

Wesley Theological Seminary

**Passing the Mantle:
How Intergenerational Men's Mentorship Prepares the Church
for the Future**

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ABSTRACT

The author's congregation is located in a rural, suburban town in Georgia where population growth has slightly increased, and church participation has stagnated, especially among younger generations. The author perceived that societal demands, combined with the church's struggle to adapt ministry to younger generations, are leaving a leadership gap of young leaders for the church. The author theorized that intentional intergenerational mentorships among men could help bridge the gap. Using biblical examples of mentorship, an eight-week mentorship program was established to foster connection and growth. Execution and research indicate that mentoring can help develop new leaders for the future of the church.

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To my parents, Charlie and Cheryl Mays, for passing down to me the gift of faith and love. To my in-laws, Matt and Becky Kehoe, for their continued support and love over the years. To my loving wife, Lindsey, who inspires me every day to never give up. To my daughters, Addie Grace, Avery, and Parker – may you live a life of faith and aim for your dreams.

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INTRODUCTION

Every generation confronts its own series of challenges and delivers its own gifts and talents to the greater good of humankind. One of the most significant challenges is what one generation offers to another. It is essential not only for an older generation to equip a younger generation but also to establish mutual trust and build intergenerational bonds that give way for healthier and more thriving communities.

As accurate as this is for communities, it is also true for local churches. God's deep desire is for the church to grow into a more faithful ministry amongst each passing generation. This growth is best achieved when the various generations represented come together and grow in discipleship. This reality is becoming much more challenging to obtain in a post-modern world marked with social, political, and even religious division.

It appears that younger generations are slipping away from the church. Some of the reasons include societal demands of career, family, and status. While this is true for both men and women, men especially appear to struggle to build mature relationships with their peers and those of different generations. This project will address these concerns and help the church find solutions to live more faithfully within its context.

West Point First United Methodist Church (WPFUMC) was established in 1830. The municipality of West Point, Georgia, is situated near the banks of the

Chattahoochee River and along the state lines of Alabama and Georgia. It finds itself halfway between Montgomery and Atlanta. Once a thriving textile mill town, it is now home to the only Kia Motors plant in North America and to a small liberal arts Christian university.

The church now finds itself in a generational gap, especially among men. The church needs to build bridges of intergenerational men's ministry to prepare for the future faithfully and invest in a new generation of disciples today. To help better understand the need at hand, the following project will seek to answer the following question:

How can an intergenerational men's mentorship program use biblical models of mentorship to effectively bridge a generational divide and help WPFUMC prepare for the future?

Chapter 1 describes the history and makeup of WPFUMC in more detail and what led the church to its present condition. This chapter will use historical information gathered over the course of the church's one hundred- and ninety-six-year history. This chapter will also examine the demographics of the region as well as the demographics of the membership of WPFUMC. It will also examine some societal causes that stand in the way of intergenerational ministry to drive the church forward into a new tomorrow. This chapter will open the door for the need of the project.

Chapter 2 examines how the biblical relationships of Elijah and Elisha (1 and 2 Kings) and of Paul and Timothy (1 and 2 Timothy) can serve as models for more faithful intergenerational relationships amongst men in the life of the church. What do mentor relationships look like in the Old Testament and New Testament, and how can they be a catalyst to strengthen the church's witness in the future? These mentorship models are certainly not the only biblical examples that could be used, but they do set a tone that will enable the intergenerational men's mentorship project to use scripture as a guide.

Chapter 3 details the intervention of a men's mentorship program to address the current condition. Included is a breakdown of data used as a preliminary study to formulate the group and program particulars such as group lessons and retreat plans. Chapter three will examine pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, interviews, and observations. In addition, chapter three will begin to address the project question in more detail and will include three core values that will help drive the project forward in effectiveness.

Chapter 4 examines what was gleaned from the project and how it relates to the project question as it helps determine how the program addressed the condition. This chapter will explore some of the cultural challenges discovered and associated with the project. This chapter will also spend time looking at some of the challenges facing the various generations and how the church can seek to respond to those challenges within its ministry context.

Chapter 5 offers a final and overall reflection of the men's mentorship program. Included is insight gained that can be used for others to implement such a program in their own setting. This chapter will also share what could be done differently in the future to produce a more effective outcome.

CHAPTER 1

West Point, Georgia, is located along Interstate 85, halfway between Atlanta, Georgia, and Montgomery, Alabama, and along the Chattahoochee River. Five miles north of downtown West Point is West Point Lake. The Army Corps of Engineers completed work on the West Point Dam in 1966. The city of West Point is located in two counties: Troup County to the north and Harris County to the south, with a large majority resting in the former, including the downtown proper.

Butted up against the city of West Point is Lanett, Alabama, and nearby Valley, Alabama. All three separate municipalities are so closely knitted together that visitors would likely not know they left one community for another if it were not for the state welcome signs. For many decades, these communities were economically supported by the railroads and the textile mill industry. The mills closed in 2000, and debris from the torn-down mills still scatters the edges of the riverbank. It was the textile industry that brought many families to West Point. By and large, most of the mill workers lived in the Lanett and Valley areas, while most of the mill managers and executives lived in West Point.

When the mills shut down, growth in the area stagnated for some time, and many young families moved away for other jobs. Located in West Point since 2009, is the only Kia Motors plant in North America. This industry has helped the community experience more vitality over the last decade and is projected to bring in more people and jobs for years to come.

West Point is also home to Point University, a small private Christian college. The college was formerly located in the Atlanta area until it was moved to West Point in 2012. Point University has also brought with it new employment and recreational opportunities to help energize the community and region.

Located in what has been known as the “Bible Belt,” the area and the community of West Point is saturated with churches. Methodism was first established in West Point in 1830. Soon thereafter, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Episcopal churches were established. Today, there are at least twelve churches located in West Point. A majority of the churches are located outside of the downtown proper, including WPFUMC, which is in a highly residential portion of town on the east side of the Chattahoochee River.

Studying the demographics of the mission field of WPFUMC is fascinating as there are multiple ways of examining the community because of the close proximity of the extended communities. According to MissionInsite, the total 2023 population of the West Point zip code is 7,335 (4,002 within the city limits). The current racial/ethnicity breakdown of the zip code population is 50% Black, 46% white, 2% Hispanic, 2% other. These percentages are expected to remain near the same for the next five years. The overall population of the zip code is expected to rise by 10% over the next ten years.

Adjusting the radius to five miles from WPFUMC, the total 2023 population is 20,604, with an expected 0.8% reduction over the next ten years. In the five-mile radius, the population's current racial/ethnicity breakdown is: 52% white, 44%

Black, 3% Hispanic, and 1% other. Over the next five years, these percentages are also expected to remain near the same. These numbers indicate that while the surrounding rural areas may not see any substantial growth, the West Point community will experience a slight increase. Because the church pulls significantly from the five-mile radius, MissionInsite numbers and percentages will be based on this parameter.

Of great importance is a review of the age of the population. In 2010, the percentage of those 0-17 years of age was 23.6%. Current reports indicate that this number is at 21.3%, with a slight increase to 22.2% over the next ten years. In 2010, the percentage of those 18-34 years of age was 19.3%. Current reports indicate that this number is at 22.4%, with a decrease to 20.8% over the next ten years. In 2010, the percentage of those 35-54 years of age was 26.7%. Current reports indicate that this number is at 23%, with a slight increase to 24% over the next ten years. In 2010, the percentage of those 55-64 years of age was 13.4%. Current reports indicate that this number is at 12.5%, with a decrease to 11.3% over the next ten years. In 2010, the percentage of those 65 years of age and older made up 17% of the population. Current reports indicate that this number is at 20.8%, with only a slight increase to 21.7% over the next ten years. It is important to note that the most significant demographic is currently those 35-54 of age and will continue to be so over the next ten years.

Overall, West Point, Georgia, is a well-established and strong community. However, even with some new life, flipping of homes, the establishment of new

homes, new retail development, and attraction to the region such as the lake, river, and a new indoor water park resort nearby, it seems that some would likely feel the community's glory days have come and gone. Even so, many are optimistic about its future and are working hard to give the community new opportunities to thrive. In turn, this does mean that the mission field is ripe, and there are wonderful opportunities to be engaged in ministry for and with the surrounding community.

According to William H. Davidson's publication of *150 Years of West Point Methodism: 1830-1980*, it is clear that WPFUMC has a storied history. The current sanctuary, which was completed in 1907, has been home to significant growth for the church for many decades. Ministries for young people were established, which ultimately led to new education buildings erected in 1927 and 1961 and a family life center in 1999.

Christian education and fellowship became of the utmost importance to the growing church and thriving community during the early and mid-20th century. A young men's class was established, and pictures scattered throughout the church building tell the story of its success. In 1919, the young men's class had a roll of 29 men. In just five short years, that roll had risen to 127 men. In 1952, the roll was 137 men, but clearly intergenerational in age. Years later, some of the men helped establish what came to be known as the "Wesley Men's Sunday School Class." This Sunday school class existed until the 2020 global COVID-19 pandemic. For many years, the Wesley Men's Class was known for gifting every graduating high school senior with a student study bible.

Davidson shares that in 1973, several men “expressed a desire to come together on Friday mornings for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship.”¹ Fifty years later, the men’s prayer breakfast still continues. However, it is predominately attended by men 65 years of age or older. Many of the young men between the ages of 25 and 45 are already beginning their work day and unable to attend, making intergenerational connections harder to achieve. The church also does not have an organized United Methodist Men’s group, thus making it more challenging to connect older men with younger men.

As of January 2024, the church membership of WPFUMC stood at 472, with a weekly worship attendance averaging 124 (not including online worshipers). This is a decrease from the membership of 636 and worship attendance of 219 in 2001, the year after the mill shutdown.² This decrease indicates that the local economy has impacted the church in multiple ways, but other societal factors have also contributed to this decrease over time.

It is also important to note the current demographics of the congregation. Of the 472 members, 97% are white, and 3% are Black. These percentages are disproportionate to the five-mile radius of the church. Regarding gender identity, 52% of the congregation identifies as male, and 48% identify as female. It is

¹ William H. Davidson. *150 Years of West Point Methodism 1830-1980* (West Point, GA: Hester Publishing, 1998), 28.

² “Tables (end of year,)” North Georgia Conference of the United Methodist Church, accessed on Nov. 10, 2023, <https://data.ngumc.org/forms/index.aspx> (password required).

interesting to point out that a quick look at other local church demographics often reveals a more prominent female than male membership base.

