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Developing A Strategy for Synergy Between Home and Church To Increase Youth Engagement and Faith Formation at Barriere Adventist Church

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR SYNERGY BETWEEN HOME AND CHURCH
TO INCREASE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND FAITH FORMATION
AT BARRIERE ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Timoteus K. Nagy

Adviser: David Jamieson

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Professional Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR SYNERGY BETWEEN HOME AND
CHURCH TO INCREASE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND FAITH
FORMATION AT BARRIERE ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Timoteus K. Nagy

Name and degree of faculty adviser: David Jamieson, D.Min.

Date completed: March 2024

Problem

There was no intentional synergistic relationship between the home and the
church at the Barriere Adventist Church. As a result, church leaders often expressed
discouragement when they saw teens become disengaged with church and spirituality.
They suggested that the root problem of this symptom was the lack of cooperation
between the two faith-forming institutions in keeping young people engaged and growing
in their faith. As a pastor, I saw this deficiency and our urgent need for change.

Method

A six-month action research strategy was designed and delivered at the Barriere
Adventist Church. Twenty members from every generational cohort were interviewed to

investigate the above-mentioned problem. Subsequently, a focus group was formed to devise an action plan that the church could implement, evaluate, and revise regularly. The objective was to develop a synergistic relationship between the home and the church to engage and retain our church's young population. A four-level qualitative evaluation process was used to discern the effectiveness of the research and the yielded results. Reactions, learning, behaviours, and results were evaluated and recorded for future cycles.

The method was dynamic and interactive in order to address the present needs of the church. The goal of the research was to align the two faith-forming institutions in order to provide a robust foundation for an intergenerational church structure. The initial stage focused on assessing the current circumstances of the church. The second phase transitioned to a focus group with the purpose of formulating proposals. In the third phase, the focus group recommended an action plan for implementation in the church. Finally, the focus group met again to evaluate the outcome and draw conclusions.

Once the first cycle was complete, the process was restarted for a second round. This cyclical method of action research was intended to fine-tune the vision of the church and provide an action plan to reach its desired goals. Secondly, it provided data to other contexts that intend to synergize the home and the church with the purpose of engaging and retaining young people in their faith.

Results

The study revealed a positive correlation between synergizing the home and church and the increased engagement of children and youth with their faith. In order to

evaluate the correlation between this action research and the long-term retention of young people in the church, a longer time frame and study will be necessary. Furthermore, the topic of retention and attrition of young people in the church is complex and comprises several factors that exceed the scope of this project. However, qualitative trends that emerged from this study suggest that young people, when intentionally engaged, want to be involved in serving and leading in the church. The intergenerational model also yielded improved communication and collaboration between every age group in the church. Lastly, the intentional and mutual collaboration of the church and home increased the involvement of every member and helped foster an intergenerational mindset in the church.

Conclusions

This project sought to explore if the home and church alliance would yield positive results in engaging, reaching, and retaining young people in their faith. After the initial action research cycle, it is evident that young people were more engaged in their faith than before. They also showed interest in participating in the church. Synergizing the two faith-forming institutions with an intentional intergenerational approach positively impacted the Barriere Adventist Church. Though it is a small sample size, and the intervention was over a short period, this project provided the framework for a potential culture shift, where the engagement and retention of young people will be at the forefront of the church's agenda.

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A Professional Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Ministry Context

Barriere is a small rural community in the Thompson Valley of Southern British

Columbia with a population of 2,500. It is located 45 minutes outside of Kamloops, a

mid-size city and an industrial hub in Canada. There are several Protestant churches in

town, a Catholic church, a Jehovah's Witnesses kingdom hall, and a Mormon temple.

Barriere Adventist Church is one of these churches, currently meeting in a rented space in

the Presbyterian church. The church is involved in a few community projects and

reaching young families that moved into the community and joined the church since the

Covid-19 pandemic. The church's average attendance is 25, with four generations evenly

represented. I serve as the district pastor, and my time is divided between three churches:

Kamloops, Barriere, and Clearwater.

Aside from the families that moved to Barriere during the pandemic, two families

from the community joined recently. They were looking for a church to worship in

because, in both cases, they had young children that they wanted to expose to a

community of faith and give them a moral foundation. Therefore, the church comprises

three groups: those who have attended the church for a long time (a decade or more),

those who moved to Barriere during the pandemic, and those who joined the church within the last year.

This project aims to develop a strategy that can be implemented in various contexts, both in families and churches.

Problem Statement

There was a lack of intentional synergistic relationship between the home and the church with the purpose of faith formation of young people at the Barriere Adventist Church. This deficiency may have contributed to young people's disengagement with church and faith when they reached their teenage years. In recent years, many young people became disengaged with their faith and the church as soon as they reached adulthood.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project is to develop, implement, and evaluate a strategy that would create a synergistic relationship between the home and the church to engage and retain young people in the Barriere Adventist Church more effectively.

Delimitations of the Project

This project was limited to members and affiliates regularly attending Barriere Adventist Church. Although the problem under consideration affects Christianity at large and the majority of Christian churches, the project focused on a small church within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this project may only partially apply to other larger contexts.

Secondly, the strategic plan and implementation portion of this project considered the dynamics within a few homes and the Barriere Adventist Church. Notably, the church is old-fashioned, even though it is generationally diverse. Therefore, this project was influenced by traditional worship practices in the home and church. While results that emerged from this research should be beneficial to various contexts, the scope of this research was tailored for a traditional setting.

Thirdly, because of the topic under consideration, namely the retention and engagement of young people in the church, the project focused primarily on the parent-child relationship within the home. However, this was not to the exclusion of grandparents and mentors outside the home. Instead, emphasis was given to the significance of parent-child relationships while exploring other non-parental relationships in the home and church. While every person in the church was encouraged to participate in the research, the majority of the participants had a vested interest in socializing the youth of our church in their faith.

Description of Project Process

The following chapters explore the theological foundation supporting the hypothesis, the literature review on the topic, a systematic and context-specific plan of action, an implementation of the research, and finally, a brief evaluation and reflection of the proposed solution.

Theological Reflection

The concept of faith transference can be extrapolated directly or indirectly from a number of biblical narratives. The stories and counsels found in the Bible provide foundational elements to establish several paradigms and principles that can be beneficial to constructing an effective strategy in a contemporary context.

The first theme that was explored is discipleship at home. Several Biblical examples were surveyed to establish the specific roles of mothers and fathers in instilling their faith in their children. Within the family context, several key components were considered: the importance of family worship for discipleship, learning styles, and the two-way influences between two generations. Outside the role of the family, the faith community's role was extrapolated from various Biblical narratives. The goal of exploring these Biblical narratives and themes was to discover principles that could be applied in a contemporary context to transmit faith to the next generations.

The theme of collaboration and synergy is another topic that was explored. The Bible provides several indications that the home and the faith community naturally collaborate to share faith with the younger generations. Chapter Two also considered the theology of the partnership between the two faith-forming institutions.

Along with the selected Biblical references, Ellen White's writings were also consulted for theological reflection.

Literature Review

Following the theological investigation, literature written by other authors on this subject was consulted. Only recent publications (ten years or newer) were included in the

research to maintain relevance, with a few exceptions significant to the topic under study. Similarly to the theological reflection, the literature review targeted three main areas: faith-building practices at home, faith-building practices in the faith community/church, and the importance of synergizing the two faith-forming institutions.

Contemporary family dynamics may differ from those in biblical times. The first part of the chapter addressed these challenges and provided context to the localized research. The next part of the literature review focused on effective forms of faith formation in the home. Among these, literature on family worship practices was reviewed first. Another area of this study focused on discipleship and how to model faith at home. A two-way learning style was evaluated among the different methods of sharing faith. Lastly, Bible study in the home was explored in relation to faith transmission.

The following section of the chapter focused on faith-forming practices in the church. Several church practices were addressed in the context of the church and how these influence the engagement and retention of young people in the church. Furthermore, the role of mentors was explored in the church context.

While understanding the pivotal role of both the family and the church in socializing young people in the church, the scope of the research ultimately focused on the synergy of the two institutions in effectively engaging young people in their faith. Literature on the intentional involvement of family units in church worship was reviewed, followed by literature on educating the church and family on intergenerational alignment.

Research Methodology

Given the dynamic nature of the church context and the long-term implementation goals, participatory action research was used as the research methodology at the Barriere Adventist Church. Participatory action research allowed for an analytic and reflective approach to investigate complex real-life situations in a small context (Stringer and Ortiz Aragon, 17). Data was collected using interviews and focus groups. These instruments were evaluated through a series of evaluation surveys that will provide a starting point for a series of action research cycles. Involving the participants in these cycles will hopefully crystallize a church culture where the generations will work together to engage and retain young people in the church and establish them in their faith. This project developed a strategy, implemented one cycle, and provided a foundation for the future in the area of intergenerational church development.

Strategic Action Plan

Once the theoretical data was gathered, an implementation strategy was devised. The strategy considered the gathered data from the theological reflection and literature review but primarily relied on the collection of information from the local context through participatory action research. A set of questions was designed to invite the participants into an interactive journey, where the research was driven primarily by the expressed needs of the participants rather than any generic recommendations. Therefore, priority was given to data gathered locally through participatory action research while educating the participants along the way about the content gathered through personal research described in chapters two and three.

Chapter four also devised a plan for recruiting participants, described the format of the interviews and the focus group, and explored potential outcomes and challenges from the implementation process. While this chapter is strictly the conceptual framework of devising and implementing a strategic plan, it offered practical recommendations for implementation that were explored in the following chapter.

Implementing the Action Plan

Before implementing the action plan, the proposed action plan passed through the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University. This approval process ensured that action research was executed safely. The protocol described in chapter four was then implemented and described in chapter five. This stage entailed gathering and implementing the context-specific data. A series of interviews and a focus group produced the necessary data for implementation. From the ideas generated, five or six ideas were selected and introduced to the church and the participating families. These were practical actions the church incorporated to achieve the intergenerational culture of retaining and engaging young people in the church. The remainder of the ideas were recycled and pooled for future cycles done every six months in the church.

Evaluating the Action Plan

After the action plan was implemented, the protocol and implementation were evaluated with a series of surveys. This assessment was based on Kirkpatrick's four levels of training evaluation: reaction, learning, behaviour, and results. Once the protocol was evaluated, the information gathered was used for future applications of the participatory

action research. Every effort was made to invite every generation to participate without coercion. Instead, they were invited to see the value of facilitating change towards a more intergenerational church that intentionally engages and retains its young people.

Definitions of Terms

This project utilized a small number of key esoteric phrases and key terms. These are defined as follows:

Intergenerational church: people from three or more generations intentionally and mutually connecting with God and each other through worship, fellowship, spiritual growth, and service (definition developed from class discussions).

Intergenerational ministry: a commitment to a philosophy that intentionally brings two to three generations together in meaningful interaction to mutually benefit every generation involved (Allen, 19).

Intergenerational Sabbath School: multiple generations learning together in a shared space, with a synchronized curriculum that is designed for age specific interests yet on the same theme. This environment allows for intergenerational two-way learning.

Generation: a group of individuals in an age-specific cohort in a spread of 15-30 years. What used to be a 20-year demarcation between generations is now recommended to range from 15-30 years. The 15-year limit of the range represents the shortening of generational divides due to the accelerated development of young people exposed to more information through technology than their ancestors. The 30-year limit in the generational range represents the longer gap between generations, as young people postpone starting a family until later in life due to economic challenges. The generations

referenced in this project are the predominant generations present in contemporary churches: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y (or Millennials), and Generation Z.

Religious socialization (also referred to as "faith transference"): the process of instilling faith in younger generations through parenting and discipleship (Bengston, 72).

Spiritual/faith formation: the intentional communal process of growing in a relationship with God or helping develop another person's faith journey (Wilhoit, 23).

Summary

This project aimed to answer a problem that affects a majority of North American churches, but also, specifically, Barriere Adventist Church. Several families in the church expressed the anguish of losing their children from the church when they reached adulthood. Whether this attrition was due to the growing influence of the world or the failure of churches and families to socialize young people in their faith, the fact remains that something must be corrected so that young people can be better retained in the church as they reach adulthood. The goal of this project was to offer a solution to this problem: synergizing the home and the church to increase youth engagement and intergenerational faith formation.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Introduction

The importance of discipling a new generation of believers is a dominant theme in

the Bible. Scriptural examples of parents and leaders provide guidance for today's parents

in their effort to transmit their faith to their children. With the aid of Ellen G. White's

inspired counsel, this chapter will explore the biblical foundation of discipleship and faith

formation in both the home and the community of faith. Worship practices, involvement

in the community, modelling faithfulness, and two-way learning will be considered in

both the family, and ecclesiastical settings. Furthermore, this chapter will look at a few

Biblical narratives that demonstrate how the two institutions are most effective when they

collaborate in transmitting faith and values from one generation to another.

Discipleship in the Home

The Bible frequently emphasizes the importance of passing down faith to the

coming generations. God designated the home as the primary platform for transmitting

faith. One of these instances is the account of Noah and the flood. Though the Bible only

mentions Noah's righteous character, which stood in contrast with the rest of the earth's

population, it is implied that his whole household followed his example and was saved

(Gen. 6:9 NKJV). "Righteousness" in this context implies "responsibility in family and

wider social contexts" (Roop, 68). Before God's impending judgment fell on the earth, He instructed Noah and his whole family to seek refuge in the ark (Gen. 7:1). Although only Noah's righteousness is mentioned, the Bible implies that the rest of his family followed his example and were saved. (Redford 2008, 46).

Abraham also instructed his household in the way of the Lord, and thus, he was chosen and blessed (Gen. 18:17-19). God's covenant with Abraham was not only a personal one but a generational one, and Abraham was responsible for teaching his children and grandchildren to obey God and instruct future generations in His ways (Gen. 17:7,9). The covenant God made with Abraham referred not only to him but also to his descendants (Nichol 1978, 322). Both Noah and Abraham led their families towards a personal dependence upon God. As a result, God blessed them, and their households benefited from His blessings and provisions, too.

Parents play a significant role in the spiritual outcome of their children. In some cases, parents can have a very negative influence on their children. Jezebel's negative example of rejecting God and murdering many innocent people led Athaliah, her daughter, to do the same (2 Kings 11:1-3). In other instances, the parent's guidance in teaching their children to revere God provided a solid spiritual foundation for their children when they left home. Joseph's faithfulness and purity of character, as seen in Genesis 39:9 when Potiphar's wife seduced him, could be traced back to the education he received in his father's house as a child (White 1890, 213).

In the Bible, children are also encouraged to follow the instruction of their parents. In contemporary Western culture, the primary influences in the lives of young

people include their teachers, schoolmates, and the entertainment industry. However, God's plan is for parents to be the primary teachers of wisdom (Newheiser, 32). Much of the book of Proverbs admonishes children to pay attention to their parent's instruction (Prov. 1:8). Parents, especially if they are God-fearing, are instructed to teach their children how to have a relationship with their Heavenly Father. The Proverbs writer lists the benefits his son will experience if he accepts his words and commands, which are drawn from God (Miller 2004, 47). According to Solomon, instructing children in the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God is more precious than silver or gold (Prov. 2:1-5). The wise man notes that a child's tender heart is most receptive to the parent's teaching (Prov. 4:1-5). Teaching children in God's ways from infancy will not only honour God but bring gladness to the parents (Prov. 10:1).

Many parents instinctively desire earthly wellbeing for their children. The mother of Zebedee's sons wished her sons to be in a position of power (Matt. 20:21). Her request was based on an earlier declaration by Jesus in Matthew 19:28 that his followers would sit on thrones and judge Israel (Magnum 2020, 88). Jesus rebuked her and reminded her that He did not come to rule but to offer Himself as a sacrifice (Matt. 20:22). Later, Jesus told His disciples that they should aspire to serve others rather than rule them (Matthew 20:26). This was an important lesson that the mother of the Zebedee brothers needed to learn and teach to her sons, namely, that the kingdom that Jesus came to promote was contrary to secular monarchies and hierarchies (Lange and Schaff 2008, 365).

Parents need to frequently ask God how they should raise their children, just like Manoah inquired of God about how he and his wife were to raise their son, Samson

(Judg. 13:12). They asked for God's help in raising their child and demonstrated the overt

virtue of godly parenting (Richards 1991, 168). Yet Samson was far from the exemplary

son that would result from such an education (Richards 1991, 168). However, the parent's

role is to represent God to the best of their ability instead of seeking to ensure the

spiritual outcome of their children.

Implementing spiritual practices in the home, providing proximity to nature, and

encouraging children to develop their own relationship with God are essential for the

holistic development of children (White 1923, 27). The goal of such education is to teach

respect towards parents, but more importantly, to teach reverence towards God. As seen

in Malachi 1:6, God requires that children obey their parents and, in the same way, that

humanity obeys Him (Taylor and Clendenen 2004, 262).

While the most effective way to impress faithfulness in the next generation is

through positive modeling, parents' negative examples can serve as a lesson from which

future generations can learn. Looking at Jewish history, Stephen noted that his ancestors

rejected God and refused to obey Him (Acts 7:39). His goal was to compel his listeners to

learn from their ancestors' mistakes and accept Christ, the "Just One" (Acts 7:51,52). God

revealed Himself to one generation despite its unfaithful ancestors. However, He desires

that parents disciple their children to follow God's ways, with the ultimate goal of

introducing them to listen and hear God's voice (Acts 22:14).

The Importance of Family Worship in Discipleship

Family altars, or family worship, were intended by God to inspire the whole family to pray and consecrate themselves (White 1954, 518). The patriarchs in the Old Testament built altars to encourage their families to develop a relationship with God. To protect their children from the world's influences, parents must intentionally guide them in prayer and establish regular family altars in the morning and evening (White 1954, 520).

Children regularly dedicated to God receive divine protection against the enemy's attacks (White 1954, 519). Nevertheless, parents need to avoid making these family altar times a monotonous routine. Instead, these should be interactive for the children and the whole family to enjoy (White 1954, 522). Music and singing should be included as much as possible during this worship time (White 1954, 523). Once a week, on Sabbath, the family can unite in a special worship time, where the presence of God can permeate the home and lift every member closer to God (White 1954, 525).

