

7. INTERGENERATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND JUSTICE

7.1 Introduction

In chapter six, we began to develop a proposal for addressing the ineffectiveness of many churches in transmitting their faith traditions intergenerationally amid the post-modern transition. We suggested that the present moment in the church's life calls for an experience of renewal rooted in the Spirit's work and centred in the mission of God. In addition, we suggested that Generation X must be recognized as playing a crucial role in helping established churches to experience renewal during this transitional period. However, as we also saw, many established churches are ill prepared to undertake changes without alienating Xers, their elders, or both. This recognition led us to assert the critical importance of *process*. We suggested that a healthy process must give attention to both the spiritual and systemic dimensions of the church's life.

Having explored these considerations, we now are compelled to propose that, if established churches are to be effective in carrying out a process of missional renewal that encompasses Generation X, this process must entail a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice. First, we can submit this affirmation on theological grounds, for reconciliation and justice are marks of the reign of God. Many churches have failed to embody God's shalom in their relationship to Generation X and in the approach that they have taken to change. Thus, if the church is to engage in processes that aid it in living more fully and faithfully within its identity as a sign and foretaste of the reign of God, it must be concerned to strive to employ *means* that are in accordance with the marks of this reign. At this moment in history, reconciliation and justice are crucial to the church's integrity as it endeavours to pursue missional renewal within the current generational climate.

Second, we can submit this affirmation on sociological grounds. As we have seen, the formative experiences of Xers have caused them to be particularly sensitized to such issues. However, as we also have seen, the experiences of Xers with local churches have been significantly at odds with these values. In far too many cases, the systemic functioning of the church has tended to reflect the intergenerational dynamics evident in other small world contexts throughout our culture, thereby

compromising the integrity of its theological vision. Thus, if indeed “the medium is the message,” then the church will need to endeavour to conduct itself with authenticity and integrity if it is to engage the members of this generation. As Ford (1995:174-175) asserts, in working among Xers, the church’s “embodied apologetic” must extend to issues of reconciliation and justice.

In the pages that lie ahead, we will briefly develop each of these themes, first intergenerational reconciliation, and then intergenerational justice. Consistent with what has been articulated above, we will explore how these themes are rooted in the renewing work of the Spirit and how they might call the church to turn from “worldly” patterns and be converted afresh by the praxis of the gospel. Furthermore, we will demonstrate how the renewing work of the Spirit might cause the emphases of intergenerational reconciliation and justice to help foster a new and right spirit within the systemic functioning of the congregation. In each case, we will see that this will help to promote the congregation’s efforts to enfold Generation X into the process of renewal. However, we will see that intergenerational reconciliation and justice also offer the benefits of wholeness and wellbeing to members of the older generations within the congregation.

Our purpose here is not to advocate for an understanding of intergenerational reconciliation and justice as the essence, entirety, or end of missional renewal. Neither are we arguing that reconciliation and justice can be expected to function as “causes” of the church’s desired ends. Rather, considering the relationship of intergenerational reconciliation and justice to missional renewal in established congregations can lead us to assert that

we cannot understand one thing without the other. A and B are indivisible. Rather than thinking that A causes B, we see that A and B are mutual influences on one another. To think in terms of cause and effect is to think that things are influenced only in one direction...System theory teaches us to think of loops instead of lines.

(Steinke 1992:4)

Furthermore, systems theory assumes multiple causes, rather than a simple cause. It assumes that there are many contributing factors to any occurrence (Parsons & Leas 1993:19-20). Thus, while there surely is more to be said about missional renewal in

established churches, our point is simply to assert that intergenerational reconciliation and justice constitute essential dimensions of the process.