In addition, understanding the demographical breakdown of ages within the church is also crucial to this study. Of the 472 members, the largest age demographic is 65 years and holder at 43%. The second largest age demographic is 46-64 years of age at 25%. The last 32% is evenly divided between those 0-24 and 25-45 years of age. These results clearly show that the members of WPFUMC tend to be older than younger. It is also important to note that there are roughly 40 constituents of the church. These are individuals who are active or somewhat active in the life of the church but have not joined the church through formal membership for one reason or another. While it is possible to include demographics on this segment of the congregation, they are not included in the percentages above.

A 2022 study by Pew Research indicates the generational patterns associated with the decline and disenchantment that people have experienced with the church in America. Pew Research finds that the projected U.S. Christian population could fall below 50% by 2070 if the current trends persist. According to Pew Research, “Religious commitment could steadily weaken from generation to generation if people continue to identify as Christian but are less devout than their parents and grandparents.”³ Some, including Pew Research, call this the “generational

³ Pew Research. “Modeling the Future of Religion in America,” September 13, 2022. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/>

snowball” effect. With each passing generation, fewer and fewer adults are claiming the identity of “Christian” and thus raising children in non-Christian or non-religious households.

Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr, argues how the threat of postmodernism has impacted our way of thinking as individuals connected within society. According to Rohr, “The soul, the psyche, and human relationships seem at this point to be destabilizing at an almost exponential rate. Our society is producing very unhappy and unhealthy people.”⁴ Rohr goes on to argue that this reality leaves us with a very disenchanted society where personal egos create personal truths. As Rohr points out, this burden is not one that many older generations have had to bear. The mindset of younger generations is “starved for meaning, grasping at anything and everything.”⁵ This is a societal injustice that the church must respond to if the witness of the church is to be shared with future generations.

However, could it be that part of the decline in younger generations’ participation in the church is because of the church’s lack of contextualized aptitude? Leonard Sweet and Michael Adam Beck state that

Western churches have a thinking problem – a reduced way of understanding God, creation, other human beings, and the larger communal ecosystems that cradle the life of inherited congregations. Contextual intelligence offers us a

⁴ Richard Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2020), 8.

⁵ Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern*, 8.

way to be absorbed into the mind of Christ and turn the energy of those shifts into opportunities.⁶

Looking through Davidson's recorded history of WPFUMC, it is clear that for decades (and multiple generations), the congregation did an excellent job of understanding the "larger communal ecosystem" that spoke to life and applying it to the context of the church. Participation, not only in worship but through education, was of great importance. This does not imply that the church today is incapable of practical contextual intelligence. Still, it does indicate that the church must invest more time and energy into understanding its cultural and social context. The demographic reports given earlier, especially regarding ages and racial/ethnic breakdown, are a good indication that the church must engage the local community more and seek to develop new opportunities to connect with a broader diversity of people.

This brings us back to the original question: how might an intergenerational group of men come together and mutually bridge generational divides to lead the church into the future? Perhaps, in this case, Robin R. Meyers is correct when he writes, "True religion is relationship, not righteousness."⁷ In other words, the emerging church of the future must be focused on the intrinsic value found in

⁶ Michael Adam Beck and Leonard Sweet, *Contextual Intelligence: Unlocking the Ancient Secret to Mission on the Front Lines* (Oviedo, FL: HigherLife Development Services, Inc.), 24.

⁷ Robin R. Meyers, *Saving Jesus from the Church: How to Stop Worshipping Christ and Start Following Jesus* (New York, NY: HarperOne Publishers), 207.

relationships and how those relationships are built, fed, and lived out for Jesus Christ within the life of the community.

However, the “life of the community” must not solely be considered as the church itself. In a post-Christian world, many churches have become inner isolated and refer to themselves as a “church family.” While on the surface this may seem to be innocent, it can easily create a dividing threshold between the church and the community. The “life of the community” must also spill over into life *in* the community and how the church not only provides opportunities for people to connect in relationships but also how the church itself builds relationships within the community as well. In what ways can a men’s mentorship group build relationships with the larger community and expand its contextual understanding?

With this in mind, it is essential to identify “contextualized opportunities” that the church should invest more time and energy into. Considering some of the reasons people within the demographical area are distancing themselves from participation with religious institutions is a critical step in better understanding how to impact and serve the community.

According to MissionInsite, in 2021, some of the reasons people considered nonparticipation with religious institutions were:⁸

⁸ “American Beliefs Study Report,” MissionInsite, ACS Technologies, accessed on Oct. 20, 2023, <https://peopleview.missioninsite.com/app/#/welcome/demographics/step-5> (password required).

1. Conflicts in religious communities: 75%
2. Did not feel welcomed: 70%
3. Do not trust religious leaders: 69%
4. Do not trust organized religion: 56%
5. Demands of raising children: 55%
6. Religious people are too judgmental: 40%

From these findings, it is clear that the demographic seeks to stay away from places of disharmony or schism. The current splintering in denominations such as The United Methodist Church is a prime example of what people are seeking to avoid not only in personal life, but in religious life as well. And other demands, such as raising children and paying the bills, are day-to-day challenges, especially for younger families.

When comparing general life concerns, some of the concerns are:

1. Social and political tensions/discord: 78%
2. Health crisis/illness: 73%
3. Quality education for children: 72%
4. Day-to-day financial matters: 57%
5. Time for family/friends: 55%
6. Making the right choices/finding direction: 55%

These general life concerns indicate that individuals are looking for opportunities to enrich their lives and the lives of those they love. The demands of

raising children and paying the bills are day-to-day challenges, especially for younger families. Regardless of age, people are seeking support to make the right decisions in life and establish a sense of purpose and direction. And, once again, social and political disharmony continues to make a negative impact.

So, what are people looking for that the church can or should invest in?

According to MissionInsite, these are some of the opportunities that are important to for people to experience:

1. Warm and friendly encounters: 73%
2. Opportunities to develop personal relationships: 61%
3. Small groups (i.e., life groups, personal interest groups): 51%
4. Social justice advocacy work: 47%
5. Spiritual discussion groups: 45%
6. Crisis support groups: 45%

It is important to note that each of these offers excellent prospects for authentic and genuine connection with others, especially when it comes to intergenerational opportunities. Each of these presents varied opportunities for the church to engage in ministry with and for the community as well as to further its own mission and ministry as the church.

To better understand these findings, it is vital to consider the ecclesiastical nature of the church and what it has meant across generations, especially in the

last one hundred years. The articles of religion of The United Methodist Church state that the church is:

The community of all true believers under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We believe it is one, holy, apostolic and catholic. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by men divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world.⁹

Perhaps this understanding can be best summed by using the words of Richard K. Avery and Donald S. Marsh, "I am the church! You are the church! We are the church together...The church is not a building, the church is not a steeple, the church is not a resting place, the church is a people."¹⁰ Many who are part of the "community of all true believers" would likely not argue this point, especially at WPFUMC.

However, over the last century, the silent generation and baby boomers have been diligently and faithfully working hard to erect edifices of brick and mortar that are referred to as "the church." While these structures have been crucial to the mission and ministry of the church, they have also become stumbling blocks and liabilities, preventing fresh expressions of ministry from being born. It is these fresh expressions of ministry that speak to younger generations.

⁹ United Methodist Publishing House. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016. Para. 104, Article V. BOD 71.

¹⁰ Richard K. Avery and Donald S. Marsh, "We Are the Church", *The United Methodist Hymnal*. Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. 558.

In their book, *Not Safe for Church: Ten Commandments for Reaching New Generations*, F. Douglas Powe and Jasmine Smothers make the case that the church needs to reframe its understanding of ministry in order to reach new generations.

They point out that

It is hard for those currently in congregations to hear that many individuals coming from younger generations do not have the same life-or-death worry they do. Those in congregations, particularly those who have been a part of them for a while, want individuals to have the same love of the church that they do. For many who feel the younger generations do not have this love, it is perceived as a lack of commitment by those in the post-civil rights generations. Many in the church do not stop to consider that the post-civil rights generations do, in fact, have commitment, but is not to a building.¹¹

This understanding of what constitutes “the church” has become a dividing point between older generations and younger generations, even at churches like WPFUMC. Churches like WPFUMC have plenty of physical plant space that is not currently occupied and deferred maintenance that eats up time and resources that could be invested into more fresh expressions of faith and ministry, such as intergenerational mentoring.

Nevertheless, this understanding of what constitutes “the church” is not the only societal injustice causing division between generations. Also of great importance is the difference between “religious” practice and “spiritual” practice. In her book, *Christianity After Religion: The End of Church and the Birth of a New*

¹¹ F. Douglas Powe and Jasmine Smothers, *Not Safe For Church: Ten Commandments for Reaching New Generations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), Kindle Electronic Edition, 7,

Spiritual Awakening, Diana Butler Bass points out that for much of Western history, the words “religious” and “spiritual” were synonymous.¹² Over the course of the 20th century and going into the 21st century, society’s understanding of the two words diverged. Bass argues, “In general, ‘spirituality’ is taken as a positive term, whereas ‘religion’ is often negative; spirituality is understood as somehow more authentic, religion as having ‘a somewhat cynical orientation.’”¹³ This acknowledgment is not a game in semantics. This acknowledgment highlights current patterns and approaches to religious and spiritual participation, especially in how it is understood amongst various generations. Bass lists these identifying words with each:¹⁴

¹² Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity After Religion, the End of Church and the Birth of a New Spiritual Awakening*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2012), 67.

¹³ Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 67.

¹⁴ Bass, *Christianity After Religion*, 69.

Spirituality

Experience
Connection
Transcendence
Searching
Intuition
Prayer
Meditation
Nature
Energy
Open
Wisdom
Inner life
12-steps
Inclusive
Doubt

Religion

Institution
Organization
Rules
Order
Dogma
Authority
Beliefs
Buildings
Structure
Defined
Principles
Hierarchy
Orthodoxy
Boundaries
Certainty

The challenge for churches like WPFUMC is how they can effectively bridge the spiritual and religious gap between older generations and younger post-civil rights generations so that the church can prepare for the future. The church can no longer stand by and wait for younger generations to adapt. The church must consider ways to adapt to connect with a younger generation as it seeks to pass the mantle of responsibility.

CHAPTER 2

Relationships are an essential component of the Christian life. Throughout scripture, we encounter God's deep desire to use relationships to build up and spread faith. The bonds of transformative relationships are not only established through love, but are also passed on to future generations for the building up of the faith community. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses shares God's command with the Israelites to teach and instruct younger generations in order to build up the faith community and pass along the traditions of faith.

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:6-9 [NRSVue]).

Passing down the stories of God's faithfulness opens the door for intergenerational relationships to thrive.