Abraham was known for his habit of building altars, "calling on the name of the Lord," and discipling his household in the ways of God (Gen. 13:4). Every time Abraham built an altar, he renewed the public witness of his faithfulness towards God (Smith 1993, 119). Because Abraham sought God and built an altar wherever he went, God revealed His will to him, and the two shared a friendship (Gen. 19:17). As he became more closely connected with God, Abraham revealed God to his household and inspired them to walk with God (Gen. 18:19). Abraham led a worshipful lifestyle, erecting an altar wherever he went, thus inspiring his family to revere God (Reybrudn and Fry 1998, 401). God

frequently introduces Himself to His people as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, amplifying His desire to be remembered as a God of continuity throughout the generations (Durham 1987, 39)

God intended His covenant with Abraham to be transmitted to all succeeding generations as a legacy of faith (Deut. 4:25). Even when the nation of Israel was to be in trouble as a result of forsaking God, God's intent was that they would remember God's mercy and redemptive power through the recollection of the stories that were kept alive from generation to generation (Deut. 4:31). Passing down the stories from one generation to the other would bring every generation into the covenant God made with Abraham, to make him and his posterity a blessing on this earth (Deere 1985, 271). Obedience to God and His moral law is God's greatest desire for broken humanity. He knows that by looking towards His perfect law, there is liberty from the power of sin and its consequences (James 1:25). He reassures people in His Word that they will be blessed if they keep His laws (Ps. 119:1).

This is why in Deuteronomy 6:6,7 God instructs parents to teach His commandments to their children, to impress them on their hearts, and even to use visual reminders of observing and obeying these commands (Knowles 2001, 96). When children were to ask about the purpose of the commandments, God wanted parents to recount the story of liberation from Egypt, which symbolized their liberation from the captivity of sin (Deuteronomy 6:20-23). This is famously known in the Old Testament as the Shema. God wanted every Israelite to know that there is one God, and He is a generational God. This was to be recounted daily for the instruction of the younger generations as a lifestyle of

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remembering God's enduring faithfulness, that would elicit faithfulness from His followers (Knowles 2001, 98). Ultimately, the purpose of all the training parents would do would be to help their children make an informed choice between God's blessings and curses, life and death, which would continue to have repercussions on future generations (Deuteronomy 30:19).

The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh built an altar as a memorial for future generations because their land inheritance was separated from the rest of the Israelites by the Jordan River. Their goal was that the altar would serve as a witness for them and future generations that they are one nation, but more importantly, that future generations would not lose their faith and be discouraged from serving God (Josh. 22:23-29). God cautioned the Israelites not to make a covenant with the people in the lands where God brought them because He knew how easy it would become to be swayed by their idolatry (Judg. 2:2).

Joshua instructed the Israelites to tear down the altars dedicated to false gods, or else God's blessing would leave them (Judg. 2:2,3). In the first commandment, God clarifies that if people are faithful to Him, His blessing will follow them for a thousand generations. However, if they turn to idolatry, they will receive God's punishment for three to four generations (Exod. 20:5,6). Faithfulness and obedience to God are of the utmost importance throughout the Bible, and the responsibility rests with every follower of God to share it with the next generation.

The Role of Fathers and Mothers in Discipling Their Children

After building an altar at Bethel, Jacob commanded his whole household to get rid of their foreign gods, purify themselves, and change their clothes. He collected all their idols and jewelry and buried them under an oak tree in Shechem (Gen. 35:1-4). In another instance, Joshua declared that regardless of which god the nation will worship, he and his household will serve the Lord (Josh. 24:15). Both passages underscore the leadership responsibility parents carry in guiding their families into a relationship with God.

On the journey up to Mount Moriah, Isaac noticed that the sacrificial lamb was missing. He asked his father, Abraham, about its absence (Gen. 22:7). If parents intentionally immersed their children in the spiritual practices and rituals of the faith, their children would instinctively know the significance and importance of every action. If they had questions, they could come to their parents, as Isaac came to Abraham. If parents do not have an answer for their children, they can always direct their attention towards God and His provisions (Gen. 22:8). In this way, parents can instill and model faith and faithfulness, and children can adopt it and make it their own. When Isaac became an adult, he followed the faith of his father Abraham in building an altar and worshipping God together with his family (Gen. 26:25).

The Bible also provides several stories of a failed faith transference. As the high priest, Eli had every opportunity to share his faith with his two sons. Nevertheless, the Bible records that they "were corrupt, and did not know the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:12-36). It is unclear from the biblical record whether Eli's parenting style was to blame or simply the

lack of interest and reverence for holy things on his sons' part. Nevertheless, by contrast, young Samuel demonstrated faithfulness in his service under Eli's guidance (Simeon 1836, 114). Even though Samuel developed an authentic faith journey with God while he ministered at the temple with Eli, his sons did not follow in his footsteps (1 Sam. 8:1-3). Jotham, the king of Judah, lived out an example of faithfulness. However, the nation still did not follow his example and acted corruptly (2 Chron. 27:2).

The role of parents is to model faithfulness to their children. However, they may turn away from God despite the best discipleship in the home (Hunt 2008, 21). The opposite is also true. Bad parenting does not always result in unfaithful children. Saul's bad example did not rub off on Jonathan, who acted honourably, pleading for David's life to his father (1 Sam. 20:30-34). Nevertheless, though there are exceptions in the Bible, parents still carry a vast responsibility in discipling their children in a way that would give them the best possible opportunity to develop a personal relationship with God (Keefauver and Keefauver 2001, 110).

The Scriptures also contain numerous passages regarding a mother's role in the faith formation of her children. Mothers who decided to dedicate their children to God before birth could train them in God's service from a very young age. Hanna's prayer before Samuel was born prepared her to commit her utmost dedication to raising him in the fear of God (Redford 2008, 70). By the time he started his apprenticeship with Eli, Samuel was well-grounded in his faith. Similarly, Elizabeth's diligence in raising John in the fear of God prepared him to become one of the greatest prophets that ever lived (Matt. 11:11). Eunice is mentioned in the Bible for her love for God and for her ability to

transmit that to her son Timothy, who eventually became one of the most prominent

pastors and leaders in Ephesus (Robertson 1933, 287). Paul commends not only

Timothy's faith but also the diligence and faithfulness of Timothy's mother and

grandmother in raising him to love God (2 Tim. 1:5). Paul later encourages Timothy to

keep "that good thing" which was entrusted to him by previous generations through the

help of the Holy Spirit. (2 Tim. 1:14).

Mothers can impress faithfulness on their children and mold their character on the

divine pattern when they seek in their own lives to follow the teachings of Christ (White

1890, 572). Parents' task is to protect their children from the darkness of the world.

Parents must prayerfully seek God's wisdom in guiding their children as they grow up

and develop their own faith (White 1890, 572).

God gave different gifts to people, and these gifts are to be primarily used in the

education of children so that they, in turn, "may do a noble work for God" (White 1923,

82). If they are uncertain how to guide their children, parents "should come to Jesus with

their perplexities" (White 1898, 512). Family worship safeguards the family from the

world's corrupting influences and offers spiritual grounding to the children (White 1977,

331). The principle of providing spiritual nurturing in the home is also found in the New

Testament. Paul encourages fathers in Ephesus to bring their children up in the

"instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Therefore, when parents intentionally make every

effort to provide spiritual nurturing through family worship, the home will be a strong

discipling environment for children (MacArthur 1981, 273).

The responsibility of spiritual discipling and teaching was entrusted to parents to bring up a new generation that would keep God's commandments close to their hearts (Hunt 2008, 21). These teachings were to be passed down from parents to children and from grandparents to grandchildren, highlighting the multi-generational continuity of discipleship (Deut. 4:9). More than anything, the Bible instructs parents to disciple their children in the commandments of God by explaining in word and demonstrating in deed what it means to keep the commandments (Deut. 6:6-8). Tying these commandments on one's forehead and hands symbolized the idea of living these commandments out in thought and action (Deut. 6:9).

Mutual Learning: Adult-Child, Child-Adult

Children play a significant role in the faith development of adults, especially their parents. Children can ask questions from their parents that can challenge adults and awaken a child-like curiosity (McGinnis 1987, 108). The prophet Malachi prophesies of a time when the "hearts of parents will turn to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents" (Mal. 4:4-6). This prophecy indicates that there will be a time when there will not be a mutual connection between the two generations, and before the "great and dreadful day of the Lord" comes, there will be a healing of a bond between parent and child that will go both ways (Taylor and Clendenen 2004, 462).

The Bible also shares several stories of children or youth who God used to teach adults. Samuel, David, and the young maid in Naaman's house are a few examples of God using children to lead adults towards God. Jesus also stated that adults should observe children and be like them because they instinctively accept and embrace the

kingdom of God (Luke 18:16,17). When asked by His disciples, "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus pointed to children (Matt. 18:1-3). The teachability of children was what Jesus used as the standard for discipleship that all Christ-followers should emulate (Nolland 2005, 732). Jesus further cautioned adults to be very careful not to offend children and pronounced a woe on those who do (Matthew 18:7). Christ identified with children, and He reminded His followers that the treatment they give to children, they offer by extension to Him (Matt. 18:5).

As a child, Jesus demonstrated an ability to explain the scriptures that produced awe in the scholars of His time (Luke 2:46,47). The Bible records that His stay at the temple caused great distress to His parents, who thought they had lost Him. Nevertheless, Jesus' great dedication and understanding of the Scriptures and His pure faith left a strong impression on the heart of Mary, who treasured His words in her heart (Luke 2:51-52). Perhaps not every child has the same appetite for a deeper understanding of God and a sincere devotion as Jesus did. Still, if parents were to give their children an opportunity, they could learn valuable lessons from their innocent and novel perspectives. Like Mary, parents can learn to cooperate with their children in their spiritual growth, and instead of assuming a teacher-student posture, they can be co-learners bound together by the power of the Holy Spirit (White 1898, 69).

God often refers to himself as a Parent and demonstrates a perfect example of parenting to a broken humanity. God says that He was to the tribe of Ephraim as a parent is to a child, teaching them to walk, drawing them with "cords of human kindness" and "ties of love," stooping down and lifting them as someone lifts a little child to the cheek

(Hosea 11:3,4 NIV). In this metaphor, God demonstrates intimacy, tenderness, and closeness to his wayward children from the tribe of Ephraim (Guenther 1998, 180). It is an example for parents in every generation of being vulnerable, emotionally available, and close to their children as they develop into young adults.

Despite His sovereignty, God preferred friendship with His children rather than authority and frequently considered their opinions. Abraham bargained with God concerning the impending judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:16-33). Moses, too, was able to plead for the Israelites, and God "relented from harming them" (Exod. 33:11-14). God not only listens to His children, but on occasion, He changes His mind based on their request. This two-way interaction deepens the relationship and allows parents and children to develop together and closer to each other. As this happens, parents can have the greatest influence in discipling their children in their faith.

Although God is the perfect parent, there are many instances where His children do not grow up to obey and love Him. God knows the end from the beginning (Isa. 46:10). Yet He created Lucifer, the fallen angels, and humankind, knowing they would rebel against Him. Indeed, the "lamb was slain from the foundation of the world" before sin entered the world (White 1890, 63). This foreknowledge demonstrates God's true love because, despite that knowledge, He gave His creation the free will to return or not return His love. God pleads with all His creation to choose Him, to choose life. However, He will not coerce His creation into obedience (Deut. 30:19). Similarly, parents have the duty of imparting their faith and love for God to their children while giving them the freedom to choose. Nevertheless, parents have a solemn duty to raise their children in the way of

the Lord, modelling faithfulness to them; then, their children will have the greatest chance of not departing from God when they grow up (Prov. 22:6).

Intercession does not only happen by the older generation for the younger generation. Nehemiah asked for forgiveness from God for the stubbornness of the nation's fathers (Neh. 9:16-17). In another instance, Job regularly prayed for his children to be forgiven (Job 1:5). Therefore, intercession can happen both ways between the generations, showing that parents are not always the ones modelling faithfulness to their children. Often, children can model faithfulness to their parents. The Psalmist writes that "one generation shall praise God's works to another," confirming a generational continuity of faith but not limiting this transaction to a one-directional exchange (Ps. 145:4).

Children's respect and obedience towards their parents are inscribed in God's moral law (Exod. 20:12). However, fathers are also instructed to treat their children with dignity and respect and "bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Paul encourages Timothy not to allow anyone to despise him for his youth, but instead live by example in word, conduct, love, spirit, faith, and purity (1 Tim. 4:12). In this way, he was able to disciple people from an older generation, demonstrating to them the fruits of the spirit despite his age. While adults have much to teach young people, they also have much to learn from young people.

Discipleship in the Faith Community

Faith communities have exceptional potential for providing discipleship for families and individuals. Here, the family can share what they learned in the home. Like Samuel, young people can be established to develop spiritual integrity that they can carry beyond the home and church (White 1890, 574). Like in the home, discipleship in the church is intergenerational. The Bible provides effective and ineffective examples of generational discipleship and faith transference. In Judges 2:10, after the Exodus generation that wandered in the wilderness passed on, a new generation "arose after them who did not know the Lord, nor the work which He had done for Israel." The following verse describes the immediate consequence of the failure of one generation to pass on their story and faith to the next generation: they ended up doing evil before God, worshiped Baal, and soon after, prostituted themselves to other gods (Judg. 2:17). This downward spiral was the direct result of a generation's failure to transmit their faith to their children.

God instituted the Jewish feasts to memorialize His faithfulness throughout the generations (Exod. 12:14,17). Through these feasts, especially through Passover, the children of Israel were to remind themselves and future generations of God's liberation from the Egyptian captivity (Exod. 12:42). Furthermore, God commanded Aaron to save a pot full of manna that would eventually be stored in the arc of the covenant, with the express purpose of reminding future generations of God's provisions during the Exodus through the wilderness (Exod. 16:33). The Israelites were also to bring a continual supply of pure oil, which would fuel the seven-branched lamp that the priests would constantly

maintain (Exod. 27:20). This ritual would also serve as a teaching opportunity for parents, as they would remind their children about God's guidance through the generations (Exod. 27:21). The sanctuary system was intended primarily as an intergenerational discipling environment, where families could explain to their children the origin of sin and God's atonement on behalf of sinners (Exod. 30:10). The Israelites' rituals for transmitting their faith and understanding of God to future generations were paramount. While the individual households had an important role in discipling their children in the home, communities of faith also had a significant role in creating an environment where rituals and practices could provide an avenue for discipleship (Richards 1991, 69).

While rituals are essential in transmitting faith across the generations, the Bible also emphasizes the importance of telling the story of what God has done. Older generations can tell younger generations about God's work in their lives and the lives of their parents and grandparents (Ps. 78:2). The Psalmist affirms the importance of sharing the "praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done" (Ps. 78:4). If the story is told from generation to generation, new generations can place their confidence and trust in God, knowing that His presence and help have been there throughout the preceding generations (Ross 1985, 851).

Paul encouraged Timothy to treasure and guard what he had learned from him (2 Tim. 1:13, 14). Even though Timothy's mother, Eunice, was a believer, his father was an unbelieving Greek (Acts 16:1,2). Although Timothy did not receive spiritual discipleship from his father, he received that from his mentor, Paul. The faith community has an

opportunity to provide mentorship for young people, either to reinforce what they have learned at home or to fill the void in the spiritual development that they lacked from one parent or both.

In the Old and New Testaments, rituals often became so important that those practicing them forgot their purpose and significance. In Isaiah 1:11, God tells His people that their sacrifices and rituals are futile (Martin 1985, 1035). What God looks for is that His followers would realize that the true purpose of their religious experience is to "learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:17). A similar theme of practicing kindness towards orphans and widows is present in the New Testament (James 1:27). Jesus emphasized both the importance of ritual and relationship: fulfilling religious duty and offering sacrifice, but not forgetting to do good to those in need (Matt. 23:23). In modelling authentic faithfulness, parents need to maintain a healthy balance between these two critical arms of discipleship.

The sacred gatherings in the Old and New Testament served the purpose of discipling families and heads of families to follow God's commands and to know Him personally. Abraham had more than a thousand people in his encampment, and he made it his responsibility to instruct them to be "representatives of the true faith" (White 1890, 321). Joshua also recognized his role as a leader, and he intentionally challenged and instructed the households of Israel to follow God and serve Him (Peckham 2007, 229). By demonstrating faithfulness in his own family, he compelled the Israelites to faithfulness in theirs (Joshua 24:15). Church leaders today have a responsibility, like the

patriarchs in the Old Testament, to encourage parents to guide their families to revere

God in their daily lives.

The Effectiveness of Aligning the Home and the Faith Community

Parallel Discipleship Practices in the Home and Faith Community

The overarching theme of the Bible is God's deliberate intent of saving fallen

humanity (John 3:16). Once a person receives God's gift of salvation, they have the joy

and responsibility to share that gift with others (2 Cor. 5:11-15). Family members and

children are the most important people who need to learn about God's gift of salvation.

The Psalmist exclaims that it is "good and pleasing when families live together as

one" (Ps. 133:1).

Indeed, sharing faith can be one of the most unifying elements in a family. Like

the home, churches have the task of making disciples, as instructed by Jesus in the great

commission (Matt. 28:19). By collaborating, families and faith communities can better

fulfill their essential role of transmitting faith to the following generations. But how can

they accomplish this daunting task? Paul's example is a good foundation: "To the weak I

became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men,* that I

might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). Parents and church members alike have to

commit to meet the needs of young people by relating with them and understanding their

needs and struggles.

Much responsibility falls on the home and faith community to disciple their young

people to love and revere God. Nevertheless, despite their best efforts, families and

churches will see some young people leave their church and faith behind as they grow. In the Old Testament, parents were not to be killed for their children's sins, nor children for their parents' sins (2 Chron. 24:4). The righteousness of three of the most faithful men in the Bible could not save another person (Ezek. 14:14). Nevertheless, in the lineage of Israel's kings, the faithfulness or lack thereof of parents most often transferred to that of their children (2 Kings 13:2, 2 Kings 15:34). Therefore, parents and churches can learn from the successes and failures of the Biblical characters but should not bear the guilt if young people decide to abandon their faith as they grow. Instead, they should make every effort while they still have a strong influence on their children to portray God in the most accurate and balanced way possible, encouraging them to discover Him for themselves.