Miller (2004:186) recognizes that it is easy to confuse end outcomes (“dramatic results”) with process (“organic and cumulative”). However, he asserts, “in complex systems the leverage comes from a fanatical focus on small things...not constructing a grand plan and bold campaigns.” Thus, as Snyder and Runion (2002:38-39) insist, vital congregations will “focus on the many small actions that collectively give visible expression to the life of Jesus in the world.” When engaged in planning and programming, such churches ask, “How will this affect people’s real growth? Will it provide an environment for them to come to know Jesus Christ more deeply and serve him more surely?” In preceding sections of this study, we have insinuated that the missional renewal of the church is in fact a revolutionary aim of transformative proportions, indeed a paradigm shift. However, we must balance this recognition with the awareness that, in established congregations, this change is likely to be achieved through small, intentional steps. Even if intergenerational reconciliation and justice are but “small things,” the potential impact is considerable for any church desiring to be renewed in the purposes of Christ. In reality, as we will see, intergenerational reconciliation and justice are by no means small matters. The challenges associated with these dimensions of the renewal process are considerable. However, the opportunity they provide for established churches to undertake the process of missional renewal in a whole and healthy manner is even more significant.

7.2 Intergenerational Reconciliation

7.2.1 The Priority of Relationship

As we have already noted, the prevailing paradigm within many established churches causes them to view “programs” as the path by which to accomplish their objectives. Peterson (1999:149) notes that older generations within the church tend to see participation in organizational programs and processes as a primary means of connecting with one another. Many Xers, however, are “not familiar with the traditional Christian church that many of us know and are comfortable with. To them it may seem as a dark, cold, lonely, and completely unfamiliar place” (:141). Thus, contrary to the assumptions that have guided previous generations, *programs* are not

likely to constitute the most effective basis from which to engage in ministry among Xers.

The prevalence of technique within the modern church's worldview may actually contribute to Xers' perceptions of the church. Shenk (2001:97) notes that "technique has been woven into the very fabric of our lives. The ways we communicate and relate to others are shaped by technique." Shenk (:62-63) cautions that this all too frequently has had adverse implications for the ministry of the church. Because it entails the "objectification" of the one toward whom it is directed, technique tends to depersonalize and therefore inherently to foster alienation. Adds Shenk, technique "separates into parts, resulting in fragmentation." Thus, perhaps it should not surprise us to find Miller (2004:120-121) concluding that the emphasis on growth methods in recent decades has cost the church in terms of relational cohesion. Frost and Hirsch (2003:211-212) note that "[i]t is very easy for key leaders to program the church out of a natural community experience...Programs are important, but we need to remember that every medium has its own innate message—we invent our tools, and they in turn reinvent us." Within this framework, suggest Frost and Hirsch (2003:63-64), genuine connections between people in such churches tend to be "usually quite rare."

Because of the priority that the members of this generation place on community, many of those who have sought to minister among Gen Xers conclude that *relationship* actually provides the most effective place to begin in striving to reach them. As has already been surveyed at length in chapter four, Xers are accustomed to criticism, brokenness and alienation (Zustiak 1999:166, 192). In the face of these realities, they are keenly aware of their need to experience a different way of relating (:217). In particular, they desire to experience genuine love and acceptance. As Fickensher (1999:72) articulates, "Gen Xers seek companions who will not abandon them...Because such steadfastness is unusually difficult to find, Gen Xers will be drawn to communities that offer unconditional love in demonstrable, pragmatic ways." Peterson (1999:151) similarly notes that "Generation X is in search of relationships...Generation X wants to be loved. Generation X wants to engage in a meaningful faith journey within the context of a relationship." While many Xers are unprepared to commit the traditional church expectations, they are eager for

opportunities to connect authentically with others (Hammett & Pierce 2007:117). The perception that congregations tend to be cold and unresponsive heightens the significance of this issue for many Xers (Carroll & Roof 2002:211). The members of this generation are more likely to respond to “relationship churches” that evidence a concern for authentic relationship and community building than to those that depend upon “large, slick programs” (Scifres 1999:47, 48). Thus, authenticity and spontaneity are more important than programs (Corpus 1999:13).

Fickensher (1999:77) cautions that the fact that Xers desire “faithful friendships, intensity, and ‘realness’ does not necessarily mean that the most outgoing, hyper-friendly congregations will be the most successful in drawing them in.” Rather, the members of this generation “tend to have a different visceral response to hospitality than Baby Boomers”, because “[a]nything that appears too organized, too orchestrated, or ‘slick’ will not be trusted” (:78). In fact, when church leaders insist upon using assimilation techniques rooted in past assumption in an effort to reach Xers, it can leave the impression that the church does not genuinely care (Hammett & Pierce 2007:122). Xers place great importance upon the question of whether churches exhibit an appreciation of the need for a “come as you are” starting point to all relationships. Xers are likely to be reached meaningfully by ministries that are prepared to help them deal with the fear and distrust rooted in their past and to offer a meaningful model of community in the present (Fickensher 1999:62; Long 1997:119). Further, many Xers desire to find “a community where pain, failings, and guilt are openly acknowledged in an atmosphere of trust and compassion,” and where the “contradictions and questions that in the modern era were smoothed away in the name of consistency and mastery” also are acknowledged (Fickensher 1999:69).