Furthermore, the building up of the faith community involves not only the church investing itself in those who follow, but also celebrating those who have come before. The author of Hebrews writes, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." (Heb 13:7). Throughout the Old and New Testaments, we witness the outpouring of human and divine interaction at its best and at its worst. The scriptures reveal the social, religious, and political interactions from one generation

to the next, with each generation offering its own unique contributions and setbacks. Each generation has been tasked with raising up and preparing the next by passing on the mantle of leadership.

The church finds itself in a generational divide. In a post-Christian world, churches like WPFUMC have struggled to maintain quality ministries with those 25-45 years of age, and this can especially be seen in ministries with men. Increased demands from family and social life reveal the need for the church to build bridges of intergenerational men's ministry through mentorship as it faithfully prepares for the future.

Elijah and Elisha

Walter Brueggemann comments that “mentoring as an *idea* is a quite modern notion. The *practice* of mentoring, however, is quite old.”¹⁵ This can certainly be said for the mentor relationship between the prophet Elijah and young Elisha in 1 and 2 Kings. Although relatively brief in scripture, the relationship between the two is one of commitment, not just to the relationship itself, but also to the shared

¹⁵ Walter, Brueggeman, “Mentoring in the Old Testament,” Chapter 1 in *Mentoring: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018, <https://eds-p-ebSCOhost.com.wesleyseminarylibrary.idm.oclc.org/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE5ODEyNDlfX0FO0?sid=07b16462-ecd4-49e2-8c7f-07e2bf012005@redis&vid=2&format=EK&rid=1> (accessed August, 2023). 12.

ministry they were about. This commitment is evidenced in 2 Kings 2 by Elisha's triple proclamation not to leave Elijah.

Brueggemann goes on to say that "Elijah has mentored Elisha by his presence, his courage, and his performance."¹⁶ The intergenerational mentorship between Elijah and Elisha is a powerful witness to how one generation feeds another and has the ability to impact future generations.

The name Elijah in Hebrew means "My Lord is Jehovah."¹⁷ Elijah's prophetic ministry is recorded in 1 Kings 17-19; 21 and 2 Kings 1-2. As a committed prophet to God, Elijah often chose to work alone and thus experienced isolation. His words of truth from God to return back to the religion of Moses and worshipping Yahweh were repeatedly rejected. In 1 Kings 19, Elijah flees to Sinai to escape the wrath of Jezebel. Soon, God speaks to Elijah in 1 Kings 19:15 and says, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus" for it was there that he would find Elisha and eventually anoint him as his replacement. Elijah went. But did he go willingly? Brueggeman comments that "Elijah still seems unwilling to go along completely with God's plan to replace him as prophet."¹⁸ Although a prophet, Elijah was human

¹⁶ Brueggeman, *Mentoring*. 15.

¹⁷ Ronald Brownrigg and Joan Comay. *Who's Who in the Bible: The Old Testament and The Apocrypha, The New Testament*. New York: Wings Books, 1993. 106.

¹⁸ Gina Hens-Piazza. *Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries: 1-2 Kings*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/reader/9781426759734/#part01ch17.html!part1ch19> (accessed July 24, 2023).

and subject to the challenges of isolation and personal desire. Ultimately, Elijah found Elisha, who became his personal assistant before replacing him as prophet.

The name “Elisha” in Hebrew means “God is salvation.”¹⁹ Elisha is often described as a “gentle man” unlike Elijah who was “stern, forceful, and solitary.”²⁰ While Elisha, son of Shaphat, was plowing a field, Elijah approached him and “threw his mantle over him” (1 Kings 19:19b). From there, Elisha became Elijah’s personal assistant. Together, their shared ministry was focused on helping people around them who were in need. When Elijah knew his end was drawing near, he asked his mentee Elisha if he had any final request of him. Elisha responded saying “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit.” (2 Kings 2:9b). In other words, Elisha wanted to receive Elijah’s mantle and become his successor. As Gina Hens-Piazza writes, “Elisha respectfully communicates that taking up Elijah’s role is like that of an eldest son following in the footsteps of his father.”²¹ Clearly, Elisha looked up to Elijah and was ready to receive his mantle.

The “mantle” (sometimes referred to as a “cloak” in some biblical translations) was more than an article of clothing. The mantle also symbolizes power, status, and authority. Through the passing of the mantle, “power was signified by receiving, touching, or grabbing the mantle.”²² In 2 Kings 2, we witness

¹⁹ Brownrigg and Comay, *Who’s Who*, 112.

²⁰ Brownrigg and Comay, *Who’s Who*, 112-113.

²¹ Hens-Piazza, *Old Testament Commentaries*.

²² *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible, I-Ma*, vol 3, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009), 791.

the passing of this mantle to Elisha as Elijah is taken into heaven. As this occurred, Elisha tore his robe in two as a sign of his own mourning.

In some Christian traditions, including the United Methodist tradition, the passing of the mantle is a significant moment. During “A Retirement Recognition Service,” a representative of the retirees passes the mantle to a representative of the newly ordained. Included in this meaningful moment are these words:

Bishop: *In the book of Kings, we read of the prophet Elijah's ministry. The mantle, symbolic of submission to God, fell upon the younger prophet, Elisha, and the spirit of Elijah rested upon Elisha.*

Retiree: *I transfer this mantle from our generation to the young, indicating thereby that the responsibilities and dedication of the older generation will be caught up and carried on by the young, and the spirit of today's Elijahs will rest upon today's Elishas.*

Ordinand: *We who come after you take up the mantle which falls upon us. May we inherit a double share of your spirit.*²³

Through the passing of the mantle from Elijah to Elisha, Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer comments that Elisha goes on to serve “the purposes of the God who works behind the scenes of human history, in the ‘sound of sheer silence.’”²⁴ Elisha’s ministry demonstrated God’s desire to connect with people in caring and compassionate ways. Through the example of mentoring relationships, such as the

²³ The United Methodist Publishing House. *The Book of Worship*. Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992. 736.

²⁴ Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer, “Proper 8: 2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14: Exegetical Perspective,” *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, vol 3*. ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press. 2010, 177.

one between Elijah and Elisha, God works behind the scenes, establishing new connections, new leaders, and new opportunities for growth for both young and old.

While the relationship between Elijah and Elisha occupied a liminal space of time, it was a time that was transformational. Coming into the relationship, Elijah brought his life experience, and the ability to be firm, and Elisha brought his eagerness to grow and his spirit of gentleness. Each benefited from the other. Timothy Cargal comments that while Elijah spent much of his prophetic ministry opposing Ahab, Elisha's prophetic ministry included interactions with the rich and the poor.²⁵ Both men mentored each other while ministering faithfully to their separate and shared audiences. It is this mutual mentoring that, when embraced, can strengthen churches and communities for future generations to come.

It is important to note that the understanding of aging in the Hebrew scriptures impacts intergenerational connections. For example, in the book of Daniel chapter 7, God is referred to as "the Ancient of Days" or the "Ancient One" (Dan 7:9, 13, 22). God has a high regard for the aged and the wisdom they bring forward into new visions of life. The Holiness Code found in the book of Leviticus also expresses this understanding. "You shall rise before the aged and defer to the old, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (Lev 19:32). God commands respect

²⁵ Timothy B. Cargal, *Immersion Bible Study: 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press) 2012.
<https://www.ministrymatters.com/reader/9781426758812/#chapter06.html!ch6>
(accessed August 19, 2023).

for older generations because their wisdom and life experience have something to offer younger generations.

Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S. Koppel comment that “such behavior concerns not only the purity of religious practices, but also the quality of social relationships and communal life.”²⁶ This understanding can also be proper for what is found in Deuteronomy, “Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Deut 5:16). This commandment expresses the importance of honoring an older generation in order for a younger generation to flourish.

In a different, but yet similar fashion, we can consider the words of Proverbs as well. In Proverbs, we read, “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray” (Pro 22:6). Not only do younger generations have a responsibility to look up to, learn from, and respect an older generation, older generations have a responsibility to teach, guide, and raise a younger generation so their lives will thrive, thus bridging generational divides. Each of these Old Testament expressions reveals the opportunity the Church has to steward the life of the church in such a way that its mission and ministry continue for generations to come.

²⁶ Hopkins and Koppel page 100-101. Denise Dombkowski Hopkins and Michael S. Koppel, *Grounded in the Living Word: The Old Testament and Pastoral Care Practices* (Grand Rapids: MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010).

Paul and Timothy

The New Testament holds nothing short of rich and meaningful intergenerational mentoring. As Brueggemann alluded to, the word “mentor” or “mentee” is not used in the holy scriptures, but its concept certainly is. Perhaps the most appropriate word used in its place in the New Testament is the word *koinonia*, Greek for “fellowship” or “partnership.”²⁷ It is through this sharing of fellowship and partnership that we encounter Paul’s enthusiastic ability to not only mentor churches for faithful witnessing, but also to build up individual leaders within the life of the church for its future success, thus passing on the mantle of faith and leadership to new generations of Christians.

Of particular interest to mentoring in the New Testament is the relationship between Paul and Timothy found in multiple epistles, especially in 1 and 2 Timothy. Paul (Greek for “small” or “little”) derived from the tribe of Benjamin and was known as Saul until his Damascus Road experience and encounter with Ananias on Straight Street.²⁸ Although a relatively small man in stature, he was solidly built to shape the course of the Christian church. He was an apostle who “inspired courage and brotherhood into early, struggling Christian communities.”²⁹

Paul’s leadership qualities became of vast importance in the New Testament. Richard S. Ascough and Charles A. Cotton highlight that Paul was a collaborator at

²⁸ Brownrigg and Comay, *Who’s Who*, 310.

²⁹ Brownrigg and Comay, *Who’s Who*, 315.

heart. “When it came to thinking about mission accomplishment, Paul was a consistent and relentless advocate of the working approach we moderns call *teamwork* – the deliberate collaboration between people trying to achieve complex ends.”³⁰ Paul valued commitment and the building up of others in order to faithfully build up the church. These values meant that Paul was constantly looking for others to join him in his work with Christian communities.

David L. Bartlett writes, “Though Paul has no term corresponding precisely to our term *mentor*, we can see in his relationship to his coworkers clues to what Christian mentoring might look like in our own time:”

1. Paul’s relationships are marked by mutuality and partnership.
2. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that Paul is the senior partner and that the mentee derives much of his authority from his relationship to Paul.
3. Mentees imitate the mentor, both in their integrity and in their zeal for the gospel and for the churches.³¹

³⁰ Richard S. Ascough and Charles A. Cotton. *Passionate Visionary: Leadership Lessons from the Apostle Paul* (Peabody: MA Hendrickson Publishers, 2005), 89.

³¹ David L. Bartlett, “Mentoring in the New Testament,” Chapter 2 in *Mentoring: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018, <https://eds-p-ebshost-com.wesleyseminarylibrary.idm.oclc.org/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlYmtfXzE5ODEyNDlfX0FO0?sid=07b16462-ecd4-49e2-8c7f-07e2bf012005@redis&vid=2&format=EK&rid=1> (accessed August, 2023). 22.