Samuel lived with Eli and ministered in the tabernacle from a very young age. As he grew, he found "favor with the Lord and with people" (1 Sam. 2:26). Receiving the support of his biological family and the family of his faith community engaged him and grounded him spiritually. Although God's voice was rarely heard in those days, God chose Samuel as the message bearer to Eli and the nation (1 Sam. 3:1). This demonstrated his spiritual connection with heaven (Henry 1994, 386).

In the Old Testament, the absence of intergenerational relationships caused Rehoboam to make a terrible mistake by ignoring the advice of the elders, following the counsel of his peers, and consequently losing half his kingdom (1 Kings 12:8-14). His tragic story can remind many young people of the importance of maintaining intergenerational relationships and learning from the experiences of elders in the faith community.

Jesus took intentional time to spend time with children. He reminded his adult audience that children have qualities that adults could learn from (Mark 10:13-16). Jesus affirmed children and reminded His listeners that unless they received the kingdom of God like a little child, they would not enter it. This concept was countercultural. When the faith community can notice and invest in her children, families will flourish, and children's faith will be fortified. Following the example of Jesus, churches and families can join hands to intentionally prioritize children, learning from them and encouraging them on their spiritual walk toward heaven. Children and young people alike notice and value the intentional effort of adults to connect with them. Adults can learn from the example of Jesus and meet this pressing need that young people have.

"The best education that can be given to children and youth is that which bears the closest relation to the future, immortal life" (White 1923, 231). The goal of both the family and the church is the same: to guide the next generation towards a relationship with God. "This kind of education should be given by godly parents, by devoted teachers, and by the church, to the end that the youth in turn may become zealous missionaries for either home or foreign fields" (White 1923, 231). When the two institutions recognize their unified purpose, they will become most effective when collaborating to reach the next generation.

Paul writes in Galatians 3:26 that "we are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." Children have as much worth in God's eyes as adults. Furthermore, God entrusted to adults the passing down of faith to the younger generations. In this process, both the younger and the older generations are established in their faith. Already from the days of

Noah, God made a covenant and entrusted it to be passed down to the "generations to come" (Gen. 9:12). God entrusted the message of salvation to parents so they might pass it down through the generations (Joel 1:3). God entrusted this task to the faith community, as well. Throughout the Old Testament, the task of passing down the faith posterity through the generations is a central theme (Exod. 3:15). In the New Testament, this message was entrusted to the church, which was to bring glory to Jesus in all generations (Eph. 3:21). The task of passing down faith through the generations was given by God to both families and faith communities.

Jesus prayed for unity among believers (John 17:20-23). Primarily, Jesus wanted His disciples to be united to Him, but His desire was also that they might be united with each other. Eccl. 4:12 reminds the reader that unification is powerful and "a cord of three strands is not quickly broken." While this metaphor is often applied to the union between two individuals, with the presence of God as the implied third strand, it can also be applied to the unity of purpose between the two faith-forming institutions.

According to the wisdom writer, "two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion." (Eccl. 4:9,10). The Bible underscores the importance of unity, which can be a foundational principle for the unity between the biological family and the family of faith. The two institutions have the same goal: socializing children and youth to continue the legacy of faith that was passed down for many generations. Therefore, unity between them will yield the most successful results.

Christ did not prioritize His biological family over his spiritual family. What indicated to Him if someone was part of His family was whether they did "the will of His Father" (Matt. 12:50). He expressed a familial bond towards those that followed him (Matt. 12:49). While He adopted His disciples into His inner circle, He did not expel His biological family (Weber 2000, 181). Instead, He expressed that there is a spiritual connectedness that runs deeper than blood relations. The early apostolic church was described as a family that was in a unified fellowship, sharing all their possessions (Acts 2:42-47). If the two institutions were to recognize that they are concentric circles rather than two separate ones, they could more efficiently reach young people with a message of love and redemption. In this way, they could effectively partner in discipling young people to develop and grow in their faith.

Throughout the New Testament, numerous "house churches" are mentioned, where believers met, broke bread, and fellowshipped together. Some of these home churches were the houses of Priscilla and Aquila (1 Cor. 16:19), the house of Philemon (Phil. 1,2), and the house of Nympha (Col. 4:15; Donkor 2008, 5). These house churches were vibrant centres of missionary work (Donkor 2008, 8). From the inception of Christianity, there were many house churches where intergenerational familiality and the worship of God would be intertwined. Different families met and shared their faith, thus modelling spirituality to their children.

In the ecclesiastic setting, Paul instructs Timothy to esteem older adults as parents and young people as brothers and sisters (1 Tim. 5:1-2). Paul wanted Timothy to understand that the church is an extension of his family (Lea and Griffin 1992, 145).

While exchanging knowledge between generations can be beneficial, churches offer another vital benefit: the capacity to supplement familial bonds where a parent or sibling is missing.

<p style="text-align:center">Leadership in the Home and the Faith Community</p>

One of the primary shared goals for families and faith communities is to transmit spirituality to the next generation. God gave Jacob a blessing similar to the one He had given Abraham, making him a blessing not only to his biological family but to families they would come in contact with (Gen. 28:14). Jacob's leadership in his family and the camp of people following him can be a good model for church leaders and parents alike: he told them to put away foreign gods and built an altar to God (Gen. 35:2-4).

Intentional leadership in the family and the community of faith is essential. However, this leadership must be grounded in God. Future generations have the best chance of knowing God personally when they learn to follow God's leading. When the people asked Gideon to rule over the nation and his descendants, he refused (Judg. 8:22, 23). Instead, he suggested that people would follow God's leading. When leaders admit to their human imperfections and direct their children to follow God's leading in their lives, they will allow their children to develop their relationship with God.

From the numerous Biblical narratives, it is clear that God intended to see faith passed down from generation to generation. God's marvelous works would be recounted in this way (Ps. 22:30,31). This responsibility rests with every parent and member of a faith community. While they cannot control the choices of their youth as they grow, they have the solemn duty to try their best to model a lifestyle of faithfulness to the next

generation. God himself allowed His children to wander for forty years in the wilderness because they were not ready to receive His promises (Acts 7:36). God pursues people even if they wander away from Him like lost sheep (Ezek. 34:11). When parents and churches join hands and reach across to the younger generations with genuine regard and love, they will have the best chance of introducing them to a God who seeks after them, too.

There is a great responsibility entrusted to parents and faith communities alike. Jeremiah asks the rhetorical question: "Where is the flock that was given to you, your beautiful sheep?" (Jer. 13:20). Every parent and every faith community would like to respond with the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me!" (Isa. 8:18). It is a great privilege for parents and faith communities to partner together with the purpose of discipling the next generation for God's kingdom. The two institutions can most effectively achieve their task by joining hands in this process.

Conclusion

The Bible repeatedly admonishes parents and faith communities to transmit their faith in God to the next generation. Time and again, Scripture demonstrates that good parenting and leadership will result in a well-established faith in children. Nevertheless, the Bible provides evidence for exceptions to that rule. Despite their best efforts and positive influence, numerous parents and leaders of faith communities were unsuccessful in transmitting their faith to the next generation. Conversely, in some instances, a bad

example on the parents' and faith communities' part resulted in a generation that searched out God and developed a strong faith despite the negative role model of their parents and elders. Therefore, the priority of intentional faith transference should shift to responsibility towards God rather than any particular outcome.

When parents and faith communities seek to share their faith in God with their children with a humble attitude and a willing heart, their children will be more likely to desire that same connection. Furthermore, the two institutions will be far more effective if they align their efforts to transmit their faith to the next generation. While ideal circumstances are rare, families can learn to supplement the deficiencies of the faith community and vice versa.

Both institutions have an overarching goal: making every effort and capturing every opportunity to share their faith with the next generation. Like in the parable of the talents, every parent and faith community will answer before God for what was entrusted to them. Undoubtedly, it will be a great joy for parents and members of faith communities that successfully discipled their youth to hear the words of Jesus: "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over little, I will set you over much" (Matt. 25:21).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In 2006, Barna Group found that six in ten teens become spiritually disengaged by the time they leave high school (Barna 2006). Over a decade ago, the National Association of Evangelicals representing over 60 denominations reported an "epidemic of young people leaving the faith tradition they were born in" (Powell, Griffin, and Crawford 2011, 14). Religious disaffiliation affects older generations as well in a society that is growing increasingly secular, however it is most pronounced in the younger generations (Smith 2017, 31).

The attrition of young people from their faith concerns families and churches. One of the reasons for this occurrence is the growing generational disagreements amongst Christians over what it means to be faithful (Sider and Lowe 2016, 5). The older generations seldom agree with younger ones on several issues. Worship style, doctrinal and ethical interpretations, social justice, and sexuality are just a few examples (Sider and Lowe 2016, 1). Because of this, younger generations distance themselves from older generations within the church or leave their faith behind altogether.

One of the challenges of preserving faith in today's context is the presence of five generations that shape culture (Shaw 2015, 7). Each generation pushes to be heard.

Families and churches must develop generational intelligence if they intend to become more successful at transferring their faith to their children and youth (Shaw 2015, 19). No matter how well-intentioned parents and church leaders are, they cannot determine the faith or future of anyone (Joiner, Ivy, and Campbell 2014, 21). The best they can do is to prioritize personal connections and places of belonging where children and youth can feel nurtured and grow (Joiner, Ivy, and Campbell 2014, 21).

This chapter will explore some of the relevant literature on how faith can most effectively be transmitted to the next generation. The influence of the home and the church on the faith formation of youth will be individually considered, and the final section will review the efficacy of a synergistic alliance between the two institutions on faith transference. The structure of this chapter will parallel that of the previous one. The broader term of "discipleship" in the theological reflection will be changed in this chapter to "faith formation" because contemporary literature commonly uses this phrase when describing the discipling process of young people in developing their spirituality.

This chapter will be divided into three sections to understand the above-described problem better and explore possible solutions in the available literature. The first part will review the importance of the home in children's faith formation. The second will consider the church's impact on the faith formation of its young members. The third section will examine how the two institutions can join their efforts in providing the best environment for faith formation, engagement, and retention of their youth. The purpose of the investigation in this chapter is to review recent literature in light of existing deficiencies and potential solutions to transmit the faith to the next generation effectively.

<center>**Faith Formation in the Home**</center>

Faith formation in relationship with child development is often under-addressed and overlooked in most contemporary families (Allana, Tennant, and Petrucka 2017, 239-240). Pluralism, secularism, lack of communication, and growing time constraints are among the most significant challenges parents face in transmitting spirituality to their children (Allana, Tennant, and Petrucka 2017, 241). Perceptions of God have substantially changed over the last century, from God being experienced in nature to being experienced in non-traditional ways, such as dancing and yoga (Bengston 2013, 39). Along with these challenges, the ever-decreasing religious socialization outside the family puts more pressure on parents to provide a strong spiritual foundation for their children (Bality and Duraczky 2016, 39).

In a 2019 quantitative study that surveyed 2,347 households, Barna Group found that families that shared meals, played together, hosted non-family guests, and attended church regularly had a greater chance of spiritually impacting their children (Barna 2019, 16-17). This provided optimism that young people can in fact be socialized in the faith, as compared to their older study that simply concluded that young people were leaving churches. They categorized families into four quadrants: vibrant, devotional, hospitable, and dormant (Barna 2019, 18). "Vibrant households" comprised 25% of the sampled families and described themselves as frequently participating in spiritual practices, spiritual conversations, and hospitality. Thirty-three percent of the surveyed families described themselves as "devotional households," where spiritual practices and conversations were frequent, but non-family guests were rarely invited. Fourteen percent

<center>37</center>

of the families described themselves as "hospitable," stating that they participated in none or only one of the two markers: spiritual conversations and spiritual practices. "Dormant households" constituted 28% of the sample and described themselves as only rarely engaging in spiritual practices, conversations, or acts of hospitality (Barna 2019, 119).

Vibrant households were the most effective at embedding faith-forming practices in their children (Barna 2019, 126). What made these families more effective compared to the others? On closer look, family members in these households described their home as "playful," where they regularly participated in games and sports, read books, shared meals, shared feelings, shared chores, and hosted guests (Barna 2019, 126). Vacations and frequent outdoor activities connected with spiritual activities are especially effective in socializing youth in the faith (Powell 2014, 146).

The current research on faith-forming practices in the family comes from a broad spectrum of Christian and non-Christian sources, and it can easily be applied to any particular faith tradition and context. Notably, the Adventist church has conducted a substantial study on this topic called "Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance," where they studied Adventist homes, churches, and schools and their effectiveness in the faith development of youth. Even though this study dates back to 1992, it is still helpful to consider today. The effectiveness factors for the spiritual formation in the family were: parents being comfortable talking about faith with their children, parents enforcing Adventist standards such as the prohibition of alcohol, smoking, and drugs, frequent and meaningful family worships, parents consistently punishing wrong behavior, caring and loving parents, parents that help their children with their homework, highly religious

parents, and frequent family helping projects (Dudley 1992, 201). Johnson Crumbly adds

the importance of role-playing as a very effective tool parents can use in the faith

formation of their children (Johnson Crumbly, 2014). It is undeniable that the tone set by

the parents will have a definitive impact on the faith formation of their children.

<div align="center">

Understanding Current Challenges Families Face in the
Faith Formation of Their Children

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Some of the challenges in the spiritual formation of children are due to the various

family types that exist. In dual-earner families, children do not receive substantial

parental attention, and unless another strategy is in place, their spiritual and emotional

development will suffer (Gentzler 2014, 145). Divorce causes another major strain for

children, as they are often displaced from their homes, schools, and churches (Gentzler

2014, 146). Children growing up in single-parent families are also disadvantaged

because, much like in dual-earner families, they receive much of their education from

non-parental sources (Gentzler 2014, 147). Remarried families, gay and lesbian families,

multiple families living in one home, adoptive families, foster families, and children

raised by other family members all pose unique challenges in the faith formation of

children (Gentzler 2014, 148-149).

Another challenge families face in passing on their faith to their children is the

growing separation between spirituality and organized religion in today's culture. This

divide became more pronounced with each generation, starting with Baby Boomers

(Nesbit Sbanotto and Blomberg 2016, 37). An individualized spirituality encourages

people only to accept the parts of the Bible that suit them while distancing themselves

from organized religion (Haydn 2015, 105). Smith and Lundquist call this brand of Christianity a "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism" and describe how today's society has embraced the notion of being a good person who believes in God but is not necessarily connected to a deeper spiritual experience or plugged into a faith community (Smith and Lundquist 2009, 119).

While the individualization of spirituality in today's culture is a fact of life, Powell and Argue point to a different challenge parents face in socializing their children in their faith: a generation gap that has widened between today's parents and their children, where parents are unable to provide answers to a vast array of questions their children have (Powell and Argue 2019, 24). Their recommended solution to this problem is "withing," a term they coined to describe the process of mutual learning between parents and their children (Powell and Argue 2019, 42). In this process, parents assume the role of guides rather than teachers. Guiding, as opposed to teaching, requires more empathy and patience. However, it is the most effective method for parents to maintain a close relationship with their children while raising them with certain beliefs and passing on their spiritual values (Powell and Argue 2019, 61).

White highlights a rapidly decaying morality in the present culture of Generation Z, where "sexting, bullying in schools, internet porn, cutting, and hooking up" are a daily occurrence for most children and teens (White 2017, 40). Many parents are oblivious to their children's exposure to a culture where morality and spirituality have dramatically diminished (White 2017, 40). White concludes that if parents intend to transmit their faith

to their children, they must intentionally strategize to counter the harmful effects of today's mainstream culture to which their children have been exposed (White 2017, 51).

<h2 style="text-align:center">Family Worship Practices</h2>

Family worships provide an effective avenue for interacting about spirituality in households of faith. Family worships are rituals that can meaningfully impact faith formation and "can be replicated regardless of a household's category or context" (Barna 2019, 117). Introducing faith-based rituals from the time children are toddlers is the best way to instil spirituality in them and expect them to mature in the faith tradition of their parents as they grow (Rundman 2018, 100).

The purpose of family worships is to instruct children in the scriptures, to pray, sing, and share spiritual things in the home (Beeke 2020). Family worships should be intentionally diverse in content and how they are carried out to avoid monotony (Beeke 2020). In an interview, Faulkner asked several parents to provide some keys as to how they made family worships more appealing in their homes, and a common denominator among the participants was the importance of brevity and simplicity (Faulkner 2019).

Religious homogamy between the two parents can provide one of the strongest foundations in family worships and value transmission to children as they develop in the long term (Bality 2016, 47). Even before the developmental stage of reasoning, children search for purpose and meaning in life, and family worship can provide a framework in the earliest stages of development (Barrett 2012, 44). When children reach the age of reasoning, family worship can serve as a platform for theological discussions (Barrett

2012, 46). In his dissertation, Booth identified three developmental periods that parallel

Jean Piaget's stages of cognitive development, urging parents to keep them in mind as

they cater spiritually to their children: the pre-operational period, ages 0-7, the concrete

period, ages 8-12, and the formal period, ages 13 and older (Booth 1996, 12-13). Each

stage poses challenges and opportunities that parents should learn to navigate as they lead

their children on their faith-forming journey.

Singing, among other worship practices, is among the most essential in the family

(Getty 2017, 11). It transcends generational and cultural barriers, and it can bring the

family together unlike anything else. Personal worship is another essential prerequisite in

making family worship appealing (Helopoulos 2013, 14). Melheim adds to the above-

mentioned worship practices sharing, reading, talking, praying, and blessing (Melheim

2014, 8). An online blog recommends going outdoors, listening empathically, and sharing

videos and podcasts as additional ideas for parents to expand family worship beyond

traditional practices (Youth and Children's Work).

In addition to this list of practical ideas for leading family worship, Westlake adds

that parents "must realize that when they play with their kids today, they are earning the

right to shape their values in the future" (Westlake 2012, 6). Undeniably, making family

worships as diverse and vibrant as possible will provide children with the greatest chance

to get in touch with their inner spirituality and grow in their relationship with God, just as

they grow in their relationship with their parents.

Modelling Faith in the Home

More than any spiritual activity in the home, the parent's greatest influence on their children is the daily life they model to them (Colon and Nagy 2015, 22). In the conclusion of a 35-year longitudinal study of generations involving 3,500 people from 357 multigenerational families and a variety of faith backgrounds, Bengston stated that "the parents that were most effective at instilling their faith into their children were the warm, affectionate ones" (Bengston 2013, 72).