Thus, we can assert that, if the church is to undertake a process of missional renewal that engages the passions and needs of Generation X, this process must entail a commitment to *persons* before *programs*. This elevates the significance of community within the church’s life to a place of considerable importance. Notes Peterson (1999:143),

A recent article in *Changing Church Perspectives* says this: ‘Community is central to the twenty-first century church. Today, we are a culture of fractured families and changing social structures. We are time-starved and isolated by distance, work, individualistic pursuits, and even our neighbourhoods. Yet,

we are created for community. Community in the church of the future is more than just making relationships or being in a small group. It is an expression of the gospel. It is both hermeneutic and apologetic.

Mahedy and Bernardi (1994:57) suggest that the value Xers place on community and friendship reflects “gospel values in secular dress.” These authors feel that Xers demonstrate an affinity for the second commandment, the love of neighbour (:66). The members of this generation “want to change the world...by changing the way we relate to one another.” This emphasis on community and relationship, which Mahedy and Bernardi (1994:117) see as “a radically different course from [Gen X’s] predecessors...has enormous implications for the world’s future.” Thus, as White (2001:178) asserts, the fact that post-modern Xers place “a remarkably high value on community...holds great promise and opportunity for the church.”

7.2.2 The Priority of Intergenerational Reconciliation

That being said, as section 5.3.2.2 demonstrated, many Xers have not given the church particularly high marks where community is concerned. Many have found the church to be a context characterized by alienation, exclusion, and judgment. The formative experiences of many Xers exposed them to a church in which separation and rivalry existed among the generations. Perhaps most notably, many members of Generation X have been subjected to the same sort of denigration within the church that they have experienced within society at large. Thus, as we have seen, many Xers have concluded that the church does not offer them the experience of secure and authentic community they seek. Stated most simply, the relationship between the church and many of the members of this generation is broken. In turn, as we have seen, the unity of the church has been ruptured both formally, through the ways in which the church structures its life, and informally, through the intergroup dynamics that exist among the generations.

Over the course of chapters three through five, we have provided a thorough socio-historical account of how these realities have come about. However, this account is not altogether complete. In addition to what has already been articulated, we must recognize that these struggles also have a theological dimension. In part, they are a product of our fallenness. As Hines and DeYoung (2000:50) assert, “Sin causes

polarization and alienation and estranges people from one another. Sin is spiritual apartheid that forces us apart from God and from one another.” DeGruchy (2002:48) similarly suggests that, “as a result of human disobedience humanity is alienated from God, experiences enmity in its own ranks, and is estranged from nature.”

The origins of this problem can be traced back to the Genesis 3 account of the fall of humanity, which Elolia (2005:153) describes in the following terms:

...the beginning of human alienation from harmony and community with God and one another. It is the foundation of hatred, division, and injustice—the tear in the fabric of our cohumanity as illustrated by the story of Cain and Abel...Our sin obscures the image of God, which in turn causes us to deny that image to others in order to justify their subjugation and exploitation.

While the presence of alienation and brokenness within the human race may be rooted in this ancient origin, Woodley (2001:110) suggests that “Satan has few tools,” and thus recycles them in every generation. Human brokenness has a way of repeatedly being manifested in hatred, prejudice, exclusion, and violence. Hines and DeYoung (2000:5, 50) assert that the generation gap being experienced today is in fact a contemporary manifestation of this ancient struggle. They insist that it is rooted in “the same spirit that limits people by separating them into gulfs of suspicion and alienation.”

