

THE *Generative* CHURCH



*Global Conversations about
Investing in Emerging Generations*

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edited by Cory Seibel
foreword by Malan Nel

Virtually all churches aim to invest meaningfully in the faith development of the younger generations who have been entrusted into their care. Some churches have a longstanding track record of faithfulness in living out this commitment. Some lose sight of this priority over time and allow their intentionality to fade. This book makes a distinctive contribution to our understanding of children's, youth, and young adult ministries by appropriating Erik Erikson's concept of *generativity* ("the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation") as a way of exploring congregational life. Eleven accomplished authors representing five different countries provide diverse theological and cultural perspectives on key aspects of what it means for churches to invest intentionally in the faith development of the members of emerging generations. Their chapters challenge us to think about the intergenerational dynamics of our churches, the crucial partnership between church and parents, and what it means to involve young people meaningfully in the life of the church. The intriguing topics explored by this group of authors—and the diverse contexts from which they write—promise to broaden and enrich our thinking about caring for children, youth, and young adults as a vital responsibility shared by the entire congregation.

"Dr. Seibel and the contributors to *The Generative Church* have given the church, particularly the Western church, a gift. This gift is not found only in the wisdom offered us by the authors, but by their vision of a church that promotes life and flourishing for all who will recognize God's kingdom at work in and through intergenerational community. *The Generative Church* offers an essential guide to embracing the intergenerational opportunity before us."

—QUENTIN P. KINNISON, Associate Professor of Christian Ministry, Chair of the Biblical & Religious Studies Division, Fresno Pacific University

"Nothing short of the future of the church. As a university president, I am invested in seeing the next generation flourish, find belonging and significance within their church communities. Accessible, well-written, and thought-provoking, *The Generative Church* is an important read for those of us in leadership who seek to empower future generations for the gospel of Christ."

—MELANIE HUMPHREYS, President, The King's University, Edmonton, Canada

Cory Seibel is a pastor at Central Baptist Church and affiliate professor at Taylor Seminary in Edmonton, Alberta. As a researcher, writer, and presenter, he strives to help churches flourish as intergenerational communities of faith.

COVER DESIGN: Savannah N. Landerholm
www.wipfandstock.com



WIPF & STOCK
An Imprint of WIPF and STOCK Publishers

ISBN 978-1-5326-8180-6



9 781532 681806

THE GENERATIVE CHURCH

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199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

www.wipfandstock.com

PAPERBACK ISBN: 978-1-5326-8180-6

HARDCOVER ISBN: 978-1-5326-8181-3

EBOOK ISBN: 978-1-5326-8182-0

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

SEPTEMBER 13, 2019

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Discipleship and Intergenerationality

Interrelated Concepts at the Core of Christianity

JOE AZZOPARDI AND KAYLE DE WAAL

§

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION: In my introductory chapter, I suggest that generative churches desire to “provide a setting in which individuals might gain a vital experience of faith and an authentic sense of identity” rooted in Christ. Azzopardi and de Waal help us explore this idea further by drawing our attention to a crucial New Testament category: the call to discipleship. They also focus upon an essential characteristic of generative churches—interaction between the generations—by pointing us to the intergenerational congregation as the ideal context for growing as a disciple of Christ. They describe flourishing intergenerational churches as those that foster an environment of interdependence between generations, that empower people of all ages to participate meaningfully in ministry, and that encourage the generations to make accommodations for one another's sake. These themes resonate deeply with the picture of congregational generativity sketched out in the introductory chapter. This chapter concludes with an exploration of the importance of mentoring, a relational dynamic frequently associated with generativity. Azzopardi and de Waal insist that mentoring also is a crucial component of a vibrant culture of discipleship within the church.

