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THE IMPACT OF DISCIPLESHIP ON WELLBEING IN INTERGENERATIONAL CONGREGATIONS

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

By Joe Azzopardi

Introduction

This study has sought to understand the impact of belonging to an intergenerational congregation on wellbeing. In order to discover how a person's wellbeing is impacted by their level of social and spiritual connectedness as they are disciplined in an intergenerational congregation, a concurrent transformative study was undertaken to find a sociological answer to these questions.

All of the self-reporting tools used in this study have been shown to be reliable and valid when used through the current sample. The interview data gathered through semi-structured interviews has served to expand understanding of the questionnaire data by providing explanations of irregularities between the theory and the data, strengthen the case made by previous research as well as those made in the literature review, and fill in gaps of knowledge not provided by the questionnaire data. It has also served to provide narrative support for the results.

This study has added weight to the argument that an individual's wellbeing is positively impacted by being disciplined in an intergenerational congregation due to an increase in social and spiritual connectedness. This chapter will provide: i) a concluding report of the major and minor findings of the study, ii) a discussion regarding the implications of the study, iii) a discussion regarding the limitations of the study, iv) a discussion regarding what areas of further research should be pursued, and v) some closing remarks.

Major Findings

Wellbeing is positively impacted by discipleship

The findings have shown that those who are actively applying the principles of the Bible through the means of an intimate relationship with God and exhibited by their care towards other persons are likely to experience a greater sense of wellbeing. This bears true regarding Psychological Wellbeing as discipleship positively influences concepts such as meaning and purpose, as well as providing positive emotions through acts of service and a sense of peace and hope; among other benefits. Social Wellbeing is positively impacted through the sense of belonging which takes place within a community of likeminded people who are striving towards making the world a better place. Strongest of all is the influence of discipleship on Spiritual Wellbeing, as it provides a pathway towards grappling and understanding the big questions in life in a way that provides a relief from the burdens of the past, a mission for the present, and hope for the future.

Participants who scored higher on the Participation in Spiritual Activities scale had a higher Spiritual Wellbeing score. While the questionnaire results for Psychological and Social Wellbeing assessments did not register as significant, the interview data consistently found that all three forms of wellbeing increased due to the faithfulness each of the participants had to God and his teachings. Therefore, it has been concluded that having faith in God as evidenced through the participation in spiritual activities can indeed lead to a higher sense of Spiritual wellbeing.

Reading the Bible and praying were discussed as sources of peace, joy, and comfort by participants in the interviews and showed slight indirect influence of Psychological Wellbeing. Therefore, it has been concluded that reading and studying the scriptures as well as spending time in prayer with God can be a means of flourishing to those who have a positive image and relationship with God.

Although the questionnaire data revealed a negative correlation between Compassion and Spiritual and Psychological wellbeing, the interviews suggested that Compassion was still worthwhile as the participants expressed clear links between acts of compassion and wellbeing. However, more study needs to be done in regard to the relationship between Compassion and

wellbeing, it was concluded that when compassion is undertaken in a compassionate community, those within the community will help increase each other's sense of wellbeing when there is suffering.

Those participants who had assessed themselves with a greater Spiritual Growth score were found to also assess higher in all three areas of wellbeing. This was also strongly evident in the interview data. Therefore, it can be said that Spiritual Growth leads to a higher sense of wellbeing.

In light of these findings, it has been concluded that discipleship can be a means of several dimensions of wellbeing. This being the case, Christian congregations have been found to be a potential context for providing both social and spiritual connectedness as they are discipleship orientated communities. The potential of discipleship's ability to positively influence wellbeing is dependent on the kind of attachment an individual has on God, as those who have a secure attachment with Christ and who see God as a loving and personal deity will have better a sense of wellbeing than those who may view God as distant, angry or apathetic.