Because of the presence of alienation and enmity within the ranks of the human race, violence frequently erupts within the context of human relationships and communities. Schreier (1992:32-33) suggests that violence has a way of distorting the identity of those who are involved and the narrative structure through which they strive to find meaning for their lives. Violence delivers its participants into bondage to a “narrative of the lie.” Might it be fair to assert that Generation X’s experience of being marginalized and denigrated as a group of “Beavis and Butthead” slackers is a form of violence, a narrative of the lie that has profoundly impacted their sense of place and purpose? Beyond this, how might the systemic forces associated with modernity’s tendency to separate and depersonalize be responsible for doing injury to all contemporary generations? Have the claims and promises of modernity constituted a narrative of the lie that distorts human identity and that undermines authentic flourishing? If so, what can be done about this?

Against the backdrop of the challenge presented by our alienation from God and one another, scripture introduces the theme of “reconciliation.” Hines and DeYoung (2000:xxi) insist that the New Testament shows reconciliation to be “God’s priority.” These authors note that the term most frequently translated “reconciliation” in the New Testament literally means “to change completely, thoroughly, or radically” (:3). This is made possible by the initiative of God through the redeeming work of Christ at the cross (Schreiter 1992:43, 56-57; Schmiechen 1996:135; Schreiter 1998:14; Hines & DeYoung 2000:142). As Nalunnakkal (2005:49) explains, reconciliation “is a process of God’s Spirit through Jesus Christ...putting an end to enmity of all sorts. In other words, reconciliation is a restoration of relationships that had been lost. It refers to a new relationship between God, humanity and nature, and affected and effected by Christ’s redemptive work on the cross” (cf. DeGruchy 2002:51). Viewed at the broadest level, this reconciliation is cosmic in scope. It entails “the moral transformation of the world” (DeGruchy 2002:67, 69). The New Testament teaches that all things are reconciled in Christ (Schreiter 1992:56-57).

The New Testament indicates that this cosmic work of God reconciling all things to himself in Christ will not be complete until the final consummation of all things. Nonetheless, scripture also teaches clearly that reconciliation is a present reality because of what God has done through Christ (Schmiechen 1996:125, 145). Therefore, reconciliation is not merely a future state to be anticipated, but something to be expressed and experienced within the realm of human relationships. DeGruchy (2002:46) emphasizes “the interpersonal character of the term” and its relationship to “our understanding of both human and social existence.” He adds that reconciliation “always has to do with personal relationships.”

DeGruchy (2002:52) suggests that, in Pauline theology, reconciliation refers to the way in which the love of God in Jesus Christ turns enemies into friends, thereby creating peace. It entails the breaking down of barriers of exclusion and the establishment of peace between individuals or groups of people (Schmiechen 1996:111; Steinke 1996:87; DeYoung 1997:92-93). It involves the fundamental repair and healing of human lives (Schreiter 1992:21). Because the narrative of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ has overcome the narrative of the lie (Schreiter 1992:61), reconciliation achieves “the shattering of the false claims of the

world” (Schmiechen 1996:122). It liberates humankind from structures and processes of violence (Schreier 1992:22) and enables interactants to be made new in accordance with God’s new creation (II Cor. 5:17). In essence, reconciliation mirrors the nature of the triune God and is closely linked with the *shalom* that God desires for all of creation (Steinke 1996:87, 131).

The interpersonal nature of reconciliation means that this divine priority must be embodied within “a community of restored relations” (DeGruchy 2002:88). Thus, the local church factors prominently and powerfully in the biblical vision of reconciliation (Moltmann 1978:86; DeGruchy 2002:99; Elolia 2005:158). DeYoung (1997:10) argues that God’s plan for reconciliation actually *begins* with the local church. The church, having been reconciled to God, is called to be a community of reconciled persons who are actively engaged in the ministry of reconciliation (Schmiechen 1996:135; DeYoung 1997: 126-127; Hines & DeYoung 2000:10, 32-33, 130-131; DeGruchy 2002:94). Through the life of the church, God desires to demonstrate the reconciliation he intends for the world (Steinke 1996:131). As a sign and foretaste of God’s reign, the church is to exemplify a shared way of life that stands in striking contrast from the patterns of brokenness and alienation native to the world (Schmiechen 1996:166; DeGruchy 2002:90).