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DISCIPLESHIP and intergenerationality go hand in hand to deepen the core of Christianity and advance the kingdom of God. In fact, the Bible provides both the spiritual and conceptual framework within which to understand intergenerational congregations as the ideal context for discipleship. Before addressing the notion of an intergenerational church, it is important in our view to understand the place of the individual disciple. Being a disciple is the heart of Christianity. “And He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men’” (Matt 4:19 NASB). The call to be a disciple is first and foremost a call to follow Jesus. It means “to adhere to,” “to walk behind,” “to stay close to”—all of this is directed toward Jesus.¹ It entails a personal commitment to Jesus and whole-hearted allegiance to him.² While there is a range of definitions of discipleship, we propose that discipleship could be defined as becoming who God desires us to be while helping others to become who God wants them to be.³ A relationship with Jesus provides the foundation for the disciple to serve, connect, grow, lead, and worship in the context of an intergenerational church. This provides an essential framework to help us understand what it means to be a generative church.

1. Putman et al., *DiscipleShift*, 47–50, attempt to define discipleship by using Matthew 4:19, and suggest that “follow me” represents the acceptance of Christ at a head level, “and I will make you” represents a transformation at the heart level, and “fishers of men” represents a change in one's actions or hands.

2. Morris, “Disciples of Jesus,” 116.

3. Burrill, *Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches*, 29–30, says that discipleship is to be in a living relationship with Jesus who is discipling you. In this relationship, one is to be constantly learning more about the Person, while at the same time living in subjection to that Person. “The person being disciplined is never completely disciplined, but always in the process of being disciplined.” Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .*, 22–26, attempts to define the word “disciple” by identifying ten traits: (1) one who considers the cost, (2) loves others, (3) abides in Christ and bears fruit, (4) continues in the Word and experiences freedom, (5) follows Christ's desires, (6) makes disciples, as well as one who is (7) committed, (8) sacrificial, (9) willing to give up possessions, and (10) full of the Holy Spirit. Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 565, suggests the discipleship language in Luke 14:25–27 is a call of Jesus for “the reconstruction of one's identity, not along ancestral lines or on the basis of one's social status, but within the new community.”

Discipleship: The Prerogative for Intergenerationality

We would like to explore two biblical themes that aid the development of an understanding of discipleship in the context of intergenerational churches, namely, the body of Christ and the gifts of the Spirit.

Body of Christ

One of the dominant models of thinking about the church is the metaphor of the body of Christ (Rom 12:4–5; 1 Cor 12:12, 27; Eph 4:12, 25; 5:23, 30; Col 1:24).⁴ In the first-century context the metaphor was rooted in the idea of the Greco-Roman city-state as a body.⁵ This metaphor provides the theological and structural underpinnings to understand the Pauline churches. The church is an organic whole, the living manifestation of Jesus Christ; he is not just in his church, but the church is in him (Acts 9:4). All disciples, regardless of age, possess the very life of God. It is this life that is present in an intergenerational church. Moreover, the notion of body simply—yet profoundly—illustrates the relationship between Christ and his church. Just as the body is an intricate and interdependent organism, so is the local church. Just as the body is a unified whole, so is the local church.⁶

The notion of the church as one body leads to another biblical metaphor—the family of God—to deepen our understanding of an intergenerational church. While a body is connected and unified, so too is a family (*oikos*).⁷ The writers of the New Testament continually refer to this image because it highlights the central purpose of God—to be reconciled with us.

4. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 557, goes so far as to call this designation the most “complete definition of the New Testament church.”

5. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 716. For examples of ancient writers that personified the body and its parts see Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 597–98.

6. MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 750.

7. This notion of *oikos* can be traced to the gospels. After healing the demon-possessed man, Jesus told him specifically, “Go home to your family (*oikos*) and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mark 5:19). Immediately following Zacchaeus’s conversion, Jesus reflected on what had just happened by saying, “Today salvation has come to this house (*oikos*)” (Luke 19:9). When Jesus healed the politician’s son, John said that “he and all his household (*oikos*) believed” (John 4:53). When Jesus called Levi (Matthew) to be his disciple, Mark recalled that, “while Jesus was having dinner [with] Levi’s house (*oikos*), many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him” (Mark 2:15).

- “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also *members of his household*” (Eph 2:19).
- “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the *family of believers*” (Gal 6:10).
- “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (1 Tim 5:1–2).
- “If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s *household*, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

The New Testament writers draw on the image of *oikos* in describing the intimate nature of relations within the church, the development of its leaders and its growth, and how believers related to and understood God.⁸ The use of the term family is indicative of not merely one, but several generations deeply connected to one another and functioning as a unit.