It is therefore recommended that congregational leaders use this research as a means to reach the secular community. Utilising church spaces, equipment and personnel as an overt means of providing both immediate and ongoing needs for the community would likely be welcomed by those outside of the Christian space. Providing resources alongside non-Christian individuals through programs that particularly promote psychological and social wellbeing will enable Christians to be the representation of Jesus they are called to be while strengthening the wellbeing of others and themselves. This would also be a non-threatening way to introduce the world to real Christians and perhaps lead individuals to Christ through relational means. It is of course recommended that at an appropriate time, the understanding that choosing to follow Jesus results in a better wellbeing should be shared with non-Christians, as it may be the necessary motivation for them to take further steps towards Christ.

Wellbeing is positively impacted by Intergenerationality

The research provided in this study has shown that wellbeing is also positively influenced through the benefits realised in intergenerational relationships. This is not limited to only family relationships, but rather individuals are encouraged to establish and maintain healthy

relationships with those from different generational backgrounds who are unrelated by blood and marriage through an intergenerational community. Intergenerationality has been linked to acceptance and belonging, through being part of a diverse and yet unified ‘family.’ This connectedness brings with it several benefits, and therefore an increase in wellbeing for those who are part of such a community.

Specifically, Intergenerationality has been found to positively impact Psychological Wellbeing. In the regression analysis, a direct positive pathway emerged from the model showing that Intergenerationality yields a moderate influence. This was confirmed through the interviews, as many of the participants reported the benefits of being mentored by more experienced members of their congregation which in turn assisted with their sense of accomplishment. Engaging with an intergenerational community has been noted to influence positive emotion, achievement, and autonomy while sharing one’s journey with others of diverse generational backgrounds.

Intergenerationality also positively influenced Social Wellbeing in the research data. The analysis of the model revealed that Intergenerationality rendered a moderately positive influence on Social Wellbeing. Again, this was echoed through the analysis of the interview data as the participants gave evidence of having their relationships benefitted through a sense of family, in having older members act as parental figures offering wisdom and generosity while younger members as spiritual children give both affection and help when needed. Pursuing and maintaining intergenerational relationships has been found to strengthen a sense of self within community as well as provide a sense of engagement from a greater diversity of voices.

Spiritual Wellbeing has also been found to be impacted by Intergenerationality. While a direct effect was not found in the regression analysis, a positive moderate indirect pathway emerged which showed that Intergenerationality quantitatively influence Spiritual Wellbeing. The participants overwhelmingly expressed how their spiritual journey was strengthened by those older and younger than themselves, particularly when personal trials took place in that each generation offered their unique strengths towards them in their suffering. Being a part of an intergenerational community has been shown to add a sense of meaning and purpose in one’s life and strengthen one’s outlook on life in general.

The five factors of Intergenerationality (Positive Interactions, Connectedness, Interdependence, Empowerment, and Accommodation) specifically lend themselves towards individual flourishing as they each provide towards specific aspects of wellbeing components. The validation of the Intergenerationality Index has added weight to its usefulness as an assessment tool, as well as strengthened conceptual framework of the five factors as components of Intergenerationality itself.

Considering these findings, it can be concluded that having intergenerational relationships and engaging in an intergenerational community is beneficial for one's wellbeing, from a psychological, social, and spiritual perspective. This being the case, there is great motivation to seek the friendship of those of different generational backgrounds in order to reap the benefits therein.

It is recommended that congregational leaders promote the concept of unity in diversity within congregations in order to bring about community wellbeing in religious settings. This is not suggesting an abandonment of theology or morality, but rather utilising the church as a place of respectful and fruitful discussion in order to present Jesus as the peacemaker he has promoted to be. Establishing a community based on equality and mutuality leads to wellbeing and will also be a point of evangelism in itself to the surrounding secular community.

It is also recommended that individuals seek to connect with those from different generational perspectives. This can be encouraged by congregational leaders by means of social and spiritual activities that be understood and enjoyed by all ages where possible. Further to this, representation from a diverse generational representation on leadership teams and in all branches of ministry will promote a sense of value and respect to each age group leading to a greater sense of belonging and therefore wellbeing.