For Paul, a shared ministry came with a high degree of accountability, trust, and vision. Paul's mentoring ethos through commitment, mutuality, and encouragement can be applied to modern-day mentoring relationships.

Timothy (Greek for "honoring God") was a young and timid man from Lystra whom Paul met on his first missionary journey, as recorded in Acts 16. In time, Timothy joined Paul on his journey to Macedonia and became his helper.³² Regarding people like Timothy, Paul saw an opportunity to train a younger apostle for faithful ministry that would go well beyond his own years on earth. Paul saw opportunities to send young Timothy in his place to communities like Philippi:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I, too, may be consoled by news of you. I have no one so like myself who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me, and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon (Phil 2:19-24).

Efran Agosto comments that Paul had confidence in young Timothy as he sent him to places like Philippi. To Paul, Timothy exhibited "well what the Philippians need to be and do."³³

While the authorship of the pastoral epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy is debated, there is no debating that it was written to young Timothy, all believers everywhere, and to what was considered the "first second generation" of Christians. The letters

³² Brownrigg and Comay, *Who's Who*, 421.

³³ Efran Agosto, *Servant Leadership: Jesus and Paul* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 142.

not only affirm the relationship between Paul and Timothy, they also become a portrait of how the mantle of wisdom and faith are passed down to the next generation.

Young and timid Timothy joined Paul on his second and third missionary journeys. Paul's trust in Timothy grew as Paul increased in years. To encourage his young protégé, in 1 Timothy, Paul not only affirms their relationship, but also seeks to better equip Timothy and his work of overseeing the young church in Ephesus. Of grave concern to Paul was the use of heretical teachings in the church. 1 Timothy 1:5 reads, "But the aim of my instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith." Thomas C. Oden writes,

The Apostle aims to nurture love in the community of faith – not love corrupted by false teaching and distorted motives, not love still constantly fighting a bad conscience. To be strong, love needs to be exercised daily with a pardoned conscience grounded in an unfeigned faith that lives without dissimulation.³⁴

These words of warning from Paul were meant to prepare Timothy for the tasks before him and to equip him to stay strong in the faith even when facing some of the most formidable opposition imaginable in Ephesus.

In addition, the writings of 1 Timothy go on to highlight the training Timothy must receive from Paul in order to faithfully carry on the mission. "Train yourself in godliness, for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in

³⁴ Thomas C. Oden, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: First and Second Timothy and Titus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), Kindle Electronic Edition. 56.

every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Tim 4:7b-8). Oden points out that “Paul knew Timothy would become a model for the ministry of others. This ministry would best be nurtured by the same sound doctrine that Timothy had long studied throughout his association with Paul.”³⁵ The mentee training of instruction, guidance, and care Timothy received from Paul, and the critical role it played in their relationship had future generations of Christians in mind.

In 1 Timothy 6, we read, “But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1 Tim 6:11-12). It is here in this challenge to Timothy that Paul seeks not only to further the ministry of the church but also to encourage young Timothy to do his job with passion and excellence. William Barclay writes, “When the challenge is presented to Timothy, he is not reminded of his own weakness and sin, which might well have reduced him to pessimistic despair; rather, he is challenged by the honor given to him, of being God’s man.”³⁶ Paul understands that in order to pass the mantle on to the next generation, it must be done while pointing towards a hopeful future. This same

³⁵ Oden, *First and Second Timothy*, 80.

³⁶ William Barclay, *The New Daily Study Bible: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 151.

sentiment that Paul shares with Timothy is essential today, just as it was then today.

Of vast importance to the canonical pastoral epistles is 2 Timothy. Not only do we find in 2 Timothy aging Paul's eagerness to encourage Timothy to remain faithful in the midst of opposition, but we also witness the intimate bond the two share. "To Timothy, my beloved *son*: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (2 Tim 1:2). This father/son affection offers both Paul and Timothy a sense of belonging and purpose. This bond is further illuminated by Paul mentioning Timothy's Jewish mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, in verse 5. Not much is known about Timothy's father other than being of Greek descent, but clearly, Timothy gained faith and trust through his mother and grandmother, and it was important for Paul to convey that truth. Oden writes, "In Timothy we have a young man from a transitional, cross-cultural family charged with transmitting the faith intergenerationally."³⁷ Paul recognized the power intergenerational relationships made in the transmission of the Christian faith.

It is in this farewell discourse of 2 Timothy that we also gain a more profound sense of what greatly concerns aging Paul as he sits in prison. Whereas in other epistles, like Philippians where Paul's tone seems more buoyant, 2 Timothy presents a different mood. Paul is concerned that false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2:17), who were successfully distorting the truth about the

³⁷ Oden, *First and Second Timothy*, 30.

resurrection of Jesus, were doing real damage to people's faith. Paul is concerned for his beloved son Timothy and is afraid his timid nature will get the best of him. It is for this reason that Luke Timothy Johnson writes, "Paul writes, then, to encourage his favorite delegate in his struggles. By so doing, the apostle also fights for the success of his own ministry."³⁸ Paul's words in 2 Timothy are geared towards Timothy drawing strength from Christ as he passes on what he has learned and knows to be true.

In Paul's charge and final words to Timothy (2 Tim 3:10-4:8), we read some of the most powerful and often used verses from either epistle. Paul's confidence in Timothy is strong, and he seeks to convey to him two important things as he passes on the mantle – faith and endurance:

Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have known sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 3:12-15).

Not only does Paul acknowledge Timothy's upbringing through the faith of his mother and grandmother, but he also celebrates what he has learned from Paul and how the spirit of endurance will impact the work God has for Timothy to carry on. Jouette M. Bassler writes, "These exhortations repeat the substance and even the

³⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, "Letters to Paul's delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus," in *The New Testament in Context*, ed. J. Andrew Overman and Howard Clark Kee, Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996, <https://www.ministrymatters.com/library/#/tntics/5571cff3f4a91ebc0b8ca2eb2f4fc4a0/introduction.html> (accessed August, 2023).

wording of those that fill earlier portions of this letter, but in a way and context that make it clear that Timothy is to take up the banner from Paul.”³⁹ Paul trusts that Timothy will take what he has learned and use it to build up the church. This becomes a powerful example of the role intergenerational relationships can play when the mantle is passed from one generation to another.

As Timothy grew in wisdom and service under Paul’s instruction, he became empowered to share the gospel message more effectively. This empowerment meant that Paul taught Timothy the importance of his role within the Body of Christ. In sharing his incarnational theology, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “It is the unity of the whole Church which makes each member what he is and the fellowship what it is, just as it is Christ and his Body which make the Church what it is.”⁴⁰ For Bonhoeffer, the fellowship of the Body of Christ includes participating in his suffering and glory. As Christ’s representative, Timothy has received from Paul the gifts and skills to carry on not only his ministry, but also prepare a new generation to do the same for the building up of Christ’s holy Church.

In summary, the biblical examples of the intergenerational mentorships between Elijah and Elisha, and of Paul and Timothy, demonstrate the importance

³⁹ Jouette M. Bassler, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.
<https://www.ministrymatters.com/reader/9781426750403/#chapter02.html!ch2lev2sec3>

(accessed July 26, 2023).

⁴⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1959), 243.

of passing the mantle on to new generations. They help give clear example of the impact mentor relationships can have on individuals and the community of faith. Creating an environment for mentoring can and should cause a ripple effect in the life of the church.

One note of caution, however, involves today's culture. In today's culture, younger generations sometimes struggle with this top-down approach to intergenerational mentorship. For this reason, it is imperative that we glean from these biblical examples ways in which an older generation can learn from and be inspired by a younger generation. Not only do these biblical examples give witness to how generational lines can be sown, but they also help us to see how the church of today has struggled to provide safe and sacred spaces for young men to grow in their faith in effective ways.

Through intergenerational mentorship programs, churches can more faithfully bridge the gap that so often causes more division and ambiguity in the life of the church. Just as the mentor relationships between Elijah and Elisha and of Paul and Timothy were not void of challenges, neither are such relationships today. Churches like WPFUMC can take heed of these biblical relationships as they prepare for future ministry in a post-Christian world dominated by division.

Including Brueggemann's threefold mentoring approach of "presence, courage, and performance," the following pages will help demonstrate how intergenerational mentoring can truly be mutual mentoring and help the church prepare for the future. Passing the mantle from one generation to the next involves

these three things. Still, each also involves a deep sense of vulnerability for the building up of the faith community to thrive. The bridge of trust is a two-way street that takes time and seeks commitment from both sides in order to prepare the church for a new chapter of ministry.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter provides a narrative approach to the intervention that seeks to answer the question:

How can an intergenerational men's mentorship program use biblical models of mentorship to effectively bridge a generational divide and help WPFUMC prepare for the future?

Included in this chapter are survey findings, group discussions, and general discoveries and observations that seek to address the condition. Chapter 4 will go into greater detail about what was learned from this experience.

Used within the project is Walter Brueggemann's mentoring concept of "presence, courage, and performance," as mentioned in the previous chapter. While Brueggeman's use of this concept is primarily to demonstrate how wisdom was passed down to and inherited by Elisha from Elijah, the current context shows many younger men do not simply want to learn from older men; they want to share their own experiences, too. Likewise, older men are showing a keen interest in learning from younger men as well.

Furthermore, the concept of "presence, courage, and performance" is primarily designed to be used implicitly throughout the project. These three values will help guide the mentorship programs across the eight weeks and hopefully lay a solid foundation for continued relationships to flourish post-project.

Presence: In order to build the quality intergenerational relationships that the project was looking for, presence was important. In other words, the men needed to show up. More than just simply showing up, the men needed to be present in each other's lives through one-on-one get-togethers and attending the gatherings. In addition, they were encouraged to pray for another as a means of deepening their relationship with God and across generational divides.

Courage: Researcher and storyteller Brené Brown has done extensive work on the understanding of courage and how courage impacts our lives. She points out that courage comes from a place of vulnerability, and often, we do not want to be vulnerable enough because then we will reveal our authentic selves. Brown says, "This is what I have found: To let ourselves be seen, deeply seen, vulnerably seen ... to love with our whole hearts, even though there's no guarantee -- and that's really hard."⁴¹ It is hard. This project was designed with a degree of vulnerability in mind. It is the need to let one's own guard down in the presence of another and to reveal more of our true selves in order to connect and grow.