When churches today function in light of their identity as the body of Christ and the family of God, there is a fundamental shift in how those churches look and act. There is a shift from programs to relationships, from independence to interdependence and from fragmentation to wholeness.

Gifts of the Spirit

The body of Christ metaphor also provides the substance for Paul’s teaching on spiritual gifts.⁹ Paul is convinced that every member of the church must have the opportunity for Jesus to shape and transform their lives into conformity to his plan and will (Rom 8:29; 12:1–2; Eph 4:23–24). Our faith tradition understands that it is at the time of baptism, as in the case of Jesus (Matt 3:13–17), that the Holy Spirit fills all believers and grants them his gifts for ministry. According to Grudem, “a spiritual gift is any ability that is empowered by the Holy Spirit and used in any ministry of the church.”¹⁰ The

8. For a study that demonstrates the close relationship between members of the Pauline churches, see Aasgaard, *My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!* Another study that demonstrates a range of maternal metaphors used by Paul that deepen our understanding of the notion of the family of God is Gaventa, *Our Mother Paul*. Gaventa expounds upon Gal 4:19; 2 Thess 2:11, 12, 17.

9. See Fortune and Fortune, *Discover Your God-Given Gifts*, 29–31, for how the body of Christ motif functions in relation to the spiritual gifts.

10. Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 396. Stuart, “Charism in the Light of Scripture,” 325–34, states that Paul’s use of gift (*charisma*) can be understood in four ways: (1) charismata are eschatological, signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit given in the Last

granting of spiritual gifts is the prerogative of the Spirit and he grants them according to his purpose and with no distinction with regard to gender, age, or nationality (1 Cor 12:4–11; 11:11–12; Gal 3:13, 28; 5:1). The early Christian communities were not structured around positions, personalities, or power, but instead were organized around the gifts of individual members of varying ages. Since the spiritual giftedness of members was the key to the operation of the early church, function was more important than office.¹¹

Paul also gave four lists of ministries, each at least somewhat different from the other (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:4–11; Eph 4:8–13). In fact, Peter exhorts, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Pet 4:10 ESV). The word “varied” (*polikos*) means “having many facets, having rich diversity.” God has provided the local church with all it needs to serve him faithfully.¹²

Interestingly, Paul provides no organizational system or flow chart for how these gifts are to be used. He does, however, say that everything should be done “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40 ESV). Paul informs the church at Corinth, “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed” (1 Cor 12:1–13). His conviction is that spiritual gifts will strengthen the local church fellowship, extend the church’s witness and ministry, and paint a relevant picture of Christ; one which is not merely theoretical but practical in impacting people’s lives. The wider New Testament teaches that spiritual gifts cannot be earned through our efforts (Eph 4:7), that it is in fact a sin to waste the gifts God gives (1 Cor 4:1–2; Matt 25:14–30), and that believers are to develop the gifts God gives them (1 Pet 4:10). As we think about the application of this concept, a question that ought to be asked is, “Are those of every generation being given the opportunity to use and develop their spiritual gifting?”

The body of Christ metaphor and the doctrine of the gifts of the Spirit convey the deeply relational nature of the local church.¹³ They highlight

Days, when the New Age breaks into the Old; (2) charismata are ecclesial, set in the corporate interdependent life of the body of Christ. Again and again Paul emphasizes that the charismata given to individuals are for the sake of others, to build up the body in love; (3) charisma is vocational; and (4) charisma is egalitarian. The egalitarian nature of the gifts in the early church suggests that both men and women were active in leadership roles in the church. See Osiek et al., *Woman’s Place*, and Ellingsen, *Reclaiming Our Roots*, 42, who note that women played a prominent role in the leadership of the early church.

11. Verhey and Harvard, *Ephesians*, 165.

12. Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, 399.

13. In 2 Cor 13:14 Paul prays that the “fellowship (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit” may be with the Corinthian believers. And in Phil 2:1 Paul speaks of the “fellowship (*koinonia*) in the Spirit.” These two verses highlight the vertical and horizontal relationship of

the fact that every member, no matter what generation they may be in, is called and equipped for ministry; that every member and the ministry entrusted to them is of equal value; and that the local church is to grow in connectedness, ministry, and love.