Discipleship is positively impacted by Intergenerationality

The study has also found great benefits concerning the process of Discipleship and how Intergenerationality serves as a context. Intergenerational congregations have been found to be beneficial in regard to the Discipleship of individuals. It can be said that Intergenerationality, using the construct of the five factors in this study, has been shown to strengthen the three disciple variables of Participation in Spiritual Activities, Spiritual Growth, and Compassion.

Being a part of an intergenerational congregation increases the faithfulness to God of individuals as evidenced through Participation in Spiritual Activities. In the regression analysis, a moderately strong positive pathway became evident showing that Intergenerationality influences Participation in Spiritual Activities. The interview data reveals that Intergenerationality within a congregation directly increases an individual's ability to serve and reproduce as a disciple largely in part due to mentoring and modelling. Being in an intergenerational congregation encourages the less experienced to engage with God through the example of those who have journeyed longer with God while strengthening the faith of the old as they see the passion and expectant faith of those new in their Christian walk.

It was also found that Spiritual Growth was impacted by Intergenerationality. The regression analysis found that there was a moderately positive pathway from Intergenerationality to Spiritual Growth. This was emphasised by the participants during the interviews as most expressed how much knowledge, wisdom, and skills they received from those who mentored them in their intergenerational community. Specifically, areas such as being given sage advice from elders in making important life choices and having opportunities such as teaching those younger contributed to the spiritual growth within such communities.

Similarly, Intergenerationality was found to be a positive contributor to individual Compassion. This was shown in the model analysis as a moderately positive regression took place from Intergenerationality to Compassion. When interviewed the majority of participants expressed how being in an intergenerational congregation gave them opportunities to give compassion to others as well as receive it. Specific examples came in the form of helping elderly members with labour intensive or technologically related work, and young parents help raising their children.

It is therefore recommended that congregational leaders take steps towards teaching their membership how to intentionally connect with both prospective disciples as well as those who are outside of their generation. This involves utilising members from each of the generations to assist with understanding how to reach and teach their generational cohort. It is strongly recommended that congregational leaders educate their communities on the different generations, particularly in terms of their history, their characteristics and value priority, and

their needs. Unless individuals are able to put themselves in the shoes of others, they will struggle to connect with them, let alone disciple them into the kingdom of God.

In summary, the major findings of this study have been that belonging to an intergenerational congregation brings many benefits to both individuals and the community as a whole. The other findings (see Appendix E) yielded a picture of what a disciple is like in both character and behaviour, as well as what a healthy church looks and operates like. These benefits are noteworthy in that they lead to a better and longer life in this present world, and quite possibly the opportunity to lead more individuals into the life eternal.

Implications of the Research Findings

Through the research done in this study, three specific recommendations have been made.

Individuals and congregational leaders should consider authentic and active Christianity as a potential means of wellbeing

Having social and spiritual connectedness has been shown in the current study and previous studies to have a positive impact on wellbeing (Cavalletti & Corsi, 2018). Christianity through discipleship is a practical means of being connected to other people through active service and comradery, as well as being connected to the Divine through faithfulness.

As discussed on p. 19 – 31, Christianity pursued through discipleship is a means of connectedness both socially and spiritually (Gallet, 2016). Consequently, it is recommended to individuals that it is not mere acceptance of Christianity that leads to a positive impact but following the teachings of Jesus as expressed in the Bible and applying them to one's own life (McCrindle et al., 2017; Taylor, 2013). In addition to this, individuals should become active ministers in a local congregation so they can live out their Christian walk in a community of fellow disciples (Camp, 2008; Talbert, 2010).