Performance: From an early age, people are taught to perform in one way or another, from rolling around on a playmat to singing in a children's choir. Sometimes, this behavior can be healthy, and other times, it causes negative emotional impacts. Edwin H. Friedman argues in his book, *A Failure of Nerve*, that

⁴¹ Brené Brown, "The Power of Vulnerability," Ted Talk, June 2010, https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_the_power_of_vulnerability/. Accessed, January 17, 2024.

“Mature leadership begins with the leader’s capacity to take responsibility for his or her own emotional being and destiny.”⁴² In other words, because one of the goals of the intergenerational men’s mentorship program was to help build leaders for the church, each participant had to take on a responsibility to be engaged but also to allow others to be engaged. Part of the facilitator’s role was to ensure that no single person monopolized the conversation. The environment was set to make room for each participant to be fully engaged.

Each of the three values undergirded the project for integrity and effectiveness.

Project Design

The following is a general design of the project before its implementation. Some adjustments had to be made to the actual project, and those will be discussed later.

1. **Size of Group:** Sixteen men total. Ideally there will be eight men of WPFUMC between the ages of 25-45 and eight men over the age of 65. The selection of men was determined by pastor with input from others such as staff and key leaders in the church.
2. **Parings:** Each younger man will be paired with an older man for the duration of the project. Parings were determined by the pastor and based on

⁴² Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2007), 203.

shared interests amongst the participants. These shared interests included anything from favorite college football team to chosen profession or even known cultural attitudes.

3. **Project Length:** The project will last eight weeks in total, including the weekend retreat.
4. **Group Gatherings:** The large group will meet four times in total, once every other week. These gatherings will take place on Sunday mornings during the Sunday school hour and, in many ways, run like a small group or a Sunday school class.
5. **Mentor Meetings:** Each pair is asked to connect at some point during each of the eight weeks (i.e., lunch, coffee, over the phone, etc.) if possible. These times will be to enrich their one-on-one relationship.
6. **Retreat:** The project includes a weekend get-away retreat. The retreat will be designed to build community and offer opportunities for the group to become more cohesive.
7. **Surveys:** An initial questionnaire will be conducted at the beginning of the project in order for the facilitator to gain a basic understanding of the group and begin to determine best practices moving forward. An exit questionnaire will be conducted at the end of the eight weeks to determine the effectiveness of the overall project. Also included will be observations throughout the eight weeks.

One to two months prior to the implementation of the intervention, men were contacted by the pastor with an invitation to participate in the project. The design of the project and its goals were explained to each of the invitees. The project was originally designed to include a maximum of sixteen men (eight men between the ages of 25-45 and eight men 65 years of age or older) with a minimum of ten men total. Time constraints and other life commitments made the maximum number hard to achieve. Initially, ten men accepted the invitation to participate. However, once the project began, one younger man was not able to commit, thus, bringing the total number of participants to men, not including the pastor.

An important goal of the project was to “bridge the gap” between the generations. While large group and small group settings can help achieve this, one-on-one pairings were identified as being very important, especially in regard to the biblical one-on-one models of Elijah and Elisha and of Paul and Timothy. Pairs were coupled based on basic interests such as similar professions, favorite sports teams, hobbies, and known cultural perspectives.

The group gatherings (four in total) were held every other Sunday morning during the Sunday school hour over the course of the eight weeks. The group gatherings became a place for the entire group of men to meet, pray together, discuss the scriptures together, and address life concerns.

Gathering One

All participants attended the first group gathering except one. This gathering began with a word of welcome and prayer. At this gathering, an overview of the program was shared along with information about the purpose of the project, schedule of events, and expectations. (See Appendix 1). Each participant, including the pastor, signed a participation covenant.

In addition, time was also spent at the first gathering exploring some of the scriptures of 1 and 2 Timothy and the mentoring relationship between Paul and Timothy. Of great importance was the concept of “passing the torch” or “transferring of the mantle” to the next generation. These scriptures, along with later selections from 1 and 2 Kings, became grounding points for conversations and biblical models of mentoring.

Initial Questionnaire

At the first gathering, participants completed an Initial Questionnaire (See Appendix 2), which was designed to establish the basic need we all have to be in community. This initial questionnaire served as an introduction to the biblical models of mentoring. It also provided the pastor with a basic knowledge of the group dynamic and personal backgrounds of participants (although no names were identified, but ages were). Lastly, the initial questionnaire gave the group the opportunity to begin thinking about ways in which they can share their own experiences and the impact they can make on the group.

Through the initial questionnaire, it was discovered that each of the four older men attended church on a regular basis while growing up. The same cannot be said for the younger men. Only one participant indicated regular attendance as a child, while the other three never went to church or rarely attended during childhood.

When asked if they had a solid “father figure” presence in their younger life, all but one, a younger participant, indicated that they did. When asked about the negative or positive impact a father figure made in upbringing, responses included:

My father was an alcoholic, and it impacted my life in a negative way. When he was not drinking, he was a great dad.

He led by example and always did what he said he would do. A wise man to look up to.

My dad taught me that there is no limit to learning and that each experience can be an opportunity to learn.

My father was active in business and community. He showed us how important family and church really are.

In addition, other questions were asked to gauge how participants have encouraged someone of a younger generation. Older participants responded by saying:

I taught my son the value of acceptance of all people and how athletics can help the mind discover.

I try to talk and acknowledge our youth when they are involved in church and leading other youth and growing in their walk with God and others.

Younger participants responded by saying:

I try to teach my son and daughter that hard work will not always get you ahead but is an excellent building block for character.

Through the school system, I mentored a third-grade boy one year who did not have a male role model at home. We met every Thursday for lunch.

Also asked in the initial questionnaire was what each participant hoped to learn from someone of the other generation throughout the course of the eight weeks. Older participants responded by saying:

Their thought process and value of learning as well as value of spirituality, and acceptance of other cultures.

I hope to better understand the difference that the younger generation of Christians think about and what they understand from God's word.

Younger participants responded by saying:

How to focus more on family and let work things go.

How to balance life's demands and still find time to grow in my faith and make time for myself.

On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being of least importance and ten being of most importance), participants were asked two questions:

Question 1: *How important do you believe intergenerational relationships and connections are to the life of the church?*

Average Score: Younger Men 8 Older Men 9

This observation clearly shows that all men see a value in how intergenerational relationships can impact the life of the church.

Question 2: *How comfortable are you sharing your feelings with other men?*

Average Score: Younger Men 4 Older Men 7

This observation shows that the younger men do not find it as easy as the older men when it comes to sharing their feelings and that the older men do have some hesitation.

Overall, hopes through the eight-week mentorship reveal similar results.

Each person had a desire to get to know the other participants better and use the relationships to deepen their faith and strengthen the mission and ministry of the church.

Gathering Two

The second gathering was attended by all older participants, but seasonal sickness in young families kept a few of the younger participants away. The gathering was designed in a roundtable format to encourage openness and freedom to share. The session began with prayer and a general check-in. Pairs shared in general about their one-on-one times together during the week. The feedback was positive and uplifting, even for the pairs that found it more difficult to schedule those times.

This gathering was designed to focus more on the 1 and 2 Timothy scriptures and answer the question: *What new thing is God revealing to you through Paul and Timothy's relationship?* Around the roundtable, participants shared that the Paul and Timothy relationship revealed to them that leadership is a shared experience and that trust is a valuable component to the work of ministry. The older participants also shared that they need to do a better job of passing the mantle of wisdom and faith to the next generation of leaders. This became clear when one of the older participants shared that he invited one of the younger participants to give the keynote speech at a forthcoming civic club meeting in order to share about his business.

The second gathering was concluded with a time of prayer and these words from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "It is the unity of the whole church which makes each member what he is and the fellowship what it is, just as it is Christ and his body

which make the church what it is.”⁴³ These words from Bonhoeffer served as a reminder that each person’s contribution to the fellowship serves not only themselves but also carries with it a significant impact on the whole of the body. Once again, undergirding the values of presence, courage, and performance.

Gathering Three

Gathering three was attended by all participants. The gathering started with prayer and a general check-in. Once again, participants shared about their one-on-one meetings during the week. One pair shared a common interest in working outdoors at their farms and highlighted their experience together visiting each other’s land. Another pair shared that they spent four hours together over lunch and even went antiquing.

Following the check-in, we began by reflecting on the words of the Psalmist, who said,

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God...The days of our life are seventy years or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away...So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart...Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and prosper for us the work of our hands— O prosper the work of our hands! (Psalm 90:1-2, 10, 12, 17)

⁴³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1954), 23.

These words from the Psalmist are a reminder that each person and each generation has only a limited time on earth and that we should use that time wisely for the Kingdom of God.

Reflecting over these words, the question was asked: *How do the words of the Psalmist connect to our lives in this time and place?* Participants were eager to share that while balancing one's life is not always easy; it is essential to consider the importance of self-care and soul-care. One younger participant shared that the words of the Psalmist, combined with the relationship of Paul and Timothy, remind him that learning to turn off work and carve out time for self and family is not always easy but important. Some of the older participants shared that even though this is difficult, it does get easier with age. One older participant shared the importance of making time for other people, but not always the same group of people. He shared that his golf friends are different from his weekly coffee morning friends, who are different from his church men's prayer breakfast friends.

Diversifying time and energy led one of the younger participants to share that it is important to him to ensure that he is exposed to people of different cultures and religious beliefs. He shared that his job helps him achieve this. One of the older participants shared about his service in the military during the Korean War. Being stationed in Maryland exposed him to different people from around the country. His year spent serving in the Philippines opened his eyes to different cultures, including people of different religious and socioeconomic backgrounds. This was something that he has carried with him later on in life after he completed

his service. In his words, he shared, “I learned that everything did not center around me. You make life as you journey through it.”

Also shared during the third gathering were the differences the various generations experienced as adolescents and how those experiences impacted future growth. For example, older participants shared a deeper connection with nature because, growing up, they spent the majority of their free time in nature. Younger participants, primarily millennials, recall a similar connection but grew up during the technology boom of the late 20th century. They acknowledged the struggles they experienced raising their now adolescent children in a fully immersed age of technology. The words of the Psalmist fall heavily upon their hearts as they consider how to be a Paul to their children in a world so full of distractions.

Also included during the third gathering was planning and organizing for the project’s weekend retreat getaway. The session concluded with a time of lifting up prayer concerns and a time spent in prayer together as a group. It is important to note that the third gathering clearly showed a willingness for the participants to openly share more, thus living into the values of presence, courage, and performance.

Weekend Retreat

The goal of the weekend retreat was to accomplish the conversation that was shared at the third gathering – to carve out time to be away for soul care and group bonding. Each pair was put in charge of different aspects of the retreat (i.e., building the campfire, preparing meals, etc). For the full agenda, please see Appendix 3. The retreat was offered at no monetary expense to the participants.