In this community, worldly divisions are meant to be healed (DeYoung 1997:48) and unity is to be experienced as normative (Hines & DeYoung 2000:21, 51). As Hines and DeYoung (2000:300) express, “Divisions, inequities, and injustice based on age, race, culture, gender, social status, or economic position were removed in Christ” (cf. Johnson 1999:108). The church’s Eucharistic table fellowship is meant to be a profound expression of this reality (Moltmann 1978:86). It is “the central place where God breaks down the dividing wall of hostility, racism, tribalism, and sexism and builds up the body of Christ” (Elolia 2005:158). Thus, as DeGruchy (2002:99) suggests, the table is “a sign of the reconciliation God wills for society as a whole” (cf. Wogaman 2004:147).

As an instrument and agent of God’s reign in the world, the church is called to participate in the transformation of the patterns of brokenness and alienation by inviting others to become a part of this reconciled and reconciling community

(DeGruchy 2002:55, 74-75; Snyder & Runion 2002:131). Essentially, because the church's mission is only properly understood in relation to the *missio Dei*, and because reconciliation is integral to God's mission, reconciliation also must be understood as integral to the church's calling (DeGruchy 2002:53; Nalunnakkal 2005:44; Schreiter 2005:82-83). As Schreiter (2005:80) expresses, "reconciliation is first and foremost the work of God, and we cooperate in God's work....The mission of reconciliation is therefore based in the *missio Dei*." Reconciliation, then, constitutes an essential component of what it means for the church to live in faithfulness to its missional vocation. As DeYoung (1997:59) suggests, "It is an honor and privilege to be God's ambassadors of reconciliation. Simply stated, to be a Christian, by definition, is to be involved in the ministry of reconciliation."

The meaning with which the concept of reconciliation is invested can never be determined chiefly by cultural or context factors. It is fundamentally a theological concept (DeGruchy 2002:46). However, reconciliation can only be expressed within the particularities of a given context (Schreiter 1998:13; DeGruchy 2002:153). The intergenerational dynamics being explored in this study provide precisely such a context. Thus, the gospel of reconciliation has powerful implications for how the church cultivates its intergenerational praxis within the praxis of society. How might God's work of reconciliation impact the way in which the generations within the church relate to one another? How might a commitment to live in faithfulness to the biblical vision of reconciliation influence the mindset of established churchgoers toward the members of Generation X? If the church truly endeavoured to model intergenerational reconciliation within a complex generational context, how might this shape the way that the church lives out its witness in the midst of society's fragmentation and discord?

7.2.3 The Competing Vision of Homogeneity

In chapters three through five, we have chronicled the increasing influence of church growth philosophy, with its affirmation of homogeneity, upon the life of the American church. Woodley (2001:30) sees the targeting of homogeneous groups as having become the basic formula of American church growth (cf. Foster 1997:5-6; Elolia 2005:155). Schaller (1999:60) suggests that it provides the underlying rationale for

the “replacement model” of church planting, one that encourages a mission achieved by focusing on a precisely and narrowly defined potential constituency. While the proponents of this homogeneous approach certainly would not discount the importance of reconciliation as a priority for the Christian community, they might wish to take issue with the suggestion that reconciliation between the generations must be manifested within the life of local congregations.

Proponents of the homogeneous approach do not see this framework as inherently inconsistent with the gospel of reconciliation. McGavran (1980:241) insisted that “‘one-people’ churches are righteous.” While McGavran (:239) did recognize the tearing down of dividing walls and the promotion of oneness as part of God’s agenda, he asserted that these objectives “must never be considered the whole work.” As a challenge to those who emphasize the need for unity, he posed the rhetorical question of whether it is better “to have a slow growing or no growing Church which is really brotherly, integrated, and hence ‘really Christian,’ than a rapidly growing one-people Church” (:238). In essence, he seemed to suggest that the HU Principle provides a more effective approach than the inclusive church can. McGavran (1980:238-239) insisted that his HU Principle is not to be understood as a justification for injustice, intolerance, or the powerful enforcing segregation against the disempowered. In fact, he suggested that integration of two or more “homogeneous groups” before one or the other is ready can itself be a form of injustice and “is often the kiss of death to the weaker party” (:241). If ethnocentrism or exclusivity persists within homogeneous fellowships, argued McGavran (:239), it does so “in spite of the Christian faith, not because of it.” Thus, for McGavran, expediency in spreading the gospel is the primary criteria by which this framework should be assessed.