An essential ingredient in achieving a healthy emotional and spiritual balance in the home is the individual health of the parent/s. Rogers describes this as "being in touch with God's grace and practicing self-compassion" (Rogers 2016, 23). Baars takes this idea further by stating that once individuals practice self-compassion, they naturally have compassion towards others and affirm them, resulting in the emotional replenishment of both parties (Baars 2016, 12). Both authors make a strong case for emotional stability and a positive environment of mutual affirmation being closely linked with spirituality in the home. For children to develop emotionally and spiritually, their greatest need is affection and affirmation from their parents (Baars 2016, 25).

Another study shows that parent-adolescent attachment promotes a young person's "religiousness and psychological adjustment," indicating a strong correlation between spirituality and emotional stability in the development of young people (Kim-Spoon, Longo, and McCullough 2012, 1577). Growing up in an emotionally secure home, where parents support their children's autonomy while maintaining intimate

attachments, is essential in a child's psychological and spiritual development (Demasure, Champagne, and Martínez 2014, 46).

Comparing five studies on attrition and retention of youth in their family's faith, Brown concluded that the family's influence on their children is by far the greatest, followed by that of their peers, and lastly, that of church leaders (Brown 2016, 8). Recognizing the impact of the home environment on children, Rundman suggests that parents should begin the process of spiritual and emotional grounding from the earliest stages of a child's development, starting with infancy (Rundman 2018, 11).

From a very young age, children are open to the wonder and awe in nature. If parents connect these with the supernatural power of God, their children's spirituality will be well established in later years (Harris 2016, 99). According to Harris' findings, the parents' nurturing an appreciation for the unknown, modeling respect for self and others, and establishing a sense of belonging provide the best foundation for healthy faith formation (Harris 2016, 92).

Spirituality is also effectively modeled through the struggles of life (Mamalakis 2016, 24). To influence the faith formation of their children, parents need to be the people they want their children to become (Mamalakis 2016, 32). Modeling an active faith is the best way parents can introduce their children to a relationship with God (Torres 2007, 32). Especially with today's Generation Z, which values authenticity above all things, parents' best chance of socializing their children in their faith is to model a genuine lifestyle of faith (White 2017, 31).

Two-Way Learning in the Home

In his book *Born Believers*, Barrett asserts that children have a much easier time

grasping certain concepts, such as the non-temporality of God (Barrett 2012, 142). While

adults can teach children certain theological concepts, children, in return, can teach adults

about faith and trust (Barrett 2012, 142). To establish a mutual learning environment,

parents must recognize that they have much to learn from their children (Elmore 2015,

107).

When parents recognize that they are not infallible, they can provide a sense of

vulnerability essential for faith formation (Elmore 2015, 109). Storehouse recommends

three avenues for mutual learning. The first is discovering God experientially by being

part of a caring and loving community. The second is in a reflective way, where parents

and children are free to wrestle with doubts as they search for meaning. The third is an

integrative way, where one's creativity and imagination are used to explore deeper

spiritual meanings (Storehouse 2010, 38). As parents learn from their children and

children learn from their parents, they can utilize these three avenues to grow closer

together.

The family's involvement in community service is an excellent way for mutual

learning. Some ideas for family service projects are park cleanups, grocery shopping for

soup kitchens, visiting elderly or sick people, or going to animal shelters and playing with

the animals (Salwen and Salwen 2010, 67-68). Being involved in service projects can

give parents the best opportunity for mentoring and also learning valuable insights from

their children (Osmer 2018, 100). While many authors emphasize the role of the parents

in the faith formation of their children, others explore the role of children in the faith formation of their parents (Tyler 2018, 108). The above literature underscores that faith formation is a relational experience that extends beyond education into creating a bond between child, parent, and God.

Bible Study in the Home

More than ever, numerous competing influences exist in the faith formation of children and youth (Drescher 2016, 90). Well-intentioned parents struggle to balance flexibility and firmness when sharing their religious rituals and beliefs with their children (Dollahite, Marks, Babcock, Barrow, and Rose 2019, 14-15). By integrating regular Bible study at least once a week, parents can provide a solid spiritual foundation for their children (Nagy 2015, 21). Along with sharing stories and teaching their children how to pray, parents and grandparents can offer their children regular Bible studies, which will assist them in their faith formation. (Deprez 2017,112-113).

The importance of Bible study is particularly significant for Generation Z because the increasing relativity of truth in a post-modern culture has rendered the Bible more anecdotal and irrelevant (Barna 2019, 64). Because of this, parents have to recognize the critical role they play in grounding their children in their faith against the neutralizing power of a culture that has very little to do with the teachings of the Bible. This role requires a balance on the part of parents between sharing their understanding of the Bible with their children while allowing them to develop their independent views (Barna 2019, 49). In this process, children can ask questions and explore their doubts, which are essential in their faith formation (Barna 2019, 49).

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Faith Formation of Youth in the Church

In a 2018 study, Barna Group found that Generation Z youth have a strong tendency to want to "develop an identity that is different from their family of origin" (Barna 2018, 42). This finding provides further insight to the 2006 Barna study. The study found that an essential step in the faith formation of young people is their healthy integration into a faith community apart from their biological family. The role of the church is crucial in this socializing process.

A year later, Barna group found in one of their studies that 68% of Christians embrace their faith before age 12 (Barna 2019, 37). This statistic means that the church needs to focus on the faith development of pre-teens. This also provides optimism that if mentored properly, young people can be well socialized in the faith of their upbringing before they reach the critical teenage years. Apart from the role of the family, Bengston identifies the faith community as having the next most important role in the faith development of children and youth (Bengston 2013, 84).

Relationships between young people and other church members of different generations are the best predictors of youth retention in the church (Brown 2016, 13). Young people identify "a sense of belonging" as the top reason they stay connected to a church as they grow up (Brown 2016, 17). Smaller churches are more effective at creating a sense of belonging, while larger churches are becoming more age-segregated (Csinos 2018, 35). Studies show that young people understand that the church does not hold a monopoly on spirituality, yet if they are well-integrated, they tend to stay regardless (Csinos and Beckwith 2015, 63).

Religious commitment has two facets: intrapersonal commitment, which focuses on a person's values and beliefs, and interpersonal commitment, which focuses on a person's behavior and relational commitments within a group or organization (Layton 2010, 6). Young people need a balance of intrapersonal and interpersonal commitments to be effectively socialized in a particular faith tradition. Based on the findings of a qualitative study involving 39 interviewed adolescents, the anchors that connected them to their faith and church were traditions, rituals, and laws in their personal lives, families, and churches (Layton 2010, 14).

Valuegenesis, a longitudinal study that investigated the role of the family in the faith formation of youth, also surveyed the church's role in developing "faith maturity and loyalty to Adventism" among 755 youth and young adults (Dudley 1992, 184). The effectiveness factors they found were a warm emotional climate, an intellectually challenging environment, caring peers, caring adults, the teaching of Adventist standards, Sabbath school teachers that are caring and supportive, interesting and thought-provoking programs, emphasis on sex, drug, and alcohol education, frequent intergenerational programming, and helping the poor in the community (Dudley 1992, 184-185).

In 1996, Dudley continued following his findings from the longitudinal study as they related to the social attachment of young adults to the Adventist church. He found that the 46% attrition of young people was primarily due to a lack of child and adolescent rearing at the church and family level. He identified four areas that churches can improve to maximize youth engagement in their church and faith: creating interesting religious

programming, encouraging the expression of individuality, providing opportunities for active leadership, and engaging in dialogues about faith standards. (Dudley 1996, 47).

Faith Forming Activities in the Church

Several studies have shown the correlation between "community service involvement and the spiritual growth of volunteers" (Colon and Nagy 2015, 30). Churches that have an outlet for families to perform community services provide a robust opportunity for the faith formation of their youth. Service-learning has been extensively studied in various disciplines and offered insights to those wanting to implement it in faith formation. Studies have shown that when combined with experiential learning, academic learning has a much greater impact on the development and growth of individuals, especially in the formative stages of life (Deeley 2011, 43).

Churches have to intentionally accommodate young people in the church if they plan to retain them (Crispin 2017, 20). One of the ways they can be integrated into church life is by providing opportunities for intergenerational fun (Csinos 2015, 33). When churches intentionally provide activities where food, games, sports, art, or music are shared with all generations, relationships develop organically, and there are numerous opportunities for spiritual growth (Csinos 2015, 33).

In one of the essays from the "Intergenerate" collection, DeBoer notes that churches with a culture of regularly sharing stories of faith are the churches most effective at developing intergenerational relationships and retaining their young people (Allen 2018, 213). Barett agrees and adds that the importance of narratives for faith formation, where adults involve children in their stories or tell stories about their

children, is that it affirms all generations in their faith (Barett 2012, 111). The reason

stories are so effective in faith formation is that they often have gaps where the listener

can interact with the narrative and personalize it to their own experience (Barett 2012,

158).

Offering a diverse way of experiencing faith is essential for faith formation

because every young person has different aptitudes and inclinations. Foster presents three

types of learning. The first is developmental learning, which focuses on creating content

that caters to a young person's developmental needs (Foster 2012, 29). This type of

learning promotes questions that can shape both the learner's and the teacher's faith.

Practice learning is the second type of learning. The focus of practice learning is to allow

the learner to practically integrate what they are learning into action (Foster 2012, 34). A

faith community has numerous rituals; practice learning is the avenue to teach and

integrate young people into these practices (Foster 2012, 35). The third type of learning,

discovery learning, pushes the boundaries of developmental and practice learning in that

it allows for the imagination and curiosity of a person to probe and even challenge

previous ideologies (Foster 2012, 35). Ultimately, all three types of learning are essential

in forming personal and congregational faith (Foster 2012, 36).

Importance of Relationships in the Mentoring Process

In the process of faith formation, Kreider outlines three stages of development:

spiritual children, spiritual young men and women, and spiritual parents (Kreider 2018,

57). Every church has people who fall into these groups, yet not every church has

effective spiritual parents. Programming or technology cannot replace mentoring (Osmer 2018, 50). Furthermore, it is not sufficient for mentoring only to take place within the family. Csinos explains that young people need a minimum of three adult relationships outside their family for healthy faith development (Csinos 2015, 33-34). He concludes his article by stating that there is a "direct correlation between adult-youth relationships and devotion to a particular faith tradition" (Csinos 2015, 34).

Adults must embrace the reality of their mortality to grasp the importance of "passing the torch" to the next generation (Freedman 2018, 132). Powell identifies the importance of "handing over the keys" by the aging adults to the young generation, both physically, in terms of giving them access to the physical church, and relationally, by entrusting them with leadership within it (Powell, 2016, 28). Churches in which adults intentionally foster friendships with their youth are more likely to keep them engaged in church life (Freedman 2018, 135).

Allen and Ross argue that one of the most damaging factors that led to the attrition of young people from churches is the segregation of generations, which impedes young people from being well-integrated within the church (Allen and Ross 2012, 136). Separating children and youth from the rest of the congregation has become standard practice in many churches, especially larger ones. Kinnaman and Hawkins explain that the results of such segregation have been counter-productive regarding mentoring (Kinnaman and Hawkings 2011, 227). Instead, they recommend that youth be intentionally socialized in an intergenerational environment, where relationships can be fostered naturally and mentoring can occur organically. Studies have found that young

people are more likely to stay engaged in a church if they are not segregated within the church based on their age (Tyler 2018, 107).

Further reinforcing the importance of relationships, Kinnaman and Matlock explain how important intergenerational relationships are not only for faith formation but also for emotional health (Kinnaman and Matlock 2019, 115). Isolation and loneliness are growing among young people, and if churches intend to keep them, they need to cater to their most essential need: acceptance through warm relationships (Brown 2016, 7). While relationships with non-parent adults are essential in the faith formation of youth, mentors have to be careful not to manage the lives of their mentees but instead offer them friendship and support (Smith 2017, 192).

Pastoral relationships also play a critical role in the faith formation of young people (Brown 2016, 9). Nevertheless, as important as the role of the pastor is in the mentoring process, the church at large needs to have a culture of intentional intergenerational relationship-building if it intends to keep its young members engaged (Packard and Hope 2015, 115). Churches where mentorship is centered on a person are much more vulnerable and prone to lose their young people when that person leaves (Packard and Hope 2015, 116).

Brafman and Beckstrom used the analogy of a spider versus the starfish to describe the importance of church-wide mentoring. In the spider metaphor, the "body's a body, the head's a head, and the leg's the leg" (Brafman and Beckstrom 2006, 37). The starfish is different in that there is no head, and if it loses an arm, it will grow it back. The

authors argue that churches most effective in mentoring have a decentralized modus operandi.

Research shows that a tight-knit family and church community are the best predictors of socializing young people in a particular faith tradition (Bengston 2013, 178). Mentoring is most effective if there is a focus on warm relationships within the church (Powell 2016, 96). If churches wish to be intentional in retaining their young people, they will invest and strategize to ensure that intergenerational relationships are prioritized and young people are effectively mentored in their faith.

A Synergistic Relationship Between Families and Churches in the Faith Development of Their Youth

Surveying the data from a Family Transitions Project, a longitudinal study of adolescent youth and their families, Spilman et al. concluded that "religiosity promotes competent family functioning across generations" (Spilman, Neppl, Donnellan, Schofield, and Conger 2013, 772).

Allen and Ross also agree with this view and suggest a reciprocal relationship between the health of the church and that of the family unit (Allen and Ross 2012, 66).

In an interview conducted by Barna Group, Reaoch states that "pastors should share their preaching schedules in advance to encourage families to enter more fully into worship" (Barna 2019, 113). She also recommends that churches train family mentors using various tools, including social media (Barna 2019, 114). By doing so, the church and family can collaborate in developing the faith formation of their members. In this

process, transmitting faith authentically is of the greatest importance, rather than sharing specific content (Powell 2016, 81).

Young people need influences outside their homes to develop a strong faith (Barna 2019, 42). Nevertheless, they will be confused if the principles they learn from the church differ from those they learn at home (Barna 2019, 132). In order to create an accommodating culture of faith, the church and home can be exponentially more effective if they collaborate in training their youth (Kinnaman 2016, 112). Tyler compares a young person's faith development to an athlete training for the Olympics. Athletes need multiple support systems with a unified goal to assist their development (Tyler 2018, 21). Similarly, young people have the best chance of being socialized in their faith tradition if the church and the family collaborate to provide a unified platform for their growth.

Churches and families can align on several shared activities, values, and goals. A practical way of working together is by having a weekly discussion guide on a Biblical topic that church members and families can interact on during the week, and church gatherings can offer an opportunity for sharing (Melheim 2014, 223). Online blogs, social media posts, singing, and games are other ways families can share their journey throughout the week while staying connected to the community of faith (Melheim 2014, 227).

Joiner, Ivy, and Campbell recommend three behavioral attitudes that a church should adopt to be effective at partnering with families: structuring the church to be more organic rather than a program focused, assigning talented leaders in charge of small groups and family ministries, and creating a warm climate and experience where families

feel welcomed and involved (Joiner, Ivy, and Campbell 2014, 4). Joiner and Ivy, in a later work, advocated for the importance of leveraging the phase in a child's development and ensuring that the church and family collaborate effectively in their faith formation, being mindful of their future and eternity (Joiner and Ivy 2015, 6). Adults can influence the significant relationships of young people by understanding the realities they face and leveraging the opportunities they will be exposed to (Joiner and Ivy 2015, 6).

<center>Involving the Family Unit in Church Worship</center>

Rundman lists four types of families in the church. The first group is the returning families who were involved in church as children, have not attended as adults, but felt a tug to return when they had children (Rundman 2018, 114). The second type is the families that switch to churches that would better fit them once they have children (Rundman 2018, 115). The third group is the new joiners who never belonged to a church, but now that they have children, they want to try the church (Rundman 2018, 116). The fourth family type comprises the ones who have belonged to a church and find it to be a good fit for them and their children (Rundman 2018, 117). Each family type has different needs, but they also offer diverse gifts to make the church worship services a family-centered experience.

In their research, Powell, Griffin, and Crawford found that the worship experiences most effective for faith formation are those led by families rather than children- or adult-led ones (Powell, Griffin, and Crawford 2011, 87). As families lead in worship, the emphasis must be on celebrating gifts rather than perfect performance

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(Holford 2017, 20). This intergenerational process provides a synergistic development for the church and the family in a cycle of mutual revival (Beeke 2020).

Family-Church Intergenerational Alignment

Every church is unique in how it collaborates with the family unit to integrate its youth and establish robust faith-forming practices. One of these examples is a green church that focuses on gardening, ecological issues, or looking after elderly and older people's yards (Moore and Leadbetter 2017, 51). Sports churches can have specific ministries focused on playing games and training (Moore and Leadbetter 2017, 52). Some churches may focus on performing arts and having a drama club (Moore and Leadbetter 2017, 53). Music, photography, cooking, and auto-repairs are some other ministries that churches might want to focus on as they intentionally maximize intergenerational connections among their members.

Among the different opportunities a church can provide, some, such as art, have therapeutic value, in addition to the benefit of connecting family members and offering an outlet for faith formation (Nathan 2018, 35). Churches need to train leaders who can effectively integrate the family unit, provide a quality program, and direct every activity for the faith formation of the young people involved (Tyler 2018, 67). Leaders need to understand that personal connections are not natural but craved by Generation Z, and they need to facilitate activities where interactions and relationship-building activities are integrated with faith-related activities (Pandit 2015, 38).

The Need for Educating Families and Churches

The future of keeping a faith tradition alive depends on how well one generation

can transmit their faith to the next (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson, and Herzog 2011,

237). Education plays a vital role in learning how best to transmit the faith to the younger

generations and keep the legacy of faith alive. Christianity's survival depends on learning

from past mistakes and developing better habits for the future (Haydn 2015, 7). Churches

and families need to work together to reach every generation, especially the one that

seems to be dropping out the most: youth and young adults. (Haydn 2015, 21). The

broader cultural context shapes children's theologies; therefore, the church and the home

need to shape each other to increase the efficacy of faith transference in the present

context (Csinos 2018, 63).