Designed as an overnight retreat, the weekend began with dinner at a popular steak restaurant. From there, the men proceeded to a nearby Christian camp and retreat center. The evening was spent around the campfire. The mentor model of Elijah and Elisha became the biblical focal point for the weekend. The first devotion (See Appendix 4), held around the campfire, focused on 1 Kings 18:16-40 when Elijah realized the need for the Israelites to experience renewal.

The conversation circled around seeking the right direction in life and these two questions:

Can you share a time in your life when you needed correction or you bravely took it upon yourself to help someone else find their way?

When you have a choice between two decisions, how do you decide?

During the campfire conversation, everyone freely shared moments in life when they needed a course correction or took the opportunity to help someone else in

need. Everyone shared the importance of seeking others out when they find themselves struggling to make the right choice between two decisions.

Concluding the conversation around the campfire was the “Prayer – Discernment – Obedience” grid of Marv Nelson (See Appendix 4). Nelson argues, “We lead with less and less power and authority when we neglect to leave room for the Spirit to move, breathe, and for God to have God’s way.”⁴⁴ Making room for the Spirit means that one makes intentional time for prayer, discernment, and obedience in one’s life. This three-fold grid equips younger leaders to rely on God and others as they develop the skills needed to receive the mantle from older generations.

Following an early morning hot breakfast, the second day began with one-on-one mentor pair time. This time gave each pair the opportunity to check in with one another and consider thoughts from the previous night’s conversation as we prepared for the day ahead.

As the entire group reconvened, the second devotion was shared based on 1 Kings 19 (See Appendix 5). In 1 Kings 19, after Elijah flees from Jezebel’s men, he hears God’s voice speak clearly to him, telling him to go back the way he came and find Elisha, whom he will anoint to replace him as prophet. Elijah’s experience

⁴⁴ Marv Nelson, *Unleash: Empowering the Next Generation of Leaders* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2022), 94.

serves as a reminder of the noise and chaos of life and how difficult it can be to hear God's voice speaking to us. Together, these questions were considered:

How does God speak to you?

Can you name a noise and chaos in your life that has prevented you from hearing God's voice?

In what ways is your noise and chaos different than someone of a different generation, and what can you learn from them?

How can you intentionally create time and space for God's voice?

How can you help someone else create such a space?

Conversation circled around these questions as some of the older participants shared some of their failed attempts to listen to God and how those consequences impacted their lives.

Following the morning devotion, the group came together in two team-building exercises. These exercises were designed to give participants the opportunity to engage their listening and leadership skills. The first activity was the "draw challenge." One person from each mentor pair was given a picture on a piece of paper. Sitting back-to-back, the person with the picture was given the task of describing the image to the other person, who would then draw it on a blank piece of paper. By the end, some groups did well and others not so well. During a time of debriefing, participants shared the challenges of listening and visioning. One participant shared, "I was not sure if I could ask any clarifying questions, so I

did not. I wish I had.” Another participant shared, “I thought I did a good job describing the image, but the end result proved me wrong.” The general conversation around the circle revealed the need to lead with clarity, depending on the skills of others, and seek help when one is unsure of what to do next.

The second team-building activity was the “Marshmallow Challenge.” Split into two mixed groups, each group was given a yard of painter’s tape, twenty uncooked spaghetti noodles, a yard of string, and one large marshmallow. The challenge was to use the supplies provided and build the tallest free-standing structure possible for the marshmallow to sit on top of and to complete the task in under twenty minutes. Once the challenge began, one member of each team was instructed to remain silent for five minutes. Each participant had to remain silent for a portion of the activity.

During the activity, it was observed that the teams worked well together. One person from each team appeared to naturally fall into place as the leader, and the others did not seem to mind. Each person positively contributed to the success of their own team. At the conclusion of the twenty minutes, it was clear that one team prevailed over the other. However, the team that thought they prevailed, in fact, did not. This team, although with the tallest structure, did not place the marshmallow on top as the instructions indicated.

The debrief of the second challenge revealed much insight to the participants. For the team that thought they prevailed, one participant shared, “I thought the marshmallow needed to be at the top, but I did not say anything.” Another

participant shared how difficult it was to keep silent for five minutes and had difficulty communicating non-verbally. Other observations revealed the importance of teamwork instead of isolation like Elijah experienced. One older participant with an engineering background noted that he had to be intentional about not taking too much control, instead allowing the younger participants to have the opportunity to take charge. He related this to the challenges Paul and Elijah had of passing the mantle on to a younger generation. Overall, both challenges proved to be a positive experience for the participants as they learned to listen, communicate, and lead better together.

Following free time and lunch, participants spent time in personal reflection. Each participant received a journaling book and was encouraged to use it in ways that would be helpful for them. The last devotion was shared in the chapel (See Appendix 6). Exploring 2 Kings 2 and the end of Elijah's ministry, the participants spent time reflecting over naming the mantles that need to be passed on, the challenges of handing the mantle off, and one's readiness to receive the mantle. Walter Bruggeman shares, "Clearly Elijah has mentored Elisha by his presence, his courage, and his performance. By being so closely committed to him, Elisha 'inherits' his transformative capacity."⁴⁵ Participants reflected over the importance

⁴⁵ Walter Bruggeman, "Mentoring in the Old Testament," Chapter 1 in *Mentoring: Biblical, Theological, and Practical Perspectives*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018, <https://eds-p-ebshost-com.wesleyseminarylibrary.idm.oclc.org/eds/ebookviewer/ebook/bmxlymtfXzE5ODEyNDlfX0FO0?sid=07b16462-ecd4-49e2-8c7f-07e2bf012005@redis&vid=2&format=EK&rid=1> (accessed August, 2023). 15.

of presence, courage, and performance as it relates to the church and one's call to serve the church and prepare it for faithful service for future generations. The retreat concluded with a time of prayer and Holy Communion.

Gathering Four

The fourth and final gathering began with a word of prayer. During this gathering, the group spent time reflecting on the previous eight weeks and completing the Exit Questionnaire (See Appendix 7). The Exit Questionnaire was designed with these goals in mind:

1. Convey appreciation for participation.
2. Discover the effectiveness of the mentor pairings.
3. Determine the effectiveness of the biblical models of mentorship to present life application.
4. Determine the need for other similar opportunities in the life of the church in order to encourage intergenerational ministry and the building up of younger leaders.
5. Discover any new insights participants felt needed to be shared with the facilitator.

When asked to share about the mentoring partnership and the quality of connecting weekly, older participants remarked,

We had some very good meetings sharing personal family and faith information. We plan to continue to meet.

We connected every week. We met up several times. Each conversation was meaningful and insightful.

Younger participants responded by saying,

We met together about every week and enjoyed each other's company and got to know each other well.

Our time together was positive, and I feel like I got to know my partner better than I had expected.

One pairing indicated that they had difficulty aligning their schedules but did manage to speak over the phone and through text messaging.

In regard to the biblical mentorship relationships of Elijah and Elisha and of Paul and Timothy, the older participants had many positive things to share. Each expressed a deeper appreciation for these biblical models, and some indicated how they were enlightened to learn that these biblical relationships were closer and more meaningful than they had previously realized.

However, younger participants did not seem to connect as well with the biblical models of mentorship. One younger participant shared that his knowledge of scripture is very limited and confessed his need to study scripture more, so biblical models like these will become a connecting point for his own life and faith. Another young participant indicated that he wanted to explore more about the

biblical idea of “passing the mantle” because he sees it as an important tool for generations younger than his own.

All participants shared encouraging and positive experiences from the retreat. Younger participants found that getting away from family, even if just for one night, took some sacrifice. However, they also indicated their appreciation for getting to know each person in the group better. Younger participants shared:

I do feel like this time together on the retreat allowed us to be more open and communicative with each other as a group than we do on our normal Sunday morning gatherings.

I enjoyed the fellowship around the fire, and getting to know the other older men who I was not paired with.

Older participants shared,

I loved the comradery. I enjoyed the ending service when we shared and served one another communion

I was impressed with the willingness with which the men shared their thoughts and feelings. Men in small group settings can easily be closed off, but that was not the case.

All participants indicated the need for WPFUMC to intentionally invest in more opportunities for intergenerational expressions of faith, including mentoring. One older participant indicated the reality that the Friday morning men’s prayer breakfast happens at a very inconvenient time for young men, especially fathers

who might want to attend but cannot because of the busyness of weekday mornings at home. One older participant suggested developing an intergenerational community work team that could come together to offer assistance to neighbors in need as issues arise.

In addition, one older participant suggested an annual men's retreat and continuing a men's mentorship program for a more extended period than eight weeks. The younger men also expressed a desire for a similar program to continue, in part because some of the older men of the church are widowers and are experiencing loneliness. Another younger participant shared that a mentor program like this could help young men in making decisions between what they want in life and what they need in life.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter examines what was learned from the project in relation to the project question. Evaluating the effectiveness of an intergenerational men’s mentorship program at WPFUMC involves going back to the very beginning, our roots. Diana Butler Bass refers to this as “the great web of belonging.” She notes that “Discovering where we come from gives us a sense of where we belong...Our roots are intertwined. We are all related to each other. We belong to each other.”⁴⁶ This web of belonging became evident throughout the course of the eight-week men’s mentorship program as the men shared the stories of their lives and discovered the connectedness they share across generational lines. The sharing of their upbringings and places of origin became an opportunity for the men to discover that regardless of age, experiences can be relatable across generational lines.

In addition, throughout the eight weeks, it was essential to establish *why* we were meeting. In her book, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters*, Priya Parker writes, “When we don’t examine the deeper assumptions behind why we gather, we end up skipping too quickly to replicating old, staid formats of gathering. And we forgo the possibility of creating something memorable, even

⁴⁶ Diana Butler Bass, *Grounded: Finding God in the World – A Spiritual Revolution* (New York: NY, HarperOne Publishers, 2015) 150-151.

transformative.”⁴⁷ Parker’s words stand as a reminder of keeping the “why” ever before us. In this case, the *why* centered on how the church can more faithfully use biblical models of mentorship to help bring together multiple generations of men so they can grow in their faith and help lead the church into the future.

However, cultural norms have often become a barrier for men to share their feelings with one another, regardless of what generation they are in. Edward P. Wimberly shares that “Cultural images of what is masculine often influences men as well. To be masculine has customarily meant being self-sufficient and going it alone without support or help from others.”⁴⁸ Some of the men addressed this stigma and cultural inequality as detrimental to the spiritual growth and self-care of men. It was shared that many men do not realize this reality until after damage has been done or self-sabotage has ensued.