Specifically, individuals are recommended to actively participate in spiritual activities as they can strengthen relationships with others, as well as with God (Bolst, 2012; Thomas, 2010). Disciples should know God, and act on his behalf. This is not in regard to knowing about God but rather they know God personally and have a relationship with him (Hull, 2006). This

knowledge of Jesus extends past the ten commandments and results in a disciple being able to both speak and act on Christ's behalf (Morrison, 2016). Disciples are also aware of God's leading not just in terms of morality, but with knowing what life choices they should make (Celano, 2013). Therefore, individuals are recommended to devote themselves to the teachings of the Bible by putting God first in their life and treating others as they themselves would want to be treated if they were in their place. Congregational leaders are recommended to prioritise promoting having a strong relationship with God and healthy relationships with others to their congregations above any other matter at the pulpit, during visitations, or when conducting meetings.

Wellbeing is distributed largely by acts of compassion by others. Although there are some aspects of wellbeing which could be argued to take place solely due to the mindset of an individual, many aspects are either products or by-products of compassion (Elliott, 2012). Compassion is not driven by selfish notions, such as fulfilling a quota or a goal, but rather by empathising with another person who is suffering in some capacity and trying to alleviate their suffering (Lowe & Lowe, 2010). In light of this, congregational leaders should oversee community support not in order to gain members or fulfil a commitment, but because it is the right thing to do (Aghababaei et al., 2016). When the community sees the Church serving solely in order to have compassion without any other expectation, they will see it as a dispenser of wellbeing.

Individuals who are actively and authentically pursuing Christ strive to grow as people. Spiritual growth has been found to directly impact the wellbeing of participants, as it gives a sense of accomplishment and experience to individuals (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). This aligns with the Christian sentiment of *becoming* more like Christ; though not in a perfectionistic sense (De Waal, 2017; Morrison, 2016). Religious institutions, ministers, and individuals should partner in challenging the status quo at every level, both inwardly and outwardly, in order to progress positively and avoid stagnation and decline.

In speaking specifically to congregational leaders, it is strongly recommended that quality must be prioritised over quantity in most aspects of life, but especially regarding evangelism and discipleship. While it may be argued that it is easier to use baptisms and membership transfers as indicators of church performance, rather than lifelong discipleship, it is because of such a

mentality that there is a struggle to retain those baptised and/or raised in the church. It is for the same reason that secular society largely sees Christianity as irrelevant; since flourishing is not taking place in the lives of those on the church registry (Kinnaman, 2011). If transformational, lifelong discipleship was the primary focus with holistic wellbeing showing evident, the secular community would have the motivation to approach the church rather than having to spend enormous resources in exclaiming a message that will not likely be received (McCrindle et al., 2017).

Individuals and congregational leaders should consider intergenerational relationships and intergenerational communities as a potential means of wellbeing

Intergenerational relationships have been shown in this study to positively influence wellbeing. While in many aspects of life generational segregation takes place, an effort should be made on an individual and communal level to foster intergenerational relationships as it has the potential to improve wellbeing (Biggs & Carr, 2015).

Intergenerational communities have been noted to display five characteristics that set them apart from other communities. Positive interactions between members of different generations help build and maintain healthy relationships through frequent and meaningful communications (Massi et al., 2016). This is not to say that there should never be any disagreements or challenging conversations, but rather that these take place within a safe and loving context that has been built upon trust (Shaw, H., 2015). Individuals are recommended to seek out positive interactions with not only their own generation, but those above and below their own. Congregational leaders are encouraged to provide safe environments for this to take place.

Connectedness is also an aspect of intergenerational communities. Such communities celebrate diversity though they are bonded as a united community, and they are also inclusive of new members so long as a spirit of respect of the group's boundaries is demonstrated (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2017). A sense of identity and belonging regardless of an individual's age is an essential aspect of intergenerational communities (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016). Therefore, individuals are recommended to strive to connect with others from various generational backgrounds. Congregational leaders are recommended to ensure the values of intergenerational acceptance and belonging are woven into the governance and structure of the congregation.