Intergenerationality: The Context for Discipleship

Having seen the evidence of the Holy Spirit enabling not only the individual believer in the New Testament but empowering every generation within a Christian community, we now turn our attention to exploring how intergenerational communities can play a significant role in providing the context for discipleship through the diversity of believers who are united in Christ and his mission. But what characterizes an intergenerational church? Is it just a matter of putting a bunch of people of different age groups into the same building each week while trying to keep the peace? Truthfully, intergenerational congregations do take a lot of hard work, as it is much easier to work with a uniform group of people.¹⁴ We will devote the remainder of this chapter to exploring some of the work that is most essential. We will argue that there are five factors that must be present for intergenerationality to flourish.¹⁵

The first three factors—positive interactions, connectedness, and interdependence—are progressive steps toward building a healthy relationship. The last two factors—accommodation and empowerment—concern inclusivity, which is an essential characteristic of a Christian community.¹⁶

koinonia. The vertical dimension is a believer’s fellowship with God, while the horizontal aspect of *koinonia* is with other believers through the Holy Spirit.

14. Conway, “In It for the Long Haul.”

15. It is worth noting the work of Bengston and Mangen, “Generations, Families, and Interaction.” Bengston and Mangen’s work on intergenerational solidarity within the family used six factors in understanding how to strengthen the bonds of cohesion within multigenerational families. While the factors discussed in this chapter are in regard to a generalized (as opposed to a family) context, Bengston’s factor of “associational solidarity” has similarities with “Positive Interactions,” while his factor of “functional solidarity” is somewhat akin to “Interdependence.” For an exploration of how Bengston’s theory of intergenerational solidarity relate to the life of the church, see Seibel, “Intergenerationally Sticky Church.”

16. Crispin, “Theology of Accommodation.”

Factor 1: Positive Interactions

The first factor found in intergenerational communities is basic to any cohesive community, and that is the existence of positive interactions between community members.¹⁷ This is not to say that there are no negative interactions (such perfection does not exist on Earth); however, as with any healthy relationship, the positive interactions should outweigh the negative. This factor is foundational in that, without interaction, there is no relationship to speak of; therefore, for the rest of the factors yet to be mentioned to take place, they must be preceded by positive interaction.

Aside from the occurrence of cordial and respectful exchanges, there are other aspects of positive interactions that need to be stressed. For congregations to become intergenerational, individuals of every generation must find a way to push past the temptation of conversing only with those who are like themselves or else fall into remaining a segregated community, a category to which most multigenerational churches belong. Multigenerational means that there are several generations coexisting together at the same time and place. However, this in itself is not intergenerational, even if everyone is in the same place and at the same time, if they do not have relationships with each other.¹⁸

Intentionality is essential for positive interactions to occur. While spontaneous pleasantries are encouraged and expected in Christian gatherings, intentionality is required if lasting relationships are to be built.¹⁹ This is particularly relevant in a diverse community where individuals with different backgrounds are less likely to spend time together.²⁰ Over time, an intentional choice to interact with an individual who is different may lead to a healthy relationship simply through a commitment to engaging in conversation.²¹ Positive interactions done regularly with intentionality are likely to elicit meaning and purpose, which lead to several other factors found in flourishing intergenerational communities.

Factor 2: Connectedness

Having positive interactions between members of different generations in a congregation will provide the groundwork for the second factor of

17. Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*.

18. Allen and Barnett, "Addressing the Two Intergenerational Questions."

19. Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*.

20. Snailum, "Integrating Intergenerational Ministry."

21. Massi et al., "Impact of Dialogic Intergenerational Activities."

intergenerational churches, which is connectedness. Connectedness goes beyond mere interaction in that individuals actually become bound together in unity despite diversity in age.²² Indeed, without the characteristic of connectedness it is rather difficult to call a group of people a community.²³ Intergenerational churches do the majority of their activities together and see themselves as a family, participating in worship, service, and learning together.²⁴ This is not to say that everything is done together, as there are some aspects of life that ought to be done according to life stage.²⁵ The importance of connectedness is evidenced by the fact that most literature on the topic of intergenerationality revolves around uniting the diverse age groups of a community and helping every generation feel as though they are accepted and belong.²⁶ Clearly, connectedness is a basic factor of intergenerational congregations since it is part of what defines intergenerationality itself.