In one-on-one conversations with the pastor, some of the men shared that the church, in general, has had difficulty giving men the sacred space they need to be vulnerable and share their struggles and questions of life. In the words of Leonard Sweet, “The life of maturity is the journey from the many to the one, without leaving the many behind. Something new and unique emerges when the many come together to dance as one without compromising each other’s manyness.”⁴⁹ In other

⁴⁷ Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters* (New York: NY: Riverhead Books, 2018) 3.

⁴⁸ Edward P. Wimberly, *Recalling Our Own Stories: Spiritual Renewal for Religious Caregivers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press), 91.

⁴⁹ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: 2014), 128-129.

words, the church has a sacred responsibility to ensure that every man, regardless of age or background, has a seat at the table in order to connect with one another and bridge the gaps that divide.

In addition, societal divides reveal that local churches like WPFUMC struggle to adapt to changing ecclesial contexts between the generations. Jason Brian Santos points out that the silent generation of 1925-1942 can be described as the generation of “cultural morality.”⁵⁰ This generation focused on rebuilding the country and strengthening societal institutions. The baby boomers of 1943-1960 focused on the value of personhood in the midst of the civil rights era and led the way for consumer Christianity to thrive. Generation X, those born between 1961 and 1981, grew up in the consumer-driven Christianity, and thus have found it easier to be less loyal to particular institutions, including churches. Millennials, those born between 1982-2004, have continued this with “their discontentment with institutional religion via their absence,” according to Santos.⁵¹ Santos also argues that although millennials are the most diverse of the generations, their discontentment also makes them the most individualistic generation. The answer to the question of *how can an intergenerational men’s mentorship program use biblical models of mentorship to effectively bridge a generational divide and help WPFUMC prepare for the future* must elevate communal experiences while at the same time

⁵⁰ Jason Brian Santos, “Why Now?” in *InterGenerate: Transforming Churches Through Intergenerational Ministry*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen, Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2018. Kindle Electronic Edition, 42.

⁵¹ Santos, *Why Now?*, 42.

honoring the value of personal experience and the impact younger generations seek to have.

Another challenge revealed over the course of the eight weeks was the impact culture makes on what it means to live a transformed life for Jesus Christ. Throughout the eight weeks, it was clear that the young men faced many pressures from society. The apostle Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom 12:2). Paul’s words stand as a reminder to the church that in order to reach and develop a younger generation of Christian leaders, the church must shape its mission and ministry around relational evangelism and discipleship. Why? In the words of Lovett Weems and Tom Berlin, “*So that*, hearing the good news, they seek to become ever more faithful disciples, inviting others into discipleship and growing in service.”⁵² Passing on the mantle of leadership to the next generation is not only critical for one’s own personal growth, it is also critical *so that* churches like WPFUMC can effectively prepare for the future.

Together, Henry Knight and Douglas Powe share a Wesleyan way of transforming evangelism. Of particular interest is their work on “relational evangelism.” Using the acronym “relational” (renewal, enter, listening, acceptance,

⁵² Tom Berlin and Lovett H. Weems Jr. *Bearing Fruit: Ministry with Real Results* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 27.

testimony, inviting, on-going, new beings, assurance, and live-it) they capture the essence of what the men's mentorship was seeking to accomplish. They write,

“The Wesleyan way of evangelism is relational. It is about loving God and neighbor and the transformation that is possible when we are truly loving. It is about encouraging people to become whole and be renewed into the image of God. It is about understanding the power of our testimonies and how they can encourage others. It is about understanding God will accept us no matter what our situation.”⁵³

The men's mentorship program accomplished this understanding of relational evangelism. Because a safe space was created and because parameters of engaging one another were established, the men were able to be wholly and truly themselves without any fear of judgment or ridicule. These types of relationships will not only help transform lives but also prepare the church and its leadership for the future.

Throughout the eight weeks, the men participating became more and more willing to share personal stories and struggles not only within the group gatherings but also during their one-on-one weekly times together. It is important to note that a majority of the time, the older participants led the way in this vulnerable opportunity. Their willingness to share created a safe space for the younger participants to open up and share from their hearts as well. Their vulnerability built trust and helped to establish roots for continuing relationships to flourish

⁵³ Henry H Knight, III and F. Douglas Powe, Jr. *Transforming Evangelism: The Wesleyan Way of Sharing Faith* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition, 85.

beyond the eight-week period and to consider anew what it means to faithfully pass on the mantle of faith to future generations.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter draws upon conclusions gathered and recommendations for others who might endeavor to take on such a task. Once again, the project question:

How can an intergenerational men's mentorship program use biblical models of mentorship to effectively bridge a generational divide and help WPFUMC prepare for the future?

Why this intervention? Each local church is given its own set of challenges and areas of growth to steward. This particular condition was discovered over years of observation and heeding the wisdom of others, such as Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky. Together, Heifetz and Linsky share much wisdom for leaders to follow. Through adaptive approaches, they help create an art of leadership that is not only sustainable but necessary for the effectiveness of the church and its leadership.

Of particular interest are these words from Heifetz and Linsky,

Seeing the whole picture requires standing back and watching even as you take part in the action being observed. But taking a balcony perspective is tough to do when you're engaged on the dance floor; being pushed and pulled by the flow of events and also engaged in some of the pushing and pulling yourself.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership On the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 52.

Prior to naming the condition and intervention, it was vital to find moments to observe and moments to dance.

Heifetz and Linsky go on to point out that

Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment...If you want to affect what is happening, you must return to the dance floor...The challenge is to move back and forth between the dance floor and the balcony, making interventions, observing their impact in real time, and then returning to the action.⁵⁵

This back and forth from the balcony to the dance floor became the birthing place to discover where the men were emotionally and spiritually. As a pastor, it was equally important to not only observe the behaviors and responses of the participants; it was just as important to also participate in the discussions and be vulnerable at times too. Yes, it was a challenge to move back and forth, but anyone seeking such an intervention must also be subject to its possible transformation for oneself and the group.

Furthermore, discovered through such an intervention and important for others to keep in mind when attempting such an intervention are the various stages and places the participants find themselves in personally. It would be easy to make assumptions that because each of the participants is somewhat active or very active in the life of the church means that they are each spiritually mature. This is not

⁵⁵ Heifetz and Linsky, *Leadership on the Line*, 53.

always the case. It would also be easy to assume that each participant is ready and willing to engage in the project.

For this project, half of the participants were over the age of 65, and the other half were under the age of 45. Even though only one younger participant was single with no children, family, and life commitments are clearly a significant factor for everyone when attempting such an intervention. People's schedules are stretched thin, thus making commitments like this one difficult to make. The facilitator has to walk a thin line and understand that life happens and there are times when people's commitments fluctuate. This project certainly experienced this truth.

L Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong argue that when it comes to the Christian life, it is "learned and lived over time in the company of others, especially those who are wiser than we are and farther along the journey of faithful living."⁵⁶ Lifelong learning is essential to Christian discipleship. The wisdom we learn from others around us (young and old) highlights our need for mutual mentoring, but clearly, that takes time, possibly longer than eight weeks.

In hindsight, the recommendation from some of the participants to extend the length of the mentorship program is important to consider. This adjustment would be beneficial for the younger participants. While the older participants indicated

⁵⁶ L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 2006), 115.

they would be willing to extend the mentorship project, it was the younger participants who first shared such a desire.

What would it look like to extend a similar project beyond eight weeks? The extension of such a project from eight weeks to a more extended period of time could impact the end result. It is possible that a yearlong intergenerational men's mentorship program could do a better job building relationships, equipping leaders, and passing the mantle forward. This option would, of course, take much more prayer and consideration on the part of the participants before agreeing to join. However, it could open the door to a new type of flexibility in the project and create varied opportunities for participation. For example, the group could attend a sporting event together or go on a fishing trip. Limiting the time to eight weeks does limit the overall opportunities that could be experienced by the participants.

It is also important to consider what keeps us grounded. In this case, the goal was to evaluate the importance of biblical models of men's mentorship and how those models encourage us to bridge generational divides and help prepare the church for the future. By and large, this was accomplished.

However, not every intergenerational mentorship program will be only men. Other biblical models of mentorship can be used to help produce a similar result. For example: Ruth and Naomi, Mary and Martha, Elizabeth and Mary. Each of these mentor relationships offers rich context and can speak to the power of relationships for the present time.

To that end, future mentorship groups at WPFUMC could be focused on other biblical topics. Other topics might include prayer, the Psalms, one of the gospel accounts, discipleship, or the means of grace. Any of these adjustments would still provide the sacred space and place for people to come together and journey through faithful practices of discipleship with others from different generations. Regardless of the topic or focus, intergenerational mentoring can help ignite an effective avenue for the passing of the mantle from one generation to the next.

In the future, to implement a similar model of mentorship in the local church, it is vital to take more time for recruitment. For this project, participants were primarily selected by the pastor. Would it have been better to open the invitation to any man in the church? Possibly. But people do not always respond to callouts. Personal invitations can have a powerful impact. However, for some people, turning down the pastor's personal request is not an option. This could result in either inconsistent participation or an unwillingness to be vulnerable enough to benefit from the experience.

In addition, it is always a challenge to establish a gathering time that meets everyone's liking. In the case of this project, Sunday mornings during the Sunday school hour were chosen because a majority of the participants are involved in Sunday school and, thus, already at church. This did mean, however, that they would miss Sunday school for the four weeks the gatherings were held. One older gentleman politely declined to participate because he teaches a Sunday school class. It is possible that a weeknight would have worked, but this was ultimately decided

against because a majority of the younger participants had family responsibilities during that time.

Another conclusion reached throughout the course of the project was the participants' willingness to engage in adaptive approaches to ministry. Not everyone has an aversion to change and adapting to new ways of approaching ministry. The men participating in this group seemed to keep an open mind and heart to what could be accomplished. Was there ever some hesitation? Of course. However, the simple fact that they agreed to participate indicated there was an openness on their end to some degree. Their willingness was, in many ways, contagious. This could be due to the implicit values of presence, courage, and performance that undergirded the project's execution.

However, it is vital that any leader or church seeking such a project keep in mind that projects and programs do not change people. In his book *Unlearning Church*, Michael Slaughter shares

“Programs and events do not change people. We are changed by the ways we live in relationship. Radical church is God’s prototype of an authentic community. We do not expect perfection from one another. We look to one another to experience grace, encouragement, and accountability. We can encourage one another to become all that Christ has created us to be.”⁵⁷

Ultimately, this was the goal of the intervention – to live more faithfully into relationships that transform us and help prepare the church for the future.

⁵⁷ Michael Slaughter, *Unlearning Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 40.

Even though various generations approach life and even faith differently at times, it was clear through this intervention that the commonality shared mutually amongst all participants was the need to be in relationship with others. Adaptive approaches to strengthen intergenerational bonds can help be created and passed on for a more sustainable and effective church not only for the future but for today.