Intergenerational communities exhibit a sense of interdependence between the various generational cohorts. An understanding that everyone and every generation has something to offer makes the group more connected and ultimately more equipped to deal with any challenges the individual members or the group as a whole may face (Andreoletti & Howard, 2016). While each person and each generation may have flaws, interdependence ensures not only accountability but a safeguard from such flaws. It is recommended that individuals and congregational leaders make an effort to appreciate the gifts that every generation brings to it, as well as be teachable regardless of age.

Intergenerational communities empower their members regardless of their age so long as an individual is able to carry out the responsibilities that are expected of the authority given to them. There is equal representation of every generation at every level of authority and every agency of an intergenerational community when possible (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Voegtlin et al., 2015). In this way, every generation is given respect and value as potential sources of direction and opinion. It is recommended that individuals respect the authority given to someone regardless of their age. It is recommended that congregational leaders empower not only the majority or the seasoned, but empower those who have potential, and to be vigilant in ensuring generational equity in every ministry and at every level where possible.

Intergenerational communities are considerate of the needs and desires of every generation and are therefore accommodating (Crispin, 2017). This does not mean that there is no place for specific rules or ideologies that govern the community, but rather that decisions are made based on a spirit of empathy (Menconi, 2010). Where possible consensus will define decisions, but when consensus is not possible then an endeavour to create times and spaces where conflicting opinions can be enacted will be made. It is recommended that individuals 'do unto others' and endeavour to put themselves in the shoes of those they may not agree with in order to accommodate for the sake of God's kingdom and God's children. It is recommended that congregational leaders safeguard the minority generations, ensuring that their needs are met and their desires are earnestly considered.

Individuals and congregational leaders should consider intergenerational relationships and intergenerational communities as a potential context of Christian discipleship

Intergenerational relationships and intergenerational congregations have been found to be a potentially ideal context for discipleship to take place. This heralds back to the diversity exhibited in the early Christian movement (Bock & Köstenberger, 2011), as a diverse Christian context undergirds the theological concepts of the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9) (Long, 2011), the body of Christ (Roman 12, 1 Corinthians 12)(Harkness, 2012), and the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12)(Harkness, 2012; Schwarz, 2006).

Intergenerational relationships have been found to positively influence faithfulness through an increase in participation in spiritual activities. Most notably in the literature, faith formation increases through mentoring and modelling relationships, which are often intergenerational in nature (Allen, H. C. & Ross, 2012; Linderman, 2016; Merhaut, 2013; Roberto, 2012; Snailum, 2012b). Older generations have also been positively influenced in their faith through wanting to pass on a legacy of faith to those younger than themselves, and therefore find purpose in being kept accountable not only for the sake of the connectedness with God but also for the sake of future generations (Andreoletti & Howard, 2016; Massi et al., 2016). Individuals are recommended to model faithfulness to God and his principles not only in words but through actions and life choices. Congregational leaders in particular are strongly encouraged in this, as they have more responsibility.

Intergenerationality has also been found to positively influence the discipleship component of Compassion. Intergenerational congregations have been noted for being accepting and inclusive environments, which therefore require compassion, sympathy, and empathy to develop (Elliott, 2012; Glassford, 2018). Being communities that display accommodation requires acts of selflessness, submission, and sacrifice, all of which are characteristics of Jesus (Cherry, 2016; Shaw, P., 2016). Flowing on from this, as empowering communities' compassion is required in order for those in authority to share authority with others (Crispin, 2017; Nesbit Sbanotto & Blomberg, 2016). It is recommended that individuals endeavour to be compassionate towards others regardless of their age, this includes assisting in meeting the needs of others, respecting them as a child of God, and accommodating and empowering others where possible. It is recommended that congregational leaders strive in upholding Christ's mission for justice and

mercy by standing up for the marginalised regardless of age and encouraging others to do the same.