Continuing the original research from the 1992 Valuegenesis study, Gillespie

interviewed 18,000 students from grades six to twelve in 2011, sharing his findings in a

journal called Valuegenesis 3. He charted students' responses about fundamental beliefs,

behaviors, standards, and educational practices across three decades (Gillespie 2011a,

3-6). The numbers showed a steady decline in interest in Adventist standards over time

(Gillespie 2011a, 5-6). Despite the negative trends, frequent spiritual conversations at

home and church about topics such as salvation by grace provided the most grounding for

children and adolescents in their faith formation (Gillespie 2011b, 2, 3). Based on the

decline in spirituality, faith identity, and religious standards over the last decade, it is

clear that the effort of only the family or only the church is limited, and more than ever,

the two institutions need to work together to socialize the present generation of youth in their faith development.

Conclusion

The reviewed literature in this chapter underscores the prime importance of the family unit in the faith formation of children and youth. There is a direct correlation between the spiritual socialization of children at home and their retention in the faith tradition of their upbringing. The reviewed sources recommended various ingredients for an effective faith-forming climate in the home.

Second to the home in the faith formation of youth is the church. Faith communities need to be warm places of belonging and nurture members of every generation while providing special support to families, children, and youth. It is in these non-family intergenerational relationships that young people can develop a personal faith. While providing a range of faith-forming activities within the church, young people can develop a spiritual autonomy that is mature and independent while at the same time upholding the principles they learned at home.

While the family and the church must understand their role in successfully socializing young people in a faith tradition, a synergistic relationship between the two in achieving this goal has the greatest potential to form youth's faith and engage them in the church as they become young adults. For decades, families and churches have been lamenting the growing attrition of young people from the church and faith of their upbringing. It is not too late to reverse this trend. Intentionally aligning the church and

the home to become more vibrant and grace-filled places of faith formation could be the turning point towards a new trajectory for the next few decades.

CHAPTER 4

AN ACTION PLAN FOR ENGAGING, RETAINING, AND RECLAIMING YOUNG
PEOPLE AT BARRIERE ADVENTIST CHURCH

Introduction

Like many other Christian churches worldwide, Barriere Adventist Church has

lost many of its young members over the last decades. Many parents, church leaders, and

members have expressed concern regarding the attrition of young members from the

church when they approach and reach adulthood while calling for intentional change to

reverse this trend. The future of every church depends not just on bringing in new

members through evangelism but on the effectiveness of retaining existing members,

especially those who are biologically added to the church.

Some churches have no strategy in place for this ensuing problem of attrition.

Others have ineffective strategies in place. Others are garnering every source of

knowledge to implement the most effective methods. The plan proposed in this chapter

will focus on an intergenerational model that intentionally aligns the effort of the family

and that of the church to engage, retain, and reclaim young people in the Barriere

Adventist Church.

The ministry context is a small rural church with an average attendance of about

25 members. Despite the church's smallness, it has a diverse generational representation.

The church has been meeting in a member's home during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This setting provides a warm, nurturing environment where families and members can interact organically. Church services are often informal, allowing for more organic conversations during the worship service. The church's personality attracts some people from considerable distances because it offers a different environment than the typical Adventist church.

In this small context, data will be gathered through participatory action research to achieve the desired strategy. This chapter will elaborate on how this process will be developed, implemented, and evaluated for maximum impact.

Participatory Action Research

In developing a strategy for implementation, it is essential to find an effective methodology of research that will highlight the problem areas in the church and help discover a strategy to find the appropriate solutions. Why is participatory action research the right methodology to use at the Barriere Adventist Church over traditional methods? Because participatory action research allows for an analytic and reflective approach to investigate complex real-life situations in a small context (Stringer and Ortiz Aragon, 17). Meanwhile, more than traditional research methods, action research can be customized to the needs and specificities of a group, organization, or institution by emphasizing the participation of both the researcher and the participants (Stringer and Ortiz Aragon, 18). Not even the data-collection process is fixed and predetermined. Instead, it offers a flexible approach for accommodating the specific contexts in which the research study

occurs. The collaborative aspect of this type of research allows for developing a strategy that involves the whole community in applying the necessary actions to accomplish the desired outcome (Stringer and Ortiz Aragon, 24).

While qualitative and quantitative research approaches seek outcomes that provide information regarding issues under investigation, action research goes much further. It not only provides information and valuable knowledge regarding the matters under study, but the outcome of action research helps participants to practically apply the information that surfaces and implement solutions to emerging problem areas (Stringer and Ortiz Aragon, 50). Action research involves systematic and adaptive processes of participative inquiry. It is a collaborative approach to investigation and research.

A cyclical process will be used to gather the necessary data. The first step will involve observation and the initial development of a strategy. Data will be gathered through individual interviews and focus groups. This process will be documented. Once the data is collected, a preliminary strategy will be drafted. The next step will focus on implementation. A course of action based on the analysis will be devised. For the last step, once the plan is implemented, an evaluation survey will be administered to the participants. Based on this evaluation, the cycle can be repeated and refined until a robust strategy is established (Stringer and Ortiz Aragon, 20). This process aims to introduce gradual change that emerges from interactions and relationships. The benefit of employing participatory action research is its constantly evolving nature, which allows the church to be dynamic and interactive in introducing an intentional intergenerational strategy.

The Objective of Participatory Action Research at Barriere Adventist Church

Like other traditional research methodologies, participatory action research was designed to find solutions to any given problem. Retention of young people in the church has been identified as one of the primary problems at the Barriere Adventist Church. In a study conducted in several Adventist churches, Dudley concluded that retention is closely correlated to engaging the youth in church activities (Dudley 1996, 47).

How is the Barriere Adventist Church going to achieve this effectively? How are they going to utilize their resources to achieve this goal? What intentional steps can be made towards reinforcing the faith of children and youth? What can be done for the young people who recently left the church? Can the church make an effort to reach and reclaim these young people? Participatory action research provides a platform for these dialogues, and its objective is to achieve a collective answer that can be implemented and evaluated.

Developing the Strategy

Interviews

The information gathered from the theological reflection and the literature review in the previous two chapters will provide the foundation for constructing the questions and tailoring them to each age group. While providing a background understanding of the subject matter to interviewees is essential, every effort will be made not to influence their discovery process or recognition of areas needing improvement. The goal of the interview is to gather data that is personal rather than informed by outside influences. Given the

small context, an interview will be attempted with every church member. These will be done within the context of a visit. Families will be interviewed together. In the case of a family with children, the parents will be interviewed first. A separate interview will be conducted for children seven years old and older in the presence of their parents. Teens over age sixteen will be independently interviewed unless they prefer to be interviewed with their parents or older siblings. The rest of the church members will be interviewed individually or as couples. If personal visits are difficult to set up because of pandemic-related restrictions, video-conference or teleconference meetings will be set up. If those prove difficult to arrange, a phone interview will be attempted individually or with each family. As the last attempt, text messaging or emails will be used to try to connect with church members. Every attempt will be made to ensure that through this process, the participants will not feel pressured, coerced, or burdened by the interview.

The interviews will be no longer than an hour. With the interviewees' consent, notes will be taken during or after the interview. The report will not include real names to protect interviewees' identities. Throughout the interview process, open-ended questions will be asked. Active listening will be used to help interviewees feel as comfortable as possible in sharing their personal opinions. The candidates will be asked for specificity— to provide examples and share their feelings and thoughts about each question. There may be instances where the interviewees may express that they feel uncomfortable with answering questions, especially in the case of children. In these instances, a parent or another interviewer can be trained to attempt to go through the interview process with the participant if it would increase their comfort level. Nevertheless, no further attempts will

be made if they express that they do not wish to participate in the interview. At the earliest opportunity after each interview, a reflection will be recorded.

Developing the Interview Questions

The questions will be tailored for each age group; however, the essence of the primary questions will be the same. Secondary, follow-up questions may differ, as each interview will take its own direction. There will be a few primary questions that will serve as anchor points throughout the interview.

The children's version of the first interview will consist of the following questions:

1. What are some of your favourite things that your family does that help you know Jesus better?

2. What are some of your favourite things at church that help you get to know Jesus better?

3. What are some things you wish were different at home so that you could get to know Jesus more?

4. What are some things at church that you wish were different that would help you get to know Jesus more?

5. What are some things that your family could do together with the church that would be fun?

The questions for teens and adults will be phrased as follows:

1. What elements have helped you, and are still helping you, in your faith development at home?

2. What elements have helped you in your faith development at church?

3. What are some things that you would do differently at home to help you and your family in your faith development?

4. What are some things that the church could do differently that, if they changed, would help you in your faith development?

5. How can the home and church collaborate in making the changes needed to offer a better environment for spiritual growth?

Focus Groups

The benefit of focus groups over individual or family interviews is that they provide a collaborative environment for inquiry and exposure to the different generations. Because of the small context at Barriere Adventist Church, only two focus groups will be attempted. The groups will be assembled with representation from every generation. The goal of the focus groups will be to take the information gathered from the interviews further while creating an environment where open dialogues and brainstorming can generate more answers to the problem.

Recruiting

The focus groups will need a facilitator and a secretary. There are a few candidates that will qualify for these roles. The facilitator must be open, teachable,

willing to lead, and enthusiastic. The secretary must be organized, detail-oriented, and a fast typer or writer. Three candidates fit the job description for the facilitator, and four people would be good secretaries. These will be individually interviewed and asked if they would be willing to serve in that role, and the right candidate will be selected and trained.

Format of the Focus Group Meetings

The focus group meeting will be organized after a church worship service. If two focus groups can be assembled, they can meet concurrently in two separate rooms. Two moderators will be selected, trained, and given an outline of the meeting. After some ice breaker questions, the purpose of the meeting will be stated. The participants will be asked to provide their input on the following questions:

1. What are some things that the group would like to see change in the home life and church life that would help the members grow spiritually?

2. What are some things that need to stay the same in the home and church life?

3. What ideas will make the home more effective in creating a spiritually nurturing place?

4. What ideas will make the church more inclusive of all generations?

5. How can the church and the home can collaborate in providing a safe and engaging environment for all generations, especially children and youth?

The moderators will be instructed to ask for everyone's reaction frequently. The groups will also have a secretary to ensure the information is recorded. The moderator's role will

also include encouraging less vocal people or generations to be equally involved in the conversation.

The answers the secretary collects from the above questions will be organized into three categories. The first category will contain the things that the church members should know. The second will include the skills that church members should learn and adapt. The last category will consist of the essential attitudes that church members should embrace.

A combination of dialogue, time in silence, and writing ideas out on flashcards will be utilized to gather as much information as possible. Once the brainstorming session is over, the group will have an opportunity to pray over the ideas generated. The meeting will conclude with a short debriefing session, a review of the discussed content, and prayer.

Expected Outcomes

The assumption that everyone in the church will have the desire to participate in the participatory action research is not realistic. However, there is sufficient optimism that the majority of church members will see the benefit of joining an intentional effort to (1) make the home more spiritually nurturing for children and youth, (2) create a more intergenerational church where young people are prioritized, and (3) provide a proper foundation for young people's faith by synergizing the efforts of home and church.

The expectation for the interview sessions is that most individuals will willingly participate and see the benefit of sharing their perspectives. Every church member wants

young people to stay connected to their faith and church as they grow up. Not every

member knows how to play an active role in engaging young people effectively. The

expectation is that providing an outlet for sharing ideas will draw out the members and

invite them to shape the church's culture.

There is a high likelihood that the focus-group participants will be hesitant to

share their opinions. The moderators will be trained to provide several priming questions

and examples to start the brainstorming process. The participants might be reluctant to

share, but the goal is that at the moderators' appeal, everyone will recognize the

importance of their voice in creating change and building up the church together.

Anticipated Challenges

Generational fragmentation and tensions are not unique to churches. Workplaces,

schools, and other professional settings also experience this challenge (Becker, Richards,

and Stollings 2020). At Barriere Adventist Church, this constitutes the primary problem,

and as part of seeking a solution, this generational tension might be tested. The interviews

may reveal some of these tensions and highlight the difference in perspectives. The focus

groups might also highlight these tensions, as the more dominant generations will

overshare, extinguishing the input of the less dominant ones, primarily children and

youth. Frequently, young people do not share their perspectives because they know they

will be discarded or misinterpreted (Ehmke 2020). This dynamic may be the greatest

challenge for the moderators to overcome and ensure that every generation and individual

is heard. Furthermore, the less vocal individuals will be encouraged to share their views to ensure that every voice contributes equally to finding solutions to the problem.

The adult membership of the Barriere Adventist Church expressed concern in the past that worldly influences have been entering the church, most often through young people. These are manifested through the choice of dress, jewelry, hairstyle, tattoos, language, and music. Nevertheless, in an attempt to be counter-cultural, they distance themselves from the younger generation, creating intergenerational tension. The challenge of this research is to overcome this conflict and help the youth and the children understand the older generations and vice versa. To overcome the intergenerational conflict, Covey's fifth habit of highly effective people will need to be presented and implemented in the church. This habit focuses on the importance of seeking to understand others before seeking to be understood (Covey 2015, 152).

Another challenge will be training moderators to deliver an engaging focus group session. The session's success and repeatability depend largely on how it unfolds the first time. If the participants are positively engaged, the meeting will be enjoyable and productive, and the research will easily unfold. It will be essential that the meeting not become dogmatic, prescriptive, or didactical.

Implement and Apply

The ultimate goal of action research is not only to identify primary factors contributing to problems but to find solutions and implement them, thus improving the wellbeing of participants (Stringer and Ortiz Aragon, 196). The development phase of the

action research will yield a number of ideas from the interview sessions and the focus groups. These ideas will inform the implementation part of the strategy. Information gathered in the previous two chapters from the theological reflection and the literature review will also be used to implement the strategy.

Family-Focused Training Events

As observed in numerous biblical examples in chapter two, the role of the home is dominant in the faith formation of children and youth. No other influence is greater than that of the family in shaping spirituality and identity. The literature reviewed in chapter three further reinforces the primacy of the home in the faith formation of children and youth. Subsequently, when developing programs and seminars at the Barriere Adventist Church, the first area of focus will be on the training of parents and grandparents.

Family Worship Training Workshop

Family worship is at the foundation of developing spirituality in the home. Because of their busy lifestyles, parents often skip or neglect family worship. Making family worships engaging and attractive to children has to be the intentional effort of every parent. The first event, aimed at parents, grandparents, or soon-to-be parents, will train participants to be effective family worship leaders.

The seminar will be based on the book by Donald S. Whitney called "Family Worship." It will be a five-part seminar based on the book's five chapters and will be presented once a week. The sections covered will be *Family Worship in the Bible, Family Worship in Church History, The Elements of Family Worship, But What If?,* and *Start*

Today. Every participant will receive the book, and after every chapter, the discussion guide will be used at the end of the book to facilitate conversation. During this time, participants can share their experiences, ask questions, or brainstorm new ideas to make family worship more relevant in their homes. The meetings will happen on Zoom for convenience.

<p style="text-align:center">Communication in the Home Training Event</p>

One of the key building blocks in a healthy home is communication. Doing that effectively across the parent-child generational divide is an acquired skill. With rapidly evolving technology, parents must be very intentional in staying connected to their children, maximizing the leverage they have in their education. With this in mind, another training event will be offered to parents on communicating effectively with their children and creating an emotionally safe environment for two-way learning, where parents grow just as much as their children.

Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish's *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen, and Listen So Kids Will Talk* will be used as the training material. This book will be divided into three sessions. The first session will look at helping children deal with their feelings and engaging their cooperation. The second session will cover alternatives to punishment, encouraging autonomy, and praise. The last session will focus on freeing children from playing roles and putting all the content together.

Family Bible Study Training

In the Barriere Adventist Church, Bible study is often correlated with preparation for baptism. It is often the case that baptism is the result of Bible studies. However, Bible study needs to be one of the core practices of every family and church, just as much as prayer is. Parents need to be aware that no one has a better opportunity than they do to teach their children about the foundations of their faith. However, many parents do not know where to begin on this journey. This training event will equip parents to teach their children from the Bible.

The training will include one introductory session designed for the parents. The biblical examples found in chapter two will be presented as a starting point. The skill of two-way learning, child from parent and parent from child, will be emphasized. The next session will be the Bible study itself. A Bible study guide that is age-appropriate will be used. *Let's Talk Together,* a youth Bible study guide by Steve Case, will be recommended. However, parents will also be offered a choice of other Bible studies.

The pastor or one of the trained leaders of the church will lead the first session to help parents who are not experienced in teaching their children from the Bible. The second Bible study will be a collaboration of the parent and leader. The parents will lead the third Bible study under the leader's supervision. In some cases, the children might also be willing and able to lead. In this case, the parents and children can collaborate in leading out on the lessons. If the Bible studies lead to baptism, the parents can choose to join their children in the baptistry.

Regardless of whether the studies end in baptism, once the Bible study guides are finished, parents will be trained to continue studying the Bible with their children. This last training session will provide parents with tools on how to study the Bible without a guide and find resources that will help them in this process. A second set of guided Bible studies will be recommended for families who need more practice and the help of guides.

Intergenerational Worship Service

With at least four generations in the Barriere Adventist Church, every age group should be involved equally in worship service activities. However, this rarely happens. Worship coordinators will be assigned and trained to ensure that every worship service will be intentionally intergenerational. After two months, this will be assessed and the necessary changes made. The data from the previous action research project conducted in January 2022 will be used.

Intergenerational Sabbath School

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Barriere Adventist Church has not had Sabbath school. Two years later, the church has expressed a need for studying together as a church. After discussing it, the leadership decided they would like an intergenerational Sabbath school curriculum that parents, children, and church members of every age group could study throughout the week.

Sermon Series on Mentoring for Alignment Between the Home and the Church

Intergenerational connections only happen if they are pursued intentionally. Virtually every church member recognizes the need to mentor younger generations in the

faith; however, very few have any practical skills for doing this (Seibel 2019, 21).

Because this area affects both the church and the home, a three-part sermon series will be

presented based on the essay compilation *The Generative Church: Global Conversations*

About Investing in Emerging Generations, edited by Cory Seibel. The first sermon will

deal with how the home and the church can collaborate to develop intentional

relationships between the generations. The essays in the book offer valuable insights into

mentoring, intergenerational discipleship, Biblical perspectives, and youth in the church

context. The second sermon will focus on how every generation can grow together, why

the church needs to focus on its youth, and the importance of generative growth. The final

sermon will be based on how the faith community and the home can collaborate in

reinforcing the spiritual values in which young people need training.