Factor 3: Interdependence

After positive interactions become the established norm, the age-diverse congregation becomes interconnected with each other. This interconnection leads the congregation to a point of interdependency and mutuality, since connectedness increases the awareness and therefore the impact of the gifts and abilities of each generation.²⁷ You can tell a church has reached some level of interdependency when an aged-based event takes a generation away from the congregation for a time, and the church finds itself functioning more poorly for it; for example, a youth rally disables various ministry teams and leaves everyone feeling a longing for them to return. This makes sense when one realizes that each generation has something beneficial to offer the rest—the elders pass on wisdom and skills to those younger, while the younger provide purpose and vitality.²⁸ This aspect of intergenerationality is one of its main attractions as a characteristic, and it further demonstrates the power of the body of Christ in action.²⁹

22. Cohen-Mansfield and Jensen, "Intergenerational Programs in Schools."

23. *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "community."

24. Ross, "Four Congregations That Practice Intergenerationality."

25. Snailum, "Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry."

26. Andreoletti and Howard, "Bridging the Generation Gap"; Cortellesi and Kernan, "Together Old and Young"; Nesbit Sbanotto and Blomberg, *Effective Generational Ministry*; Grignoli et al., "Development of a European Learning Model."

27. Menconi, *Intergenerational Church*.

28. Murayama et al., "Effect of Intergenerational Programs."

29. Eikenberry, "Developing an Intentional and Transparent Intergenerational

Factor 4: Empowerment

The last two factors of intergenerationality are probably the most challenging for congregations to embrace, since both involve sacrifice on the part of church members and leaders. They are empowerment and accommodation. To empower means to give power or authority to another, and churches that are intergenerational have leaders who are willing to give authority to people from a variety of age levels.³⁰ If intergenerationality is truly a core value of a community and every generation is considered valued then every generation should have the opportunity to participate in all ministries and, when possible, to lead.³¹ For younger people to develop responsibility, they must first be given responsibility. Further to this, great leaders create great leaders; the younger generation needs to be mentored for continuity of the ministry (and therefore legacy) to be achieved.³² Unfortunately, empowerment is a characteristic that many in leadership struggle with, not only in intergenerational affairs, but in general. However, if we truly accept the concept in 1 Peter 2:9 of the priesthood of all believers, then we as leaders must recognize that all members of the body of Christ, whether they are sixteen or sixty, are indeed Christ's ministers and therefore need to be considered in leadership. Each generation has strengths and weaknesses. However, an advantage of working as a united body is that the weaknesses of one member are compensated for by another, which therefore can lessen the likelihood of failure. Consequently, while sharing power with others can be difficult it has immense benefits.³³

Factor 5: Accommodation

As with empowerment, the characteristic of accommodation is challenging for many congregations as it is all about giving something up for the benefit of others. For intergenerationality to flourish, however, accommodation must be exercised since the perspectives and needs of every generation

Ministry.”

30. Snailum, “Implementing Intergenerational Youth Ministry.”

31. There are limits of course, as a base experience and cognitive level are necessary, especially with some positions. For example, having a ten-year-old in charge of the church budget would likely be a poor decision considering both typical maturity and mathematic ability of that age group.

32. Andreoletti and Howard, “Bridging the Generation Gap”; Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*.

33. Stollings, “Unlocking the Power of Intergenerational Leadership.”

should be considered equitably.³⁴ Unlike empowerment, however, accommodation is a challenge for everyone, not just the leadership. For example, if one or two generations control the music played and prevent styles other than their own preference from taking the stage, it sends the message (subtly or otherwise) that those with different musical tastes are not valued. We have personally seen this happen to both younger and older members in different congregations, and the result commonly is bitterness, anger, and, far too often, their departure.