Spiritual Growth has also been found to increase in intergenerational congregations. Aspects of spiritual growth such as having individuals strengthen the fruit of the Spirit, such as but not limited to patience, kindness, and gentleness in order to accommodate other generational perspectives is a consideration (Crispin, 2017; Vos, 2012). As mentoring and modelling exists with intergenerational environments, younger individuals learn a great deal from their elders on a variety of topics whilst those mentoring are benefitted with purpose, meaning, and fellowship resulting in legacy beyond their own lives; the elders also learn a great deal from those younger as well (Cortellesi & Kernan, 2016; DeMichelis et al., 2015; Grignoli et al., 2015; Whitehouse, 2017). Therefore, it is recommended that individuals actively seek out suitable mentors who exemplify Christ-like qualities while striving to be mentor others while striving to mentor others themselves. As to congregational leaders, it is recommended to provide adequate training regarding mentoring as well as a safe environment for those who are mentored as well as those who do the mentoring.

Congregational leaders are recommended to undertake measure to educate their congregations regarding understanding each of the generations in the greater community. This includes understanding the history, characteristics and value priorities, and needs of every living generation. Further it is recommended that training opportunities are provided for their congregation to understand what it means to be intergenerational, why it is important, and what they can do to develop intergenerationally as a congregation.

Congregational leaders and individuals alike are recommended to implement intergenerational strategies in order to meet the needs of both their own congregation, as well as potentially the surrounding community.

Conclusion

It has been recommended that individuals should consider authentic and active Christianity as a potential means of wellbeing as it has been found that discipleship is indeed a mechanism in Christianity which leads to being socially and spiritually connected. This sense of connectedness in turn leads to an increase in spiritual, psychological and social wellbeing.

Therefore, it can be said that Jesus' promise of rendering an abundant life by following his teachings is a true statement in the case of those who were part of this study, as it has shown that it leads to individual flourishing.

It has also been recommended that individuals should consider intergenerational relationships and intergenerational communities as a potential means of wellbeing as belonging to an intergenerational congregation leads to a variety of positive outcomes. All three measurements of wellbeing were found to be either directly or indirectly impacted positively by Intergenerationality.

Further to this, it is also recommended that individuals should consider intergenerational relationships and intergenerational communities as a potential context of Christian discipleship since the study also found that Intergenerationality positively impacts the three discipleship areas of participation in spiritual activities, compassion, and spiritual growth. Therefore, Intergenerationality has been found to positively impact the discipleship process of individuals in the study.

Limitations of The Study

Although the study attempted to have more denominational representation in the study, only one of the eleven congregations was not a Seventh-day Adventist congregation. Having greater denominational diversity would have lessened any bias regarding characteristics that reflect a denominational perspective rather than say an intergenerational one. However, having a sample largely of one denomination assisted with pinpointing intergenerational differences as the faith tradition of the participants and their respective congregations were homogenised. In addition to this, geographically the sample was fairly narrow being as far north as Raymond Terrace, NSW and as far south as Quakers Hill, NSW (approximately 170 km between).

Another limitation of the study is that the congregations which were used in the study would be largely considered to be Australian (Caucasian) in ethnicity with some exceptions in some of the congregations. While there were some differences between the eleven congregations in terms of traditional leanings, most of the congregations would be considered moderate to conservative in terms of their religious views. Therefore, culturally there is a great deal of homogeneity.

A final limitation is that the sample was limited to those over the age of sixteen years old, and there were only three representatives between the age of sixteen and eighteen. Ideally, the questionnaire would have been administered to younger children as well in order to hear their point of view. However, due to reading ability and ethical considerations, the questionnaire was relegated to those who were older.

Opportunities for Further Research

The findings of this study have opened up the need for further research, as knowledge always results in further questions to be answered. As mentioned in the previous section, conducting the assessments on a greater variety of congregations would be useful not only in fine tuning the questionnaire and interview questions, but also in comparing different denominations and ethnic groups. For example, how would a Fijian congregation with a strong family orientation compare with a typical Australian congregation in terms of empowerment or interaction? Considering that both cultures have different perspectives on ‘church’, it would be valuable to learn from the strengths of each as well as find the weaknesses that exist.

