cohesive and that involvement in community organizations has decreased. However, Wuthnow would argue that this generation's capacity for relationships is not weakened; rather, they have just taken on another form. In his words, these relationships are "more porous" (Wuthnow, 2007, p. 38). Social networks, like Facebook and Twitter, have increased the quantity of sustained relationships; however, the manner in which individuals connect is markedly different than in past generations. The way in which younger generations seek out relationships impacts the church as it considers how to create community and how to communicate.

6. Globalization: Young adults are experiencing the forces of globalization in ways not known to previous generations. News from all corners of the world can come within seconds of its occurrence via Twitter, Facebook, or on a news update on a phone or computer screen. Many young adults are in a workplace that either joins forces or competes with international companies. Customer service for many com-

panies will put Americans in contact with individuals from other continents. Immigration laws have also allowed for changes, leaving many workplaces and schools with a more ethnically diverse population. Not only is the face of Christianity changing, but also practices from immigrants are being introduced into congregational life. A congregation's span of care has also increased, as news of tragedies in far off places has become immediate.

7. Culture—An Information Explosion: More than anything else, the computer and the Internet have defined this generation of young adults (Wuthnow, 2007, pp. 44–48). News, music, photos, videos, and communication are available at any moment. Time set aside to read the evening paper or the watch the six o'clock news is now distributed throughout the day in elevators and at stop lights. The amount of attention given to such matters is greatly decreased, while sources of information—newscasts, podcasts, texts, blogs, websites, email campaigns, tweets, just to mention a few—have exponentially increased. Communication patterns with this generation are multiple, constant, and brief.

Wuthnow's seven observations of cultural shifts highlight the enormity of change in society, as well as the nuances of their impact on the individuals of younger generations. These observations point to the differences, as well as the similarities, of the human struggles for those who live within these environs. It is important to be cognizant of the fact that the present reality of intergenerational fragmentation within many of our churches is not inherent to "doing church," rather it is an import from society. As church leaders, we need to claim our unity and discern new paradigms for ministry that will create community, allow for mentoring, and generate fellowship across both the real and the fabricated generational lines.

Postmodern pursuits, labels, and increased specialization in ministry all merge together to fuel generational fragmentation. Two examples are in order. In the area of children's ministry, "Children's Worship" designed by Jerome Berryman and the late Sonya Stewart created a space for a separate worship experience that is more appropriate for young children (Berryman & Stewart, 1989). In many churches, young children join the adult congregation for worship up until the sermon and then are dismissed to their own worship experience. This program has been readily adopted by legions of churches across denominational lines. In researching its adoption by Christian Reformed Churches, it became clear that the primary argument used to advocate for the program was the unique needs of children. (In addition, as worship services were being redefined as teaching services for adults, the idea that young children in worship were disruptive to adults was also present.) From

our own tradition, we can find no public record of a theological discussion about the program's consistency with covenantal and Reformed theology of the Christian Reformed Church (Glassford, 2007). Though we have not done a thorough search of other histories, we suspect similar lines of argument were used in other churches.

The history and development of youth ministry, which has paved the way for the fragmentation of teenagers and adults, was also pursued without substantive theological discussion. Though full of good intentions, the adults who pioneered ministry to young people encouraged churches to follow their approach of catering to the preferences of young people and emphasizing the differences between adults and young people, often portraying them as insurmountable. There is no record of theological reflection or interpretation of a biblical mandate. One must conclude that generational fragmentation in Christian education is largely due to the unforeseen consequences of churches that were seeking to discern how to minister effectively in a rapidly changing context.

Integrating the Generations

Assessing generational fragmentation is necessary if a biblically consistent, theologically rich, and workable alternative is to be offered. The following brief assessment follows two lines of inquiry. First, is the practice of generational fragmentation consistent with our biblical and theological foundations? Second, according to current research about the effects of generational fragmentation on faith development, is it sustainable?

As Christians, the Scriptures ought to regulate our faith and practice. One of the many metaphors offered in Scripture to understand the church comes from Paul. He writes,

> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists and teachers, to equip the God's people for works of service, so that the whole body of Christ may be built up until we reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measures of the followers of Christ. (Eph 4.11–13, NIV)

If the faith formation of our children, teens, young adults, adults, and senior citizens is of primary concern, then the generational fragmentation that pervades North American culture must not be allowed to take root. And where it has taken root, it must be uprooted.

A biblical theology of resistance to generational fragmentation is rooted in recent findings in the socialization theory of learning. A socialization theory maintains that beliefs, values, and lifestyles are best learned, or "caught,"

through participation in the community of faith. This approach to faith formation pervades the Old and New Testaments. Embedded in Deuteronomy 6:4–6 is a mandate to the people of God to instruct their children, to uphold and to explain the Scriptures with the expectation that all, from the youngest to the oldest will participate in the feasts, festivals and sacrifices.