There are three aspects to accommodation: empathy, sacrifice, and surrender. To accommodate one must be able to empathize with others, meaning to put oneself in the shoes of another and try to see things from their angle.³⁵ To accommodate one also often must sacrifice, which entails offering something of significant value for someone else's desires or need to be fulfilled. Surrender is a word that often is perceived as unpleasant, as it requires humility. A closely related—and equally unappealing—term is submission, which entails an individual choosing to give up their own authority and allow someone else to preside. When one looks at Jesus, however, we see the ultimate example of a servant leader, one who pulled out all of the stops to accommodate our sinfulness so that we might be heirs to his kingdom.³⁶ As Christians, we can affirm that accommodation is not inherently unpleasant; it is the way of Jesus.

In summary, intergenerationality flourishes in the presence of five factors: positive interactions, connectedness, interdependence, empowerment, and accommodation. Congregations who strive to be intergenerational need to incorporate these characteristics into their cultural fabric. However, there is one other aspect of intergenerationality that must be mentioned; while it is not a foundational dimension of intergenerationality, it does provide evidence of healthy intergenerationality: mentoring.

Mentoring: The Evidence of Intergenerationality

When looking at research studies, most benefits resulting from intergenerationality cited in research either directly or indirectly relate to mentoring.³⁷

34. Crispin, “Theology of Accommodation.”

35. Shaw, *Generational IQ*.

36. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*.

37. Cortellesi and Kernan, “Together Old and Young”; Hsu et al., “Effectiveness of Intergenerational Program”; Agmon et al., “Relationship between Mentoring”; Massi et al., “Impact of Dialogic Intergenerational Activities”; Raven, “Impact of Mentoring Reconsidered”; Andreoletti and Howard, “Bridging the Generation Gap”; Grignoli et al.

While many church members seem intimidated with the idea of being a mentor to someone else, it is worth noting that members of intergenerational congregations often participate in informal mentoring without realizing it, as it simply involves intentionally pouring into someone with less experience than oneself to aid them in their life journey; this can be as simple as going out of your way to talk to a certain younger person every week at church.³⁸ While these are two separate concepts, intergenerationality is intrinsically connected to mentoring. The positive interactions and connectedness that form between two individuals from different generations is how mentoring begins.³⁹ Long-term mentoring results in interdependency, as both young and old contribute important things to their relationship.⁴⁰ Mentoring requires accommodation and should result in empowerment for both parties involved.⁴¹ Therefore, upon reflection, a flourishing mentoring culture (whether formal or informal) could be considered the crowning piece of evidence that a church has developed a healthy culture of intergenerationality.

Thinking back on our discussion of discipleship, we can see another way this concept of mentoring becomes even more significant. Considering that discipleship could be defined as becoming who God desires us to be while helping others to become who God wants them to be, then is not the mentoring relationship the basic unit of discipleship? Can there be true discipleship without one mentoring someone else in some capacity? Since discipleship should not be understood merely as focused on self-help or personal growth with God's assistance, but rather as a direct response to the Great Commission to actively make disciples as we go about our lives, could intergenerational churches provide the ideal context for discipleship? As a setting in which there is rich potential for mentoring relationships to emerge, might intergenerational churches be the missing puzzle piece that has prevented us from truly being the people God has called us to be?⁴²

"Development of a European Learning Model"; Ayton and Joss, "Empowering Vulnerable Parents."

38. Campbell, *Mentor like Jesus*; Shaw, *Generational IQ*.

39. French et al., *Somebody2someone*.

40. Roberto, "Our Future Is Intergenerational."

41. Parrott, *Transforming Together*.

42. Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*.

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, we have argued that the call to discipleship, when understood in light of the biblical concepts of the body of Christ, the family of God, and the gifting of the Spirit, validates the importance of intergenerationality. Having explored how the core factors of intergenerationality help to create an ideal context for discipleship, we hope others will join us in recognizing the importance of nurturing and pursuing intergenerationality within the church under the direction of the Spirit. The Spirit desires to deepen the intergenerational dynamics of the church as its members exercise the gifts with which he has endowed them. As the Spirit plays this essential role in deepening our relationships, this enables our theological ideals about the body of Christ and the family of God to move from abstract notions to experiential reality.

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