Community Outreach

Children and teens want to know that their parents' faith is practical and lived out

in everyday life, not just confined ecclesiastical settings (Osmer 2018, 103). The Barriere

Adventist Church has several members passionate about health, gardening, food storage,

and wilderness survival. The church will host a monthly training event catering to

community members. Church members can invite their neighbours and friends, and

young people can be involved in presenting and demonstrating these educational events.

Another outlet for outreach is the local community shelter, where the church

serves a meal once a month. This service is another opportunity for people of every age

from the church to be invited and involved. There are also unique cases in the community

that will arise where the church can assist. Once again, young people will be encouraged to help those in need. In helping, teaching, and sharing in the community, young people can witness faith in action, potentially reinforcing their faith and love for God.

Memorizing the Bible

One activity that has connected generations has been Bible memorization. The Psalmist declares that "one generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts" (Psalm 145:4 NKJV). He also states that hiding God's word in his heart, or committing it to memory, was how he was able to stand against temptations and not fall into sin (Psalm 119:11). Scripture memorization will be utilized at Barriere Adventist Church as a tool to promote intergenerational connections. It will also provide an avenue for children and youth to fortify their knowledge of the Bible and develop their faith. To achieve this, the church will cover the FAST Scripture memorization curriculum for four consecutive Sabbaths and equip the members to memorize the Bible efficiently (FAST Missions, 2022).

Outdoor Activities

Barriere is located in the scenic countryside. Several members live on farms, and there are numerous trails and outdoor attractions. Young people from the church are always excited about outdoor activities. Consequently, the church will plan a church campout in the summer and a Sabbath afternoon hike for each summer month, allowing families to come together, young people to interact with each other, and intergenerational relationships to forge naturally. Singing songs by the fire, sharing testimonies, and

hearing messages from the Bible surrounded by nature will fortify interpersonal relationships and relationships between families and the church family.

Hospitality

In a 2019 quantitative study that surveyed 2,347 households, Barna Group found that "vibrant households" that spent intentional time in spiritual conversations, spiritual practices, and hospitality most effectively passed their faith to their children (Barna 2019, 119). Interestingly, young people's spirituality is affected when they see their parents live out their beliefs and faith. Being hospitable is one of these practical expressions of faith (Barna 2019, 122). Inviting people for a meal is one of the best ways to forge meaningful relationships. Because this plays such a significant role in the faith formation of children and youth, particular emphasis will be placed on encouraging families to practice hospitality. "Guess who is coming for dinner" is a church activity where several people can offer to host a dinner, and others from the church can draw a name and be guests. People in the church can get to know each other better, and families can interact with the church family. In this way, a strong synergy can be forged between the home and the church family.

New Ideas

The development of the above-described strategy has been primarily informed by chapters two and three of this dissertation. Nevertheless, ideas will emerge from the focus groups and interviews that will enlarge or change the above plan for implementation or

add new elements. These ideas will be prioritized, and the plan will be adjusted to consider every member's contribution.

Evaluation

The development process and implementation will be evaluated to complete the first action research cycle. This appraisal will be done to ascertain the value of the training and learn how to make the next action research cycle more effective. Data collection will be done using a survey administered to every member. The book *Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation* by James D. Kirkpatrick and Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick will be used.

Level One: Reaction

The first level of the evaluation process will be instant. Every meeting will have frequent and intentional formative evaluation questions about the content (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2016, 95). The presenter will ask participants how they feel about the content and observe their body language. This technique will allow adjustments in real-time rather than waiting until the completion of the program (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2016, 96). At the end of the seminar series, a summative evaluation survey will be given to the participants (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2016, 97). The survey will ask three questions:

1. What information did you find relevant to you?

2. What information do you wish had been further discussed?

3. What would you have changed about the format?

The surveys will be compiled and tabulated, and the feedback will be used in the subsequent seminars.

Level Two: Learning

The second level of the evaluation process will focus on learning: knowledge, skills, and attitude. A short quiz will be presented after each seminar to capture knowledge retained during the seminars. This assessment will properly identify if participants retained the presented content (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2016, 99). By keeping quizzes anonymous, participants will know that this is not to measure their retention performance but to understand what information was shared and absorbed clearly and what areas need further reinforcement. The acquired skill will be evaluated during the training by dividing the participants into small groups or pairs to practice what they have learned. This process will be done several times throughout the training event. The participants' attitudes will be evaluated informally by observing their responses while evaluating their knowledge and skills. Through an evaluation performed by the presenter, a report can be done assessing whether the group's attitude has changed positively or negatively due to the program.

Level Three: Behaviour

This level goes beyond evaluating into the realm of performance monitoring (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2016, 105). Generally, after training events, the new behaviours are rarely incorporated by everyone, as the amount of content and change can be overwhelming. Thus, the content needs to be simple, so the behaviour changes

encouraged are few and critical. Monitoring behaviour change is essential for personal

growth and accountability, and the participants need to be willing to commit to a self-

evaluation process. At Barriere Adventist Church, after every seminar or training event,

there will be a 30-day checklist given to the participants that they can use to track

changes in their lives. Additionally, the results will be requested from them anonymously

after the 30 days for evaluation purposes.

Level Four: Results

This part of the evaluation will begin at the beginning of each event. Beginning

with the end in mind lies at the foundation of every organizational and personal change

(Covey 2015, 42). At the beginning of each training event, participants will be asked

what they hope to learn, what they hope to implement, and what outcomes they

anticipate. These answers will be recorded and saved. A final questionnaire will be

administered at the end of every series to assess the level of knowledge, skills, and

attitudes that were successfully acquired and applied. The results will provide a

measurable indication of the effectiveness of the training (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick

2016, 112).

Repeating the Cycle

Once the first action research cycle is complete, Barriere Adventist Church will be

ready for the second round. The timing for the second cycle will be critical. The time

frame of the first cycle will be 5-6 months. It will be important not to begin the second

cycle immediately after the first while ensuring that too much time does not pass. A two-month break between cycles will suit the Barriere Adventist Church the most.

The evaluations from the first round of training events will inform the content of the second cycle. Only seven to eight people will be interviewed in the second round, and there will be only a single focus group to refine the areas in which further training will be necessary. A reduced number of participants will be involved compared to the first round to maximize the efficiency of the repeated cycles. If the first round uncovers new problem areas, further training events will be planned and implemented. If the members are satisfied with the outcomes after the second round, future cycles will be conducted only once or twice a year.

Promoting a culture of growth and constant change is the goal of action research at Barriere Adventist Church. Every member will be invited to offer their perspectives, forming a think tank for every generation. Furthermore, the ultimate goal of action research is to bring every generation together, offer opportunities for interaction, foster relationships, promote mentoring opportunities, and spiritually nurture every individual. Home spirituality will be promoted. Generations at church will be intentionally connected. Synergy will be encouraged between the home and the church in nurturing young people in their faith. Through action research, every participant will contribute to developing a strategy for engaging and retaining children and youth in the church.

Rigor in Action Research

Action research is conducted as repeated cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The first cycle might yield data for an improved action plan (Melrose 2001, 161). For this process to provide accurate and applicable results, it needs to follow a standard of rigor. This standard can be achieved by repeating the cycle sufficiently to distill the main ideas and find constancy in the research group (Melrose 2001, 166). Aside from pursuing the highest standard of precision, rigor also relates to the ethics of action research. When applied to ethical considerations in research, this concept is associated with truth-telling, safeguarding the wellbeing of others, and avoiding any harm to others (Melrose 2001, 174).

Conclusion

The problem under consideration is that the Barriere Adventist Church has not effectively retained its young people as they become adults. Action research will be used to develop a strategy to enable the church to retain, engage, and reclaim its young people better. An intergenerational approach will be developed, implemented, and evaluated that will rely on the previous research from chapters two and three and feedback received from the interviews, focus groups, and planned activities in the church. This information will be collected and utilized to equip every member to be intentionally intergenerational. In this process, parents and grandparents will be trained to provide spiritually forming practices to their children in the home. Church members will also receive training in making the church an environment for spiritual growth for young people. Lastly, both the home and the church will receive training in how to interact synergistically to achieve

their goal of transmitting faith to the next generation. While this chapter provides the

theoretical framework for this strategy, the following chapter will discuss how the plan

was implemented and its practical outcomes.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN FOR ENGAGING, RETAINING, AND RECLAIMING
YOUNG PEOPLE AT BARRIERE ADVENTIST CHURCH

Introduction

Barriere Adventist Church consists of a balanced generational spread. In looking

at the current context, the membership has decided to invest its resources into the young

demographic of the church. The church leadership recognized that young people are the

most vulnerable generation and are likely to leave the church if not successfully engaged

and firmly grounded in their faith.

This chapter will detail the process of implementing the strategic plan constructed

and described in chapter four. Implementing participatory action research aims to achieve

a synergistic relationship between the church and the home to retain and engage young

people in the church and firmly ground them in their faith.

The Implementation Process

Institutional Review Board

To safely implement participatory action research, the Institutional Review Board

at Andrews University had to inspect and approve the strategic plan. An outline of the

process was submitted to the board, along with a certificate obtained after completing a

safety training course online. The Institutional Review Board's role is to safeguard

research participants. Every adult participant in the research signed an informed consent form, while minors signed an informed assent form. The administration of these forms took place when the subjects were recruited.

Recruiting Participants for Action Research

Given the small size of the Barriere Adventist Church (an average of 30 members in regular attendance), every member, regardless of age, was invited to participate in the research. A printed invitation to participate was given at the beginning of two consecutive Sabbath services. The candidates were assured from the beginning that their participation was voluntary and no adverse consequence would follow if they decided not to participate. No coercion was used to secure participation in the research.

The period between the end of the worship service and a fellowship meal was used to present the mechanics of action research to the members at large. The topic of research was presented, as well as the process required to accomplish the outcomes. Sixteen individuals from the membership were willing to participate in a focus group, and fourteen agreed to participate in interviews. The subjects ranged in age from 9 to 87. Every generation was represented, and the candidates signed informed assent or informed consent forms (See Appendix A and B). After the forms were signed, a brief meeting was held to set the time for the first round of interviews and the first focus group with the recruits.

Additionally, two interviewers, a group facilitator, and two secretaries were nominated from the pool of volunteers. A training meeting was scheduled for this core

leadership team to plan the next phase of the research process. The interviewers' job consisted of asking the provided questions from the interviewed candidates and any secondary follow-up questions. The unscripted follow-up questions were subject to the safety criteria the Institutional Review Board required. In addition to the interviewers, a secretary was asked to be present during the interview, recording the questions and the answers that were collected. Similarly to the interviewers, the focus group facilitator received the discussion topics to lead the group conversations. The two interviewers, secretaries, and focus group leader were trained to conduct the interviews safely. The core leadership team was asked to report the gathered data to the research leader.

Gathering Data

Interviews

Two groups of interviewees were assembled, each consisting of six participants. They were supplied with the initial set of questions. Permission was sought for the interview to be recorded anonymously by the secretary for data collection. Two small rooms at the church were used for the interviews. The interviewers introduced the session with an overview of how action research works, the safety protocols in place, and the overall topic of discussion. An additional four-minute synopsis covered the literature review and theological reflection from chapters three and four of this dissertation.

Four minors under the age of sixteen participated. They were interviewed as a family together with their parents. Two couples also preferred to be interviewed together. The rest of the candidates were interviewed individually. At the initial meeting with the

participants, the decision was reached to make interviews a maximum of 45 minutes long. If the allotted time was insufficient, an additional meeting was set until all five interview questions were answered.

The first question addressed to children was: "What are some of your favourite things that your family does that help you know Jesus better?" All four children mentioned singing with their families. One child also mentioned that he got to know Jesus better when his parents read stories with moral lessons during family worship. Two of the four children had mentioned that they have regular family worship. The other two indicated that they have occasional family worship. One of the children shared that when the family goes out in nature, they feel the presence of Jesus. Reading the Bible or watching a Christian movie with the family were listed among the activities that helped children connect to Jesus. Playing Bible games was another activity children mentioned as a good way to feel close to their family and Jesus. Common denominators for the activities were playfulness, interactiveness, adventure, intentional routine, and connection.

Adults were asked a similar question: "What elements have helped and are still helping you in your faith development at home?" Some of the answers were based on the interviewees' childhood memories. Others answered the question based on their present family context. For a few candidates, sharing spiritual quality time has played a role in their personal faith formation. Some examples of this were sharing meals while discussing spiritual topics with the family, memorizing Scripture, doing regular family worship, inviting guests over for dinner, and singing. Music seemed to be an excellent

bonding medium for a number of families in this congregation. Some of them play different musical instruments, and they expressed how music has been a significant component of their faith journey.

The next question children received was: "What are some of your favourite things at church that help you get to know Jesus better?" Three children expressed that our community outreach was their most spiritually edifying activity. The church's yearly camping trip has been another activity that brought children closer to Jesus, according to three of them. Two children also expressed that being included in leading out during the worship service made them feel like they belonged to the fellowship of the church, which in turn made them feel closer to Jesus. Three children also mentioned people in the church as to why they look forward to coming to church and feel close to Jesus. One of the surprising findings that this question produced was that it was not the events like children's story, children's activities, Pathfinders, or children's Sabbath School that stood out as spiritually engaging to children, but rather moments throughout the time they spent together and relationships that made them feel valued, appreciated, and spiritually engaged.

The adult participants received a similar question: "What elements have helped you in your faith development at church?" Sabbath school and the worship service were only briefly mentioned by a few of the interviewees. Several mentioned the outreach projects in the community as a spiritually edifying endeavour our church does. Two participants expressed that giving Bible studies has been faith-building for them. Seven people expressed that the prayer meeting hour was the most faith-building for them. Five

individuals expressed that having a Friday evening musical vespers brought them closer to God. Nine individuals expressed that sharing their faith in the community has helped them on their journey, while four others expressed that mentoring young people in the church has been spiritually enriching to them. Eight candidates expressed the value of relationships in the church as faith-building; seven others expressed the value of having an official role in the church as the reason they were engaged in the church and their faith.

When asked, "What are some things you wish were different at home so that you could get to know Jesus more?" one of the children answered that he hoped to spend more time with his parents helping needy people in the community. Another child wanted his parents to invite guests home more often and talk about the Bible. Playing more Bible games was another child's idea of improving spirituality at home. Two children shared that spending more time in nature with their family and pets would help them get to know God more. A common denominator for the children's answers was that spending more quality time with their families would also help them grow spiritually.

The next question the adults were asked was: "What are some things that you would do differently at home to help you and your family in your faith development?" Six interviewees shared a desire to have more time to spend with their families. They also shared how they wanted to increase personal interaction by reducing or eliminating screen time in their homes. Five individuals shared how they wanted to have more regular family worship time. Four candidates shared how they wanted to be more involved with their families in supporting a cause or helping an individual in need. Two

others mentioned Scripture memorization as an activity they wanted to incorporate into their daily family devotions to increase spirituality in the home. Four people shared that they would like to increase the number of intentional spiritual conversations at home, and three others expressed that they would like to spend more time outdoors in nature with their families.

The fourth question the four children were asked was: "What are some things at church that you wish were different that would help you get to know Jesus more?" One of the children shared that having more social activities would be good for building community and increasing spirituality. Some suggested activities were hikes, playing sports, and camping trips. Two other children suggested that offering help in the community to the elderly and needy families would help the church increase its activity and spirituality. Another recommendation was to involve every generation consistently in the worship service, inviting them to bring their instruments to play along during our praise and worship time.

The adults were asked: "What are some things the church could do differently that, if changed, would help you in your faith development?" One person recommended that the church have a mentorship program for the worship service and involve children more intentionally in worship, pairing them with an adult. Children could be paired with adult mentors and intentionally discipled in all the church's activities, such as leading out in song service, collecting the tithes and offerings, leading out in prayer, telling children stories, sharing a sermonette, helping to prepare and serve the food at potlucks, and helping with the clean-up. Twelve people recommended that the church adopt an

intergenerational Sabbath school, one that the church has tried for a month already. Five other people suggested that we poll the community to find out the greatest needs and interests, put on training events on those topics, and involve every generation in the church in these presentations. Six other individuals recommended that our church incorporate regular training seminars on various topics that would elevate spirituality in our church. Some recommended topics were financial management, relationships, healthy cooking, canning, home remedies, and depression recovery. In some of these, children and youth could be invited to help. Two individuals expressed a desire to see doctrinal truth being shared in a seminar format and the church more involved in sharing the advent message. Four individuals expressed that having ongoing Bible Studies would allow our members and guests to grow in their faith.

The last question the children were asked was: "What are some things that your family could do together with the church that would be fun?" This question was challenging for the children at first. After some thought, one child suggested that the church should feature a family once a month, and they should lead out in the worship service. Two other children recommended that the church find and help a needy family in the congregation or the community. Another suggestion from a child was that a different family should host a musical vespers program every week. This activity would be interactive and fun and bring families together in worshipping God.

The final question adults were asked was: "How can the home and church collaborate in making the changes needed to offer a better environment for spiritual growth?" Three participants answered that having a church-wide meeting once a quarter

where families can share challenges and successes in their spiritual practices could boost spirituality and synergy in the church. One of the interviewees expressed their view that the church is like an extended family to the many individual family units, and having an outlet for sharing and interacting could help the church better support its families. Another participant recommended that it would be beneficial if one family or individual per Sabbath would share a spiritual lesson they learned that week in their devotional life. Three individuals also suggested that the church host regular family seminars to build spirituality in the home. Five individuals expressed that they would like more interaction between individual families and the church family at large so that the two can mutually help each other fulfill their shared goal.

Distilling the Core Ideas from the Interviews

Once the initial interview process was complete, the interviewers, secretaries, and research coordinator met to ascertain the main ideas extrapolated from the twelve interviews. The five questions provided a good starting point for distilling some things already working well in the home and the church and some areas where the two institutions could synergize to accomplish their shared goals.

The following points were distilled from the interviews:

1. Shared family activities and quality time for spiritual growth are important. Some of these are playing Christian music with instruments at home, singing, family worship, time spent in nature, watching Christian entertainment, memorizing Scripture, hosting guests, playing sports, camping trips, and playing Bible games.