John Westerhoff III (1976), the Episcopalian education scholar and professor at Duke Seminary, notes that the involvement of all served to help form the faith of all. He writes,

> True community necessitates the presence and interaction of three generations. Too often the church lacks the third generation or sets the generations apart. Remember that the first generation is the generation of memory, and without its presence the other two generations are locked into an existential present. While the first generation is potentially the generation of vision, it is not possible to have visions without a memory and memory is supplied by the third generation. The second generation is the generation of the present. When it is combined with the generation of memory and vision it functions to confront the community with reality, but left to itself and the present, life becomes intolerable and meaningless. (p. 53)

Westerhoff's observation helps us to understand the Old Testament's inclusion of all the people and why Jesus welcomed the children and ministered to all people. It helps us to appreciate the stories of Paul bringing the gospel to households and baptism being administered to all who are present. It enables us to appreciate that the guest list for the wedding feast includes all people.

Judges 2:10 does not state specifically what gave rise to this situation of forgotten identity. Is it possible that the older generation forgot to tell the stories of God's care and faithfulness during the conquest to the younger generations of Israelites.

Faith formation involves learning the content of the faith and a way of life. Young people in the Scriptures were socialized into the faith community, and in a large part, though there was formal instruction as described in the *Didache,* adult converts were also socialized into the faith community. Socialization requires that each member of the community be willing to spend time with and learn from the other members of the community.

In spite of the scriptural teaching and research findings, forces that cause generational fragmentation have been allowed to colonize in our churches (Dean, 2010). The impact of intergenerational fragmentation on the church is hard to measure, though recent studies conducted in both America and Great Britain (Savage, Collins, Mayo, Mayo, & Cray, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005) have identified ecclesiastical and theological trends, which are believed to be the result of the increasing isolation of generations from each other.

These newly identified trends are most clearly recognized in the faith practices and beliefs of the younger generation. Both studies pointed to similar trends, namely a generation that is not hostile to institutions of faith or to faith traditions, or even to embracing a form of their faith. However, the studies reveal that the faith creeds or beliefs that are embraced by this younger generation are a "misbegotten step cousin" of traditional Christianity, a "watered down gospel so devoid of God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ, so immune to the sending love of the Holy Spirit that it might not be Christianity at all" (Dean, 2010, p. 12).

Soul Searching and *Almost Christian* interpret the data collected by the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR), which was extensive study conducted with over 3,000 youth and young adults over a 7-year period. In *Soul Searching* (2005), Smith and Denton observe, "The evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents" (p. 261). Parents and other interested adults (as the evidence suggests) most likely "will get what they are" (p. 261). In other words, young people receive their primary theological training from their parents and other interested adults. If a young person's understanding of the faith is deficient, then it is highly probable that his or her parents and the adults who surround him or her also have an understanding that is deficient.

It is worth noting that only 30% of the teens have "talked with an adult youth minister or religious youth leader about a personal question or problem" (Smith & Denton, 2005, p. 64). Smith and Denton (2005) report that among conservative Protestant teens, 35% have no adults they can to look to for help besides their parents, 26% have one or two adults, 16% have three or four adults, and 11% have five or six adults (p. 60). What emerges from their study is that our young people do not appear to have a sufficient number of adults, including parents, and others who are vested in their spiritual formation. One of the reasons for this is that adults are not adequately grounded in the faith and therefore fail to engage young people in significant conversations about religious issues. In essence, the faith formation of children, young people, and adults is undermined because of a failure to enter into conversations that would enable them to clarify their faith in a constructive manner.

Kenda Dean emphasizes this point in *Almost Christian* (2010)*, which explores the implications of Smith and Denton's work for the church's ministry. She notes, "What we do know is that giving young people opportunities to talk about faith in families and congregations is positively correlated with holding religious convictions that they can articulate, critically examine, and confess" (p. 137). Dean claims that through intergenerational conversations, we help each other identify what is important and worthy of concern. For example, celebrity antics are important to us because we are told they are important and they are constantly before us. Typically, faith is not given the

same status. If our adults and young people are not talking about Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father, then these subjects are easily moved to the periphery of our lives. If we are not conversing about the Word, then the Scriptures are moved to the periphery of our lives. A faith community's ability to articulate its beliefs and discuss faith issues across generational lines is essential for the spiritual development of the whole community.

The role of the community in this process is captured in *Hardwired to Connect* (2003), the report from the Commission on Children at Risk. This report examined the role of communities in the lives of teenagers from a sociological and neuroscience perspective, as well as the declining mental and behavioral health of U.S. children. This "crisis" according to the study, is predicated on "a lack of connectedness—close connections to other people, and deep connections to moral and spiritual meaning" (p. 6). The report goes on to note that the social institutions that foster this connectedness "have grown significantly weaker" (p. 6). The report argues that biologically we are "hardwired to connect" (p. 6) and that a young person's mental and behavioral health is shaped by the authoritative communities—communities that live out the type of connectedness that our children increasingly lack. "They are groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life" (Commission on Children at Risk, 2003, p. 6). Authoritative communities involve adults who are willing to cross generational lines. Though the report focuses on the potential benefit to children who participate in these communities, there must also be a benefit to the adults who engage young people at various levels in significant conversations. The benefits may include increased clarity about what they believe and value, an enhanced ability to articulate what they believe and value, and a renewed interest in critically examining their own beliefs and the beliefs of others. There is also the experience of joy that comes from passing down something that is meaningful and vital in their lives.