Stemming from the cultural perspective above, it would also be relevant to investigate how intergenerational immigrant congregations are in light of having to deal with issues of integration. Specifically, considering the difficulty in keeping a church which speaks a minority language hospitable to the younger generations who will likely be more comfortable speaking the common language. This issue in particular paired with the first generation’s often refusal of giving up on the old ways has made it particularly difficult in retaining second and third generation immigrants.

Alternatively, modifying the questionnaire so that it can be used for younger age groups would be quite interesting especially for knowing whether the children are respected and empowered. Additionally, it may be useful in assessing if mentoring support is where it ought to be for those in middle school or in their adolescent years. Modification could also be done so that those who speak other languages can do the questionnaire in their own tongue.

Comparative research can be done to assess discipleship and wellbeing between intergenerational and monogenerational congregations. This study has used congregations who had corporate worship together and who were at least multigenerational in nature but being able

to assess congregations who have separate services based on age or who cater for only one generation would be of interest to understand when and if such formats are viable regarding discipleship.

A research study exploring an intervention model to assist congregations who desire to become more intergenerational should also be pursued. The first step would be using the current questionnaire as an assessment for congregations to establish what their areas of strength and weakness are followed by consultation, training seminars, and reassessment. This would be valuable as it would not only contribute further to theoretical aspects but use theory for practical purposes in order to transform a congregation into a more intergenerational community.

Another research endeavour could be to assess the attitude and perception of ministers of religion regarding discipleship. Endeavouring to discover whether their education has focused more on evangelism rather than discipleship would be useful, as would their confidence in practical theology. Similarly, discovering the attitudes and perception of professional ministers concerning intergenerationality would be useful, as it cannot be established in a church unless the ministers and church leaders consider it a core value (Snailum, 2013).

Conducting methodological analysis of discipleship in congregations would also be beneficial in understanding what is working and what is not. Such research could inform practitioners as well as seminary institutions on the best kinds of methods to use, as well as what principles such methods are based on.

Further research could also be done concerning a comparison between the shared developmental stages of each of the generations; where possible. This is worth considering since regardless of the historical standpoint of each generation, every generation goes through similar developmental stages.

Another comparative research study could revolve around understanding how individuals of similar temperaments and learning styles could bond despite being from different generational backgrounds. This would be a means of strengthening intergenerational relationships from a trait and interest perspective.

In order to understand the relationship between Compassion and wellbeing with greater clarity, a different scale could be used which assesses acts of service rather than emotion.

Further, the Participation in Spiritual Activity Scale could be bolstered by including a sub-scale for gratitude and hope. By doing this, a much better understanding regarding discipleship and its components in regard to their relationship to the various forms of wellbeing can be hopefully achieved.

Finally, further research in understanding the perspectives of each generation concerning discipleship, wellbeing, and ministry would be beneficial. While there are several books on this topic that are available, such perspectives are in constant flux as each generation matures and new generations join the ranks of leadership.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of an individual's level of social and spiritual connectedness on their wellbeing as they are discipled in an intergenerational congregation. A mixed-methodology was pursued using interviews and questionnaires in order to triangulate the data using 545 participants in 11 congregations between the Hunter Valley region of NSW in the north to Wollongong, NSW in the south. The data supported the hypothesis that intergenerationality would positively impact both discipleship and wellbeing and that being actively engaged in the discipleship process would positively impact wellbeing.

It is therefore recommended that creating or seeking an intergenerational context within a Christian congregation be pursued for the sake of being properly discipled and improving one's wellbeing. This is not to say that there are no avenues to achieve these goals, but this study has found such contexts to be favourable towards flourishing as a Christian individually and as a community.