2. Balancing outreach in the community and inreach to every member is important to the Barriere Adventist Church. Organizing outreach events in the community and social activities within the church, such as camping trips, prayer meetings, musical vespers, Bible studies, and game nights, are equally important. Intentionally including and mentoring young people in worship activities is essential. However, the scope of discipleship goes far beyond organized events to intentionally spending time with people of every generation, seeking to understand their needs and sharing in their lives.

3. Reduce technology and screen time in favour of connecting intentionally and establishing spiritual routines such as regular family worship and scripture memorization with the whole family.

4. Intentionally and regularly include every generation in the worship services at the church, along with a well-structured mentorship program.

5. Have an intergenerational Sabbath school with a synchronized curriculum.

6. Provide training events to the church fellowship and the community on relevant topics of interest, such as relationships, discipling, communication, parenting, healthy cooking, financial management, survival skills, sustainability, canning, home remedies, and depression recovery.

7. Offer doctrinal presentations to evangelize the community and establish younger members in their faith.

8. Showcase one family per month, allowing them to share spiritual highlights from their life with the church.

9. Provide church assistance to needy families.

10. Hold regular church-wide gatherings where families can share openly.

The Focus Group

The next phase of action research was the focus group. A group of sixteen individuals was assembled to discuss and further interact with the problem that the interviews addressed. Beyond the scope of the interviews, the focus group was intended to encourage open dialogue among the participants and provide an opportunity to elaborate further on the best strategy for achieving the shared goal of the church and the individual families represented.

Similarly to the training given to the two interviewers, the focus group moderator was also instructed on how to conduct the meeting safely, complying with the Institutional Review Board requirements. Every participant signed either an informed assent form or an informed consent form. There were three children under the age of sixteen in the focus group and thirteen adults representing every generational cohort.

After prayer and introduction, the following question was asked: "What are some things the group would like to see change in the home and church life that would help the members grow spiritually?" The question was further refined by asking how spiritual growth happens. One of the participants suggested that spiritual growth requires an environment where people feel comfortable but also where their faith is challenged. Intentionally including young people in church leadership positions was one such example. While most of the participants in the group saw the value and benefit of involving and engaging young people in the church by entrusting them with leadership

roles, some also expressed their reservations because mentorship would require the kind of consistency that very few adult members could offer. Nevertheless, the group concluded that while involving youth, changing culture, and becoming intentionally intergenerational would be the more difficult path to take, it would also be the more rewarding one in the long term.

Another suggestion from the group was the importance of activities outside the church. Community outreach would allow every member to apply their faith practically and model it to the younger generations. Foreign mission trips were also recommended as an outlet for outreach, an avenue through which young people could be mentored to help those in need.

The next question was: "What are some things that need to stay the same in the home and church life?" Several members shared that they see music as a unifying element that brought the generations together in the church. The intergenerational Sabbath school that the church tried in the last three months has also been a blessing. A monthly outreach to the community, frequent nature walks with the church, and a yearly camping trip were mentioned as positive practices that provide an intergenerational atmosphere for faith-building. A number of participants also shared that regular or semi-regular family worships were part of their routine. Singing, sharing meals, and spending quality time together were some of the strengths of at least two homes. While a few new ideas were proposed, the group realized that some of the existing elements of the family and church only needed reinforcement and enhancement.

The following question was presented to the group next: "What ideas will make the home more effective in creating a spiritually nurturing place?" Beyond the already mentioned ideas from the interviews, several group members suggested the importance of offering their children the opportunity to lead in family worship at home. Mentorship for leadership is something that should begin at home. Another recommendation was for parents to review the Sabbath School lesson with their children. Intentional spiritual activities at home lay the foundation for socializing children's faith. Spirituality is also evident and transmitted to children not only by talking about spiritual topics in the home but also by having a lifestyle, hospitality, charitable heart, and a generous spirit, which children observe and apply in their own lives. One participant commented that parents who seek to transmit their faith to their children should follow God's leading with humility rather than seek to be assertive and strong leaders in their homes.

The next question was asked: "What ideas will make the church more inclusive of all generations? " Similarly to the home, the church can increase its effectiveness in engaging and retaining young people. One important missing element was asking young people about their spiritual and emotional needs. The group's consensus was that the church's adult membership is responsible for seeking out the best and most effective way of modelling faith to the younger generations. A group member suggested that the church should host a monthly gathering to evaluate and seek to improve the existing activities of the church. Every member of the church should be invited to participate in these meetings.

The group also discussed the importance of reaching out to the young members who stopped attending church. Reclaiming them should be a matter of intentional effort and prayer. When making contact with them, the suggestion was made that the members should only call to see how the individual is doing. Remarking that they are missed or alluding to the fact that they should come back was rejected by the group as a method of reclaiming them. Instead, seeking to spend time with them and inquiring about their life should be the first connection point, according to several group members. They also suggested that reaching out to reclaim young people who stopped attending should be done delicately, not to create guilt, but to attempt to reconnect. The group identified seven young people who no longer attend and who should be contacted. Two individuals from the group volunteered to reach out to them.

The last question asked in the focus group was: "How can the church and the home collaborate in providing a safe and engaging environment for all generations, especially children and youth?" The group recognized that the greatest deciding factor for children's faith formation is the home. Therefore, the church's role is a supportive one that nurtures families and supports the faith formation of young people, which they primarily receive at home. The church has an excellent opportunity to bring families together, creating platforms where not only young people learn from each other, but parents learn from each other as well. Regular connection points for parents allow them to develop and grow with each other by sharing their journeys.

The group also discussed the practical reality of mentorship. Because in recent years, working with children has become an increasingly more sensitive issue, with the

number of sex offenders rising, the Barriere Adventist Church has decided to have family mentors. The suggestion was made for a senior couple to adopt a young family, or vice versa, and the two families could spend time together performing various activities. This practice would naturally provide opportunities for mentorship and relationship building.

The group discussed the topic further, and several individuals underscored the importance of the family unit allying with the church to engage and retain young people in their faith. This alliance would benefit the family unit and the church family, making each more effective in accomplishing their goal than if they worked independently. The synergy of a shared goal maximizes the two institutions' ability to be effective in their pursuit.

The alliance of the church and family was not the only one discussed. The group also raised the need to ally with other community outreach organizations. Homeless ministries, youth ministries in the community, and foreign mission organizations were recommended as partners to socialize young people in the church with other Christians. Some expressed their hesitance regarding non-denominational partnerships, especially youth ministries, as some feared an ecumenical Christian environment would dilute the uniqueness of the Adventist beliefs for the young people of our church. Others from the group countered by expressing the importance of young people having friends outside the church, especially if these friendships still share a similar Christian foundation. The consensus was that as long as the family and the church have properly grounded young people spiritually, there should be no fear of their faith being eroded by external influences; instead, they would have the opportunity to reinforce and share their faith.

A shared goal and vision are essential for the church and the home to synergize. The focus group also discussed what shared core values they would like to define and intentionally implement. They identified five core values: motivation, relationships, priorities, consistency, and simplicity. Firstly, having a clearly defined motivation for every action can help family members and church members become more intergenerational in their approach. Secondly, the church wants to nurture an intergenerationally inclusive environment by focusing on relationships rather than information. Thirdly, the group concluded that the culture and identity of the church and home should centre around the shared goal of prioritizing young people in the church. Lastly, the church and home should simplify and streamline their activities to facilitate young people's faith formation.

The group also briefly discussed the need to educate the church membership and its families through lectures and seminars on intergenerational faith transmission. The decision was made to have a seminar every three months on intergenerational faith transference. The meeting ended with prayer and a renewed zeal for putting into practice the discussed ideas.

Distilling the Core Ideas from the Focus Group

After the focus group meeting, the following ideas were collected for tabulation:

1. Foster a culture where young people are entrusted with leadership roles in the church.

2. Disciple younger generations through more community outreach and foreign missions.

3. Continue building on the existing church ministries: music ministry, intergenerational Sabbath school, outreach in the community, nature hikes, and camping trips.

4. Continue building on and enhancing quality time spent in the home by focusing on shared meals, family worship, and time spent together in spiritual conversations.

5. Give children leadership responsibilities in the home to allow them to practice their faith.

6. Intentionally create sharing opportunities where young people can express their needs in a safe environment.

7. Meet monthly with families to brainstorm and evaluate the new activities in the home and the church.

8. Make contact with non-attending young members in a delicate way to check how they are doing, not guilting them for their absence.

9. Create a program for older members/couples to mentor younger families in and outside the church by connecting throughout the week.

10. Ally family, church, and other Christian outreach missions in the community.

11. Have a shared goal in the home and church, and uphold the five shared core values: motivation, relationships, priorities, consistency, and simplicity.

12. Integrate education via quarterly seminars for families and church members.

Summary of Data Gathering

The interviews and focus group yielded several ideas. They also highlighted the areas of concern and challenges of the church. During the focus group, the facilitator

needed to ask the younger people for their ideas and contributions because they tended to be overlooked. Prioritizing young people in the church has to start with including them in the planning phase of the church. Another challenge that emerged was distinguishing between topics exclusive to parents and discussions that should include younger generations. The interviews and the focus group provided a good starting point for collecting ideas and the foundation for implementing these ideas.

Implement and Apply

After data was collected from the interviews and the focus group, an implementation committee was assembled. This committee consisted of people who participated in the research. Five individuals were selected to meet and discuss an implementation strategy. The implementation group took the gathered data from the interviews and the focus group, separating the ideas into two categories: event-focused and culture-focused. The group also decided to select only three event-based ideas and three culture-based ideas to implement every three months to avoid being overwhelmed by the initial amount of ideas. The three events would be planned and promoted in the church. The culture-based ideas would be showcased in the church during every worship service. The three selected events were an intergenerational Sabbath school, a training seminar on communicating with children, and a bi-weekly outreach event in the community. The group's culture-based ideas were to engage young people in leading out in the home and the church, encourage older couples to mentor young families, and encourage quality time spent with young people both at home and church.

Implementing Idea #1: Intergenerational Sabbath School

One of the best ways to synergize the efforts of the church and the family in the faith formation of every member is through Sabbath School. Beyond individual development, growing together by sharing a synchronized curriculum has been something the Barriere Adventist Church considered crucial in engaging every generation. South-East California Conference has graciously provided its "Growing Together" curriculum to the Barriere Adventist Church.

The trial was successful, and the church adopted the intergenerational Sabbath school. The program was structured to provide a synchronized topic developed for every age group. The families could study the lesson together at home, as the topic for every age group would be the same. Although the program was designed to separate each age group into age-appropriate classes during the Sabbath school time, the Barriere Adventist Church decided to keep all the generations together in the same space. This step was taken primarily out of necessity, as our church did not have classrooms for the children's divisions. However, this became a blessing after the church overcame the initial challenges of adjusting to a radically different Sabbath school experience.

After the initial two sessions, two teachers were assigned. Every age group's segment was covered for 3-5 minutes every day of the week. Six different age groups were in the rotation: pre-kindergarten, primary, junior, junior-high, youth, and discipler/ adult. The spotlight would shift from one age group to the other through the Sabbath school, and other age groups could contribute to the lesson. The role of the teacher was to help keep the Sabbath school time interactive, intergenerational, and engaging.

The Growing Together Sabbath school has been an excellent tool for bringing the church and the family together, including all the various generations. This will be an ongoing event that the church voted to keep and use indefinitely.

Implementing Idea #2: Communicating with Children Training Event

The second church-wide event was a training seminar on communicating with children. Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish's *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen, and Listen So Kids Will Talk* was used as the primary resource. The seminar was primarily for parents, but adult church members were also invited to attend. The training consisted of three sessions:

1. Helping children deal with their feelings and engaging their cooperation.

2. Alternatives to punishment, encouraging autonomy, and praise.

3. Freeing children from playing roles and putting all the content together.

The seminar was offered in a presentation style on three consecutive Sabbath afternoons. It was important for parents to learn key communication techniques, listen to the input of older members, and learn from each other. This process allowed parents and other church members to interact, collaborating synergistically to accomplish a shared goal: learning to communicate effectively with children.

Implementing Idea #3: Community Outreach Event

The third church-wide event was a community outreach to the local homeless mission. The church offered to sponsor and host a biweekly dinner for people in the community experiencing homelessness. The church gathered together to prepare and

serve the meal. Members could interact with those without homes, sitting with them and sharing a meal. The parents and their children offered a musical program and an encouragement message before the meal was served. This outreach blessed our neighbors who lack homes and the families involved. It also allowed the church and home to collaborate in applying their faith practically, thus modelling service and compassion to the young generation. The intent was to engage young people in acts of service, resulting in deeper faith experiences.

Implementing Idea #4: Entrusting Young People with Leadership Roles

The traditional mindset of adults leading and teaching children often leaves young people disengaged and stunts their development. The Barriere Adventist Church has decided to intentionally empower young people by giving them leadership roles. These roles ranged from leading in prayer or song service, sharing a sermonette, or offering special music in church. If their maturity level and ability allowed, supportive church offices were assigned to them. These were assisted roles, with adult leaders mentoring children in leadership. Families could also apply the same principles at home: engaging children to lead family worship, prayer at mealtime, singing, and other such responsibilities. If parents and church leaders synergized in empowering young people, they would be better socialized in their faith. This message was promoted every Sabbath in church.

Implementing Idea #5: Family Mentorship

Young people and parents both need to be mentored by older generations. An invitation to adopt and mentor a family was added to the weekly church announcements and has also been the topic of a new sermon series on discipleship. Young families were also encouraged to approach an elderly couple and ask them if they would like to become their mentors. A few ideas of how to mentor were presented during the sermon series. Some of these included regular visits and shared outings where the families could organically interact, learn from each other, and grow spiritually. Several church families were connected this way and started a mutual mentorship journey.

Implementing Idea #6: Intentional Quality Time

Young people unanimously expressed that they felt most emotionally connected to their parents and with God when they knew that they were spending quality time together. This time may have been spent sharing meals, playing games, participating in family worship at home, or going on camping trips or day hikes in nature with other families from the church. The church included a segment in the weekly announcements promoting quality family time. The implementation committee also planned a monthly outing with the whole church, where all the families could unite and share quality time as a church.

Repeating the Cycle

The ultimate goal of action research at Barriere Adventist Church was to bring the generations together, offer opportunities for interaction, foster relationships, promote

mentoring opportunities, and spiritually nurture every member. Achieving an efficient synergy between the home and the church to retain, engage, and reclaim young people in the church will require an intentional and mutual effort. This goal will be reached by repeating the above-described process. It will create a culture of growth that seeks to make the church an intergenerational community where young people can form their faith and thrive in it. The remaining ideas from the pool will be strategically implemented throughout the successive cycles. After the evaluation process, additional interviews and focus groups will be organized to brainstorm new ways to achieve the shared goal of retaining and engaging young people in the church.

Conclusion

Action research was implemented at the Barriere Adventist Church to develop a strategy enabling the church to retain, engage, and reclaim its young people better. This chapter has described the development and implementation of one cycle of this intergenerational approach of bringing the home and church together. Action research was used as a learning and growing vehicle, where the home and the church worked together to provide a safe environment for young people to be rooted in their faith. In the following chapter, an evaluation of this first action research cycle will be provided, and the overall conclusions of this project will be drawn.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN AND FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

This project intended to consider the problem of the increasing attrition of young

people from the Barriere Adventist Church when they reach adulthood. The proposed

solution in this dissertation was to recommend the synergistic collaboration of the home

and church to engage and retain young people in the Adventist faith. Barriere Adventist

Church, a small rural community, has been the context for conducting action research and

investigating a strategic plan to achieve this goal.

This final chapter of the project will primarily describe the evaluation process of

action research. It will comprise the conclusions drawn from the implementation process

(chapter 5). Secondly, this chapter will consider the conclusions drawn from the

theological reflection (chapter 2), the literature review (chapter 3), and the strategic plan

(chapter 4).

Evaluating the Implementation of Action Research

Once the first stage of the implementation process was completed, the outcome of

the strategic plan was evaluated. The book *Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training*

Evaluation by James D. Kirkpatrick and Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick guided the

evaluation.

Level One: Reaction

For implementation ideas one through three (see Chapter 5), there were formative

evaluation questions about the content throughout every meeting (Kirkpatrick and

Kirkpatrick 2016, 95). The presenter asked participants for feedback about the content.

This practice allowed for adjustments to be implemented in real time rather than waiting

until the completion of the program (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2016, 96). A month

after each of the three programs was implemented, a summative evaluation survey was

administered to the participants (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick 2016, 97).

For the intergenerational Sabbath school, an evaluation survey was administered

at the end of the first month. The survey asked the following three questions:

1. Did the intergenerational Sabbath school help you grow spiritually?

2. Have you been able to connect with other generations through this Sabbath school?

3. What would you change about the current format of the lesson?

The survey questions allowed participants to share their experiences. The survey

was kept anonymous to reduce the probability of participant bias. About 70% of the

church members filled out the survey. For the first question, fourteen of the answers were

affirmative, while four did not answer. The positive feedback suggested that the lesson

was helping them develop and grow spiritually.

The second question prompted members to consider the new intergenerational dynamic in the church. Every respondent favoured the new Sabbath school curriculum and expressed that it provided a bridge to interact with different generations during the lesson.

When asked what they would like to change about the lesson format, several individuals preferred that the different generations study the lesson separately in church, coming together only for a short intergenerational segment and sharing time. They recommended that families study together at home but separate by age group at church. Others suggested that the lesson be simplified: instead of switching around the different generations multiple times, the teacher should dedicate 10-15 minutes to every age group, where other generations could still interact in the other's discussion and study. Others expressed that they liked the multiple generational rotations and enjoyed being together in the same space. Deciding how the Sabbath school will continue in the future will be discussed at the next focus group session.

The training event *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen, and Listen So Kids Will Talk* was evaluated at the end of the three-part seminar with a survey that asked the following three questions:

1. From 1-10, please indicate how effective your intergenerational communication was prior to this seminar?

2. From 1-10, please rate your intergenerational communication skills after the seminar?

3. Please provide 1-2 suggestions on how to improve similar seminars in the future.

The first two questions were provided to allow the participants to self-assess their communication skills. The average result for question one was 5.7, while the average for question two was 8.5. This difference highlighted primarily the importance of providing education on this topic. Secondly, it demonstrated the dramatic improvement and effectiveness of the seminar. The suggestions from question three ranged from providing similar trainings regularly, having more breakout sessions in the meetings, providing training events for families with children, and having different people lead the trainings.