What is good for the spiritual lives of our young people is good for the spiritual health of our congregations. We have learned from Scripture that faith is nurtured when the generations tell the stories of God to each other. Smith and Denton demonstrate the significant role that parents and other adults play in shaping a young person's faith. Dean enables us to appreciate the role of conversations in faith formation, and the *Hardwired to Connect* report points to the reality that young people are wired for participation in authoritative communities to inform their lives. Each of the above descriptions is assume generations will cross generational divides to interact with each other—to discuss God's story, how God is at work in their lives, and to explore the questions of faith. Crossing generational lines means that all those who cross them will be shaped by the ensuing relationships. Generational fragmentation undermines the church's mission in the world because it

undermines the faith formation of the whole congregation. Intergenerational worship and education seeks to foster a true community oriented to faith formation of the entire community as a community.

Cultivating an Intergenerational Ethos

Generational fragmentation is not the norm. It contributes to an unhealthy context for our young people and adults and is contrary to Scripture's vision of the Christian community, a vision validated by research. How ought the church to respond to the reality of generational fragmentation in light of the above findings?

In addressing the consequences of generational fragmentation, the church must remember that faith formation is not an accident. Young people with highly developed faith and practices did not get that way by themselves. The studies repeatedly point to adolescents' tendency to mirror the religious lives of their parents and the adults around them. The good news is that there is a corrective to this disturbing trend—nurturing faith in young people means nurturing the faith of their parents and their congregations.

When VanderKam in her article *Seen and Not Heard in Church* (2009) asked Dr. John Witvliet, director of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan about intergenerational models for teaching and worship, , he suggested that efforts for intergenerational ministry are most successful when the congregation does not "dumb things down." (Vanderkam, 2009, para. 7) He also observed that when congregations consider options for including youth in their worship, "they think that basically means turning it into something entertainment-oriented" (Vanderkam, 2009, para. 7).

To counter this tendency, Witvliet offers the ancient model of the Seder dinner in the Jewish tradition. The Seder is a gathering of generations around a table, or many tables. The children pose the questions, and the responses are given in ways that remind all participants of who they are and from whence they have come. There is nothing flashy or slick. Tragedies and celebrations are remembered together. The words, the ideas, the theology are all reinforced with the experience of eating various foods, of sitting with people of all ages and stages of faith, and of hearing various voices around the table. The ritual serves to shape the participants, to teach distinctives by "enfolding them into the practices" of the community (Vanderkam, 2009, para. 7). Informal teaching occurs as the individuals sitting around the tables are socialized into one identity.

Much like a catechism (literally "to echo" or "to sound like") that was developed later by Protestants to teach the faith, the questions and answers help all the generations find a place to belong in a bigger story and within a community. For the younger or newer members of the community, the questions

and answers allow "emerging believers [to] echo the faith they see evidenced by mature believers" (DeVries, 2008, pp. 117–118). Through the dialogue between the generations, youth begin to absorb the thinking, the feeling, and the behavior of the community. They have a belief system and a narrative with which to identify and a community to which they can belong.

Based upon this model, one could begin to see how other church celebrations, such as the Lord's Supper, baptism, or holidays such as All Saints Day, Epiphany, and Pentecost could be opportunities to reverse generational fragmentation. If what is good for our young people is good for our congregations, then the church needs to wrestle with fostering an intergenerational ethos as part of its congregational life. The process will take time. We would like to offer five ways that a church can begin developing an intergenerational ethos that promotes both individual and corporate spiritual growth.

1. Adopt and use intergenerational language that emphasizes mutual accountability of all believers for spiritual growth.
2. Provide opportunities for all ages to share their stories of faith with an emphasis on how the experiences impacted, and continue to impact, them spiritually.
3. Draw on the rhythm of the church year to tell God's story, integrating the congregation's story with it in the same manner that Israel employed the Seder.
4. Draw on the rhythm of the church year to celebrate milestones in life as a congregation.
5. Challenge the congregation to think and act as a body, consistently reminding its members that everything one does and says and teaches something.

When the new Jerusalem descends, the earth is renewed, and everyone worships at the throne of the Lamb, it will be intergenerational worship. Generational fragmentation is not what God intended, and as God's people, we should seek to foster an educational and worship ethos that reflects our past, and the future reality.

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[1]Throughout this paper we will use the terms *Christian education*, *church education* and *educational ministries* interchangeably to refer to the educational dimensions of a church's ministry.

[2]Drawing on the work of David Lyon, Osmer and Schweitzer (2003) understand postmodernism "as a cultural response to the condition of globalization" (p. 33). It should be noted that the authors believe that we live in a time of complex and rapid social change due to collision of modernism, globalization and postmodern perspectives. We have chosen to focus on postmodernism because of its role in fostering generational fragmentation.

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