Appendix 1: Project and Purpose

Dear Brother in Christ,

October 2023

Over the past two and a half years, I have been working on my Doctor of Ministry degree in church leadership through Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C. I have completed my coursework and am now working on my final project. I am inviting you to be part of my project!

The project: The project will be an eight-week men's intergenerational mentorship program. The project will seek to answer this question: *How can an intergenerational men's mentorship program use biblical models of mentorship to effectively bridge a generational divide and help West Point First prepare for the future?*

The Purpose: Program participants will explore issues of faith, family, spiritual practices, and self-care. The end goal is to highlight the need for the church to reimagine its ministry with younger generations and to become a catalyst for fuller assimilation in the life of the church.

The Participants: This program will pair men 65 years of age or older with men 25 to 45 years of age. Participants will be asked to complete an initial and exit questionnaire, as well as participate in small group and one-on-one discussions throughout the eight weeks. Participation is voluntary.

The Time Required: Participants will meet every four Sunday mornings during the Sunday School hour as a group and weekly as a pair. Pairs are encouraged to meet in person or by phone for at least 30 minutes a week at a time set by the pair. I ask that you make every effort possible to be present each time we meet. The program will include a weekend retreat (at no cost to the participant) for spiritual growth and team building. Please see the schedule below.

Group Meetings (Sundays at 10am): October 1, 15, 29, November 19.

Retreat: Friday, November 10 – Saturday, November 11.

Confidentiality: Participants' names will not be used in the final project paper, but the church body will likely know who is in the program. Confidentiality will also be respected amongst pairs.

The Risks: While there is no overt risk involved in participating, participants are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings with each other in a safe and sacred environment.

The Completed Project: Once the final project is complete, it will be available for you to read, and a formal presentation of the project will be scheduled.

Permission: By signing below, you agree to participate in the project as listed above and to let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Participant Signature:

Pastor Signature:

Date: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 2: Initial Questionnaire:

Dear Brother in Christ,

Since 1830, the Methodist movement in West Point, Georgia, has produced multiple generations of disciples of Christ Jesus and leaders for God's Holy Church. Among these disciples and leaders have been women and men who have carried the torch for younger generations to follow. Like us, these disciples and leaders have grown through countless obstacles, including faith challenges, family stress, health concerns, death of loved ones, addictions, and self-care. Since 1830, the people called "Methodists" in West Point have experienced divisions in our country through a civil war, church schisms, the civil rights movement, terrorism, and other societal challenges. In our world, we have experienced multiple wars and unrest, natural disasters, and a worldwide pandemic.

Each of these obstacles and situations challenges our faith and calls into question who and what we are following. Paul tells his mentee, Timothy, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have known sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:14-15). Paul's encouraging words to young Timothy can also encourage us as we seek to grow in faith through God's Holy Word.

Paul also realized that we do not travel the journey of faith and discipleship alone. We travel together – building one another up and helping to prepare the way for future generations to come to know the life of faith in Christ Jesus.

Included is an initial questionnaire for you to complete. As a reminder, your responses are confidential. I invite you to fill out the questionnaire to the best of your ability as we begin this journey of men’s intergenerational mentorship.

Blessings,
Rev. Erik Mays
Pastor

Initial Questionnaire:

1. What age range do you fall into (please circle): 25-45 65 or older
2. How long have you been worshipping or participating at West Point First UMC? _____
3. As a child, how often did you attend church/worship? (Please choose the best answer):
 - a. My parents dragged me every week
 - b. We never darkened the door of the church
 - c. We showed up for easter eggs and egnog only
4. Growing up, did you have a solid “father figure” in your life? (Please circle one): YES NO
5. In a couple of sentences, share how your father or father figure impacted your upbringing – negatively or positively. If you did not have a father or father figure, how do you think that impacted your upbringing?

6. In a couple of sentences, please share how someone of an older generation encouraged you along the way.

7. In a similar way, how have you encouraged someone of a younger generation?

8. For those who are 25-45, please share one thing you hope to learn from someone 65 years or older and one thing you think you can share with them:

9. For those who are 65 years or older, please share one thing you hope to learn from someone 25-45 years old and one thing you think you can share with them:

10. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being of least importance and ten being of most importance) how important do you believe intergenerational relationships and connections are in the life of the church?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being difficult and ten being easy) how comfortable are you sharing your feelings with other men?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. If you know your spiritual gifts, what are a couple?

13. Do you trust God with the future of West Point First?

YES NO NOT SURE

14. Briefly share what you hope to learn through this 8-week men's mentorship program. If you are not sure, that is fine, too.

Appendix 3: Men's Retreat

Agenda:

Friday, November 10th:

- 5:30 pm: Dinner (Hunter's Pub)
- 7:30 pm: Arrive at Pine Eden Christian Retreat Center
- 8:15 pm: Bon Fire with devotion and Storytelling

Saturday, November 11th:

- 7:00 am: Breakfast
- 8:00 am: Mentor Pair Time
- 8:30 am: Large Group with devotion and team-building activities
- 10:30 am: Free time
- 11:30 am: Lunch
- 12:30 pm: Personal Reflection Time
- 1:30 pm: Devotion and Communion
- 2:00 pm: Clean up and departure

Appendix 4: Devotion 1

1 Kings 18:16-40

Back and Forth

Elijah saw how the Israelites were going back and forth between God and Baal. He realized they needed renewal. Elijah challenged the people to prepare a bull sacrifice and ask Baal to consume it with fire. Elijah would take another bull, prepare it, and ask God to consume it with fire. Elijah did this to prove who the real God was. His efforts paid off, and the Israelites were awakened to the reality of not following God. They were renewed.

There are times in our lives when we move closer to God, and times we drift away or do not have faith in God that we should. No one is immune to seasons of confusion and uncertainty. Often times, it is the people in our lives that help point us back in the right direction.

Can you share a time in your life when you needed correction or bravely took it upon yourself to help someone else find their way?

When you have a choice between two decisions, how do you decide?

Prayer – Discernment – Obedience⁵⁸

Prayer: Spending time in prayer and seeking the Lord for vision not only encourages us to hear better from God but also displays our admittance that we need God's voice to develop a vision.

⁵⁸ Nelson, *Unleash*, 95.

Discernment: Spending time in prayer will give us the opportunity to discern the will of the Lord as it pertains to personal and corporate vision. It is incumbent on the leaders then to test what they hear through the lens of discernment. This can be done by testing against Scripture as well as seeking input from discerning people in the life of the leader.

Obedience: Once the leaders hear from the Lord, they must then obey and follow through.

Appendix 5: Devotion 2

The Voice of God

1 Kings 19

In fear for his life at the hands of Jezebel's men, Elijah fled. Alone and full of despair, he found a tree to rest underneath. The word of the Lord came to Elijah and said "Get up and eat, or the journey will be too much for you." (1 Kings 19:7) The angel had a cave prepared for him to rest in until the Lord spoke to him. Elijah experienced winds, an earthquake, and a fire – but the Lord was not in any of these moments. It was in the quiet of the aftermath that the Lord's voice came clearly to Elijah, telling him to go back the way he came and find Elisha, whom he would anoint to replace him as prophet.

Because of the noise and chaos of life, we sometimes do not hear the voice of God speaking to us. Day-to-day challenges can almost become so much that we cannot distinguish the ways in which God is calling. Even when the noise and chaos settle, moments of quietness can sometimes cause us to close ourselves off from hearing God's call. Elijah reminds us of our need to actively create time and space in our lives to listen for God's call.

How does God speak to you?

Can you name a noise and chaos in your life that has prevented you from hearing God's voice?

In what ways is your noise and chaos different than someone of a different generation, and what can you learn from them?

How can you intentionally create time and space for God's voice?

How can you help someone else create such a space?

“If we as Christian leaders seek to impart wisdom, we better be connected to the Spirit, so we can speak truth in love to them. Being led by the Holy Spirit of the Living God is the wisdom we need to follow. But before we can lead well, we must be willing to be led, and it should be the Holy Spirit who is our leader.”⁵⁹

“To help young leaders discern their calling, we have to help them have a better condition of listening. We must challenge them to listen to: their hearts, their gifts, their desires, the Lord.”⁶⁰

Can someone from our older generation share about a time when you failed to listen? What did you do? What were the consequences? How did those consequences change your perspective, and what wisdom can you impart to someone younger?

⁵⁹ Nelson, *Unleash*, 59.

⁶⁰ Nelson, *Unleash*, 78.

Appendix 6: Devotion 3

2 Kings 2

Moving Forward

Elijah's journey was coming to an end. His protégé and servant, Elisha, refused to leave his side. Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you before I am taken away." (2 Kings 2:9). Elisha responded by saying that he wanted a double share of Elijah's spirit. Elisha had learned much from Elijah and sought to follow him as prophet in faithful ways.

After Elijah is taken into heaven, Elisha picks up his fallen mantle and carries forward his faith and mission as prophet.

What mantle are you passing on? Are you ready to receive the mantle?

Presence – Courage – Performance⁶¹

⁶¹ Bruggeman, *Mentoring*, 15.

Appendix 7: Exit Questionnaire:

Dear Brother in Christ,

As we conclude our eight-week intergenerational men's mentorship program, I want to express my sincere appreciation for your participation. As the church, we are called to build each other up in relationship not just for today but for the future of the church as well. I pray that new bridges have been built for you. Whether you are on the giving side of the mantle or on the receiving side, my hope is that we all see more clearly God's deep desire for faith and leadership to carry on as we continue to invest in each generation.

Over the course of these eight weeks, I hope our time together has been fruitful for you. I pray that as we explored the scriptures and learned of the mentorships of Elijah and Elisha, and Paul and Timothy, you will be inspired to carry on the culture of mentoring and the powerful impact it can make for the Kingdom of God.

Included is an exit questionnaire for you to complete. As a reminder, your responses are confidential. I invite you to fill out the questionnaire to the best of your ability as we conclude this journey of men's intergenerational mentorship.

Blessings,

Rev. Erik Mays

Pastor

Exit Questionnaire:

1. In a couple of sentences, share what your experience with your mentor partner was like. Did you connect weekly? Were those times helpful? How?

2. How did you connect with your partner outside of the large group? (circle all that apply):

- a. Shared a meal together
- b. Talked over the phone
- c. Met up for coffee
- d. Other: _____

3. In what ways did you find the biblical examples of mentorship between Elijah and Elisha and Paul and Timothy helpful?

4. If you attended the retreat, what part stood out to you the most?

5. Do you see a need for our church to have a more intentional men's ministry, especially in regard to faith and leadership? YES NO NOT SURE

If yes, what might that look like?

6. Please feel free to share anything else you think might be helpful:

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