The outreach event was evaluated with the following two-question survey:

1. How did the community service outreach to the homeless impact your spirituality?

2. How can the home and church collaborate more effectively to reach the needy in our community?

The first question yielded several short testimonies from people who expressed the profound benefit of having an opportunity for applied faith. For many, being able to help others was the substantiation of what they learned in church and in their personal and family devotion. The survey reaffirmed the importance of community outreach for personal spiritual growth and modelling practical faith to the younger generations. The second question yielded several suggestions to consider at a future implementation committee meeting. One person recommended that the church nominate a different family monthly to lead an outreach initiative in the community. Another suggestion was that the church should do an outreach effort in the community every Sabbath after church. Another suggestion was that every Sabbath, the church should showcase the work done in the community along with a family that contributed. Smaller individual projects could be

done by individual members or families and shared with the church during the outreach spotlight. These were valuable answers to consider at future planning sessions.

For the remaining three implementation ideas, the same survey was administered, asking the following two questions:

1. How has the recent effort to make the home and the church more intergenerational affected you?

2. How can the church and the home better collaborate to achieve their shared goal?

Although the specific answers to the first question were diverse, the overarching theme was that the church and home have dramatically been transformed during the one month of implementation. Several parents shared that intentionally creating quality time in their homes contributed to elevated spirituality. Others shared that including young people in leading out in church and practical activities, such as collecting the offering, made the church a more spiritual place. Some of the recommendations to the second question suggested that the church should be more intentional in prioritizing young families and young people in the church, providing frequent and consistent opportunities for interaction between the church and the families within the church, reminding the church often of its vision and priorities, and investing resources and time in families and young people. In this way, the church and the home could grow together and grow young.

Level Two: Learning

The second phase of the evaluation process focused on learning: knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The acquired skill was evaluated during the training seminar by

dividing the participants into small groups or pairs to practice what they had learned. Evaluating the effectiveness of the intergenerational Sabbath school and outreach event also happened informally after every event. A 10-15 minute window was reserved after every meeting, and the leader asked the participants to share what they had learned.

During the training event, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen, and Listen So Kids Will Talk*, the presenter observed the participants' attitudes. There were two question-and-answer periods during every session when the participants and the presenter could ask questions. This interactive approach was the best way to assess the level of retention. The goal was not to test the listeners' knowledge after the seminar but to ensure they had a positive learning environment where they could engage with others and learn better communication patterns.

A 30-minute reflection and prayer time was reserved to evaluate the implementation of the community outreach, where participants gathered at the church to share their experiences and what they had learned. This activity provided an environment of mutual learning in an intergenerational setting.

A monthly evaluation session has also been set, where the implementation ideas 4-6 were discussed, and the members shared what they had learned, as well as recommendations for improvement. This provided an opportunity to learn from each other and for the coordinator to learn from the participants, while the ideas were implemented in real time.

Level Three: Behaviour

At the beginning of the six-part implementation process, participants were asked to journal the changes that they were noticing at home and the church. They were asked to keep track of these changes for 30 days. This process was primarily for self-assessment purposes, but after one month, the church spent 30 minutes during the Sabbath school class to debrief and discuss the behavioural changes in the attitudes of the church, the family, and the individuals. The members brought their journals and shared their personal journeys, but the discussion also reflected on the cultural changes that were taking place in the home and the church. The group discussed the benefits of the intentional collaboration of the church and the home to include and engage young people in the church. Inviting every generation to interact in the church has impacted people's perception of the church at large.

Level Four: Results

After the reaction, learning, and behavioural assessments, the final phase of the evaluation will focus on the results. After the first month of implementation, a survey was administered to evaluate the changes that resulted from the action research. The survey asked two questions:

1. What changes did you notice the church and home make to engage young people more?

2. What were some of the effective ways in which the home and the church worked together to engage young people?

The answers to the first question highlighted some areas of improvement. Intentionally including young people in spiritual activities at home and in the church resulted in young people winning the confidence of adults, showing that they could be entrusted with any responsibility. The answers also showed that young people appeared more invested and interested in spiritual activities when asked to lead and participate actively in the home and church worship activities. Young people not only benefited, but the survey answers also showed an increase in overall engagement across every generation. When young people were entrusted to lead in home worship, community outreach, or church-related activities, the members indicated a more interactive and vibrant experience. An area of deficiency that arose was a need for training activities for young people. One of the comments recommended that young people need more equipping before they are entrusted with more responsibility. This deficit will be an area of further discussion in future action research cycles: how to equip young people in leadership effectively.

The second question sought to assess the effectiveness of the synergistic collaboration between the home and the church. The answers to this question confirmed that having a shared vision between the home and the church is beneficial for discipling the younger generation and socializing them in the faith. Developing shared core values was another way in which the home and the church were able to align. The intentional and frequent interaction between the families and the church allowed young people's needs to be voiced and prioritized.

At the end of the three-month implementation cycle, a final questionnaire will be administered to assess the level of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that were successfully acquired and applied. These results will provide the foundation for the next phase of action research.

Conclusions

This project provided the first step for the Barriere Adventist Church to develop a strategic plan to reach its young people. Action research has to become an extended activity in the church in order to continue becoming more intergenerational. This project sought to set the foundation for a life-long culture change that would align the home and church to retain and engage young people in the church. In addition to the implementation and evaluated findings discussed above and in the previous chapter, the conclusions from Chapters Two, Three, and Four are discussed below.

Conclusions from Theological Reflection

The Bible provides numerous examples of successful faith transference from one generation to another, both within the context of faith communities and the home. As seen in numerous biblical narratives, the home is the primary institution where faith formation occurs. Based on this blueprint, the home is the first place where discipleship happens and spirituality develops. The faith community has a supportive role, and if working in unison with the family, it can enhance the efforts of parents in socializing their children in the faith. While the general principle of discipling younger generations

in their parents' faith is well supported in the Bible, unfortunately, this does not always result in children capturing and carrying on in their parent's faith.

There are numerous biblical exceptions where the outcome of the children's faithfulness is dramatically different from that of their parents. Nevertheless, the primary motivation for parents and faith communities is responsibility towards God rather than a guaranteed outcome. Still, if parents and faith communities worked together and modelled faithfulness to their children, they would more likely engage in their faith and aspire to follow their parents' example. The Bible repeatedly highlights the parents' and faith communities' shared responsibility towards God in discipling their children into a relationship with God. However, beyond the weight of responsibility, the reward of spending eternity with their family should motivate every family and church member to work together to achieve this shared goal.

Conclusions from Literature Review

Some of the reviewed literature provided a background of the predominant context in Christianity regarding faith transference. Understanding the existing challenges that parents and churches face today was necessary as a starting point in the theoretical research. Secondly, the reviewed literature provided a starting point for understanding how to transfer faith between generations successfully. Some of this information stemmed from practical and implemented research by various authors. Other literature provided theoretical guidelines, which ultimately informed the strategic planning and implementation of this project.

The key takeaways were similar to those from the previous chapter, namely, the primacy of the home in socializing young people in the faith, the importance of the faith community as a supporting institution to the family, and the value of the two institutions collaborating and synergizing in transferring faith to the younger generations. Turning the home and the church into an intergenerational space of mutual learning could help address the problem of attrition of young people in Christianity at large.

Conclusions from Strategic Planning

Chapter Four presented a context-specific strategy after the general foundation set by the theological reflection and literature review. Like most Christian churches in North America, Barriere Adventist Church has had poor results in retaining its young people. The strategic plan presented in chapter four sought to offer a strategic plan to retain young people in the church through engagement. Education was a key part of this strategy, where families and church members were to receive practical training on effectively engaging young people in the church. This strategy hypothesized that if the home and the church collaborated and reciprocally supported each other, they would be more effective in engaging and retaining their children and youth. This proposed solution was the premise of the ensuing action research. It will continue to be the driving force in creating an intergenerational culture in the church for the years to come.

Overarching Conclusion

While every parent in the Barriere Adventist Church wants to pass down their faith to their child successfully, this has not always happened—partly because this goal

was not maintained consistently and partly because families and churches did not have the proper training to achieve it. Another reason why families and churches have often failed at transmitting their faith is their lack of intentional synergy. This has led to apathy in the church and the home, and young people feel no desire to engage in their faith.

What if that were to change? What if families and churches joined hands and prioritized their young people? What if they collaborated and sought to constantly brainstorm new ways of engaging young people? What if parents, church leaders, and members worked in unison to intentionally socialize young people in their faith? What if young people were welcome and entrusted with active roles in the church? What if young people felt comfortable stepping up and sharing their gifts with people from every generation in the church? What if every member was eager to learn with people from other generations?

While action research provided merely a starting point for a proposed culture change, the hope is that Barriere Adventist Church will serve as a prototype for other churches and institutions seeking to engage and retain young people in their faith. This strategy of synergizing the home and the church to achieve an intergenerational alliance can potentially become a winning formula for reversing the problem that the Adventist church and Christianity face in losing their young people from the faith.

From the array of lessons I've learned through this project, I would like to mention a few. First, I've learned the importance of educating people. Providing people with tools is the first step in combating any problem. Secondly, I've learned the power of relational learning. While my research from a number of literary sources was informative,

nothing compared to what I learned first hand from the people in the church. Thirdly, I've learned the importance of humility and listening attentively, rather than assuming a didactic or authoritative stance on any ideology. Fourthly, I've learned the importance of prioritizing a culture and casting a vision for the church to grow young. Fifthly, being immersed in this research for over four years, I am a firm believer that when the home and church synergize, young people will become more engaged in the church.

The Barriere Adventist Church continues to explore new avenues for engaging young people in their faith. The church decided to continue the participatory action research even after the completion of the first cycle that provided the content of this paper. The church is now in the third cycle of developing a strategic action plan for the retention of its youth.

My recommendations for the future are that churches that begin action research continue it at least for three to five cycles, but preferably that they adapt it as part of their culture: to explore new ways to remain relevant and progressive in reaching their goals. I also recommend that every church would prioritize an intergenerational approach, where every generation can learn and flourish while benefiting the others. Furthermore, while this project focused on the attrition of young people, the sad reality is that other generations are also becoming disaffiliated with church and religion. Therefore, my recommendation is that an intergenerational approach would be implemented in every church, which would benefit every generation. My last recommendation for individuals and churches wishing to grow more intergenerational is that they would develop a vision that focuses on intentionality and mutuality.

Final Word

This project stemmed from a desire to seek answers to a difficult and complex problem: the attrition of young people from the church. While the current trends are alarming, there is sufficient optimism that with an intentional effort, families and churches will ally and, with utmost dedication, work persistently to engage and retain young people in their faith. Barriere Adventist Church will continue pursuing this goal.

APPENDIX A

PROTOCOL FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Title of the Study:

Developing Synergy Between Home and Church to Increase Youth Engagement and
Faith Formation at the Barriere Adventist Church

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this project is to develop, implement, and evaluate a strategy to
create a synergistic relationship between the home and the church for the purpose of more
effectively engaging, retaining, and reclaiming young people in the Barriere Adventist
Church. There will be interviews and focus groups that will engage the members of the
church to devise an intentional alignment plan between the home and the church in order
to engage young people in the church.

Subjects:

Considering that the Barriere Adventist Church is a small church, every adult in
the church will participate in this research project. The following vulnerable populations
will be excluded from the research: People in a frail physical condition, mentally
impaired people, pregnant women, prisoners, or other similar vulnerable classes. No
children under the age of seven will be involved in the interviews, and those between the
age of seven and eighteen will only be interviewed together with their family unit. The
questions and discussion topics that will involve minors will first be screened by a
committee of adults, to ensure maximum safety and protection for the minors.

Recruiting:

To recruit the subjects, two consecutive announcements will be made in church.
An in-person poll will be taken to determine who would like to participate in the
research. The scope of the research will be clearly stated clearly, and nothing will be
concealed. Those members that will not be present will be contacted via telephone or e-
mail. The same explanation of the scope of the research will be presented to them, and an
open invitation extended. If participants demonstrate any hesitance or discomfort in

participating in the interviews and focus groups, they will be excluded from these, and no coercion will be used to include them.

Consent:

Every participant will be given a written consent form, which they will need to sign. This will clearly outline the protocol of the research, as well as the location and time when the research will be conducted. Attached in Appendix A is the written consent form sample.

Voluntary Participation:

In addition to the description of the scope of the research, participants will be clearly informed that their participation is voluntary, and that they are free to join and free to leave the research process at any time without any penalty. They will also be offered the option to contribute anonymously, and that their participation will be kept confidential.

Procedures:

The participants will be informed of the three part process of the action research that will be conducted. The first step will consist of collecting the data. In this, the participants will be invited to provide their feedback during the interviews and focus groups that will be held at the church. Secondly, there will be an implementation phase. In this phase, the participants will put into practice the ideas that we collectively gathered. In this stage, participants will be actively involved in pilot testing the different activities. Some of these activities will consist of, but not limited to the following:
Intergenerational Sabbath School
Intergenerational Worship Service
Intergenerational Outdoor Activities, such as bringing the families together for hikes, picnics, sports, picnics, camping, etc.
Intergenerational Outreach Events, such as cooking classes, door to door literature distribution, health talks, gardening training events, etc.
The last step that participants will be involved in will be the evaluation process, where they will be able to assess the effectiveness of the above mentioned events, and make the necessary changes or adjustments. This will be done every six to eight weeks after pilot testing the above activities.
Every effort will be made to eliminate risks from every step of the action research. Participation will be encouraged, but no pressure will be applied. Minors will only be able to participate with their parent's supervision, and in to part of the process will they participate apart from their parents.

Risk:

While it is impossible to eliminate all risks, intentional and consistent effort will be made to minimize risks. Risks will be managed by clearly describing every step of the process, and inviting the participating adults to collaborate and hold each other accountable to keep risks at a minimum. Especially in the involvement of minors in any step of the action research, a special effort will be made to eliminate exposure to any risky activity. Doing door to door outreach will be the riskiest activity, and the parents will be accompanying their children. If the children or parents will not feel comfortable participating in some of these activities, no pressure will be applied to convince them.

Data Collecting:

The data will be collected from the interviews and focus groups. Some of this data will be quantitative, but the majority of the data will be qualitative in nature. The collected data will be kept secure and used anonymously in the action research. The data will be collected at set times, at the church. The interviews will be scheduled on Sabbath afternoons and evenings, when the participants will be available. The data will be collected by the moderator in charge, whether that will be me or another assigned moderator. The data collected will be strictly written in note form. There will be no video or audio recordings.

Securing of Data:

Once the writing of the action research is concluded, the data collected from the interviews and focus groups will be held securely for three years, after which it will be destroyed. The collected data will be anonymous to protect people's privacy, considering the tight nit nature of the small context. The data will be kept on a password protected computer.

APPENDIX B

WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Tim Nagy, Doctor in Ministry Student at Andrews University

6435 Dallas dr., Kamloops, BC, V2C4X6, Canada. tnagy@bcadventist.ca, 778-549-0056

     I, _____, have been clearly informed that my participation has been solicited for the purpose of conducting research in the Barriere Adventist Church. I am voluntarily offering my participation and feedback in the upcoming interviews and focus groups. I am aware that this process may take up to six months. I understand that there will be interviews and focus groups that will engage the members of the church to devise an intentional alignment plan between the home and the church in order to engage young people in the church. I am also aware that this process may benefit our church, and involve every generation to be more involved and intentional in reaching across to other generations. This may be beneficial for young families in keeping their children and youth engaged in their faith as they approach adulthood, but it may also benefit older members in their faith development. The research may also yield new activities for the church and family to be involved in, which may result in spiritual and numeric growth in the Barriere Adventist Church.

     I understand that with the exception of where my life, health, or well-being are threatened, my confidentiality will be maintained in the focus group context, and anonymity in the case of individual interviews. No personal data will be collected, and the input provided will be safely secured and not shared with third parties.

     If I will have any questions regarding my own safety, well-being, or overall comfort during the process of the research, I will direct my questions to the research coordinator, Pastor Tim Nagy, at tnagy@bcadventist.ca, telephone number 778-549-0056. I have been informed that my participation is voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time and for any reason, without any penalty. No coercion has been used to solicit my participation in this research.

     Date: _____

     Participant Signature: _____

     Witness Signature: _____

APPENDIX C

INFORMED ASSENT FORM

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Developing Synergy Between Home and Church to Increase Youth Engagement and Faith Formation at the Barriere Adventist Church

INVESTIGATOR(S): Pastor Tim Nagy

The investigators named above are doing a research study.

These are some things we want you to know about research studies:

We are asking you to be in a research study. Research is a way to test new ideas. Research helps us learn new things.

Whether or not to be in this research is your choice. You can say Yes or No. Whatever you decide is OK. We will still take good care of you.

Why am I being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in the study because we value your opinion. We want to help your home and the church work together in helping you grow in your faith.

What is the study about?

The study will be about how the family and the church can work together to share Jesus with you.

What will happen during this study?

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked a few questions in an interview together with your parents. We want to know what you think would help our church and your home grow spiritually.

Will the study hurt?

The study will not hurt. There will only be a few questions. If you don't like a question, you don't have to answer. All the questions will first be shared with your parents first, and we will do our very best not to ask you anything that might be uncomfortable.

What if I don't want to be in this study?

You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to.

Who should I ask if I have any questions?

If you have any questions about this study, you or your parents can call the investigator, pastor Tim, at 778-549-0056, or the Andrews Institutional Review Board at 269-471-6361.

Do I have to be in the study?

No, you do not have to be in the study. Even if you say yes now, you can change your mind later. It is up to you. No one will be mad at you if you don't want to do this.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Vita

Name: Timoteus Nagy

Education:

2008-2010   MDiv at Andrews Theological Seminary

2003-2007   Bachelors of Arts (Architecture Major) University of Toronto

2001-2003   High School diploma from Kingsway Adventist College (Oshawa, ON,

Canada)

Ministry Experience:

2021-Present   Senior Pastor at Kamloops, Barriere, and Clearwater Adventist Churches

2015-2021   Senior Pastor at Chilliwack and Mt. Hope Adventist Church

2011-2015   Intern Pastor at Mission and Maple Ridge Adventist Church