As we saw in chapters three through five, the emphasis on expediency as a justification for a generationally homogeneous approach to church life has been widely influential within the American church in recent decades. In reflecting upon how this approach has been appropriated to target specific generations, White (1999:104) asserts that this is an effective strategy and is in fact a work of the Spirit. Benke and Benke (2002:8-9) also speak affirmingly of “generation driven churches.” These authors suggest that such churches “experience high levels of conversion growth....Their ministries are designed to respond to the cultural needs, attitudes, and

thought processes of the unchurched in the generational categories they have targeted.” Perhaps Schaller (1999:99) captures the mindset of expediency most poignantly in questioning whether it is necessary to base our strategies for reaching diverse cultures on “how the world should be” when adopting an approach based upon “the trend toward separation as a fact of life” promises to accelerate the rate of its success.

Does this approach to church life provide an adequate framework for the church’s missional vocation to be expressed? Is it truly faithful to the gospel of reconciliation? If so, this might force us to reconsider the value of working to promote intergenerational reconciliation within established churches. Schaller (1999:60) suggests that “the replacement model” of church planting is responsible in part for the shrinking of older parishes. In other words, because new churches are formed to serve each rising generation, older churches are left in a state of decline. Should we simply accept this as the natural order of things, as part of God’s will for the church? Are older members within established congregations entitled to conclude that “their people” consist simply of others their own age and thus release themselves from responsibility for reaching Generation X and those who come after them? Clearly, if we are going to advance a case for the prioritization of intergenerational reconciliation within established churches, we must engage critically with this approach that has been so prevalent in shaping the imagination of the American church. While it lies beyond the scope of this study to undertake a complete assessment of the merits and deficiencies of the HU Principle in relation to a context such as the caste system of India, where McGavran first formulated this concept, we do find it necessary to take a critical stance toward the way in which it has been appropriated within the American cultural context. Indeed, we must assert that the American brand of homogeneous church falls short of being a faithful expression of the church’s missional vocation.

As we saw in chapters three and five, within the American context, the focus on homogeneity has come to be linked closely with the values and emphases of a consumer culture. This reflects the church’s complicity in American society’s “carceral continuum,” the term Foucault (1977:303) has developed to describe the disciplinary matrix that moulds us to conform to societal expectations. In the case of

American society, this matrix disciplines us to define ourselves fundamentally as consumers. As Brownson et al (2003:3) note,

The real difficulty is that, as more than one pundit has noted, most of us no longer consume to live; we live to consume. Our lives are orchestrated around habits of consumption that no longer serve any higher purpose, but which have become ends in themselves, to be desired for their own sake. These habits in turn transform our relationships with other people, as friendships and even marriages are entertained around the question of meeting our personal needs.

As we saw in chapters three and four, all contemporary generations have been shaped within this matrix. Thus, it now is difficult for most people to imagine any other way of living or to contemplate why an alternative to the life of consumerism might even be desirable.

Some voices within the Christian community urge that we rather uncritically accept this market framework (Burgess 2005:10). Gibbs and Bolger (2005:138) note that churches that have adopted a market mindset “say they are only meeting the felt needs of individuals.” However, Gibbs and Bolger caution, “like all marketing organizations, they have a strong say in what those felt needs are.” These authors express concern that churches all too frequently “adopt cultural narratives that say that every person lacks something, is impoverished, and needs a particular product to be satisfied.” The appropriation of this narrative within the church forms people in a way that reinforces rather than challenging the carceral continuum at work within society at large. Thus, as Barger (2005:13) notes, many church-goers today are unashamedly engaged in “church-shopping.” It is not that contemporary church-goers are incapable of making commitments. However, their church involvement tends to be mostly a matter of personal choices.

This approach poses several profound problems. First, it fails truly to advance an understanding of discipleship as something that requires the individual to experience transformation. In this respect, it stands in stark contrast to the vision of the church that orients our lives to the reign of God. McGavran (1980:239) asserts that people “must be disciples before they can be made really one.” However, we are compelled to ask whether a congregation that centres in the interests of the individual will ever truly challenge this egocentric focus in a way that leads one to sacrifice for the sake of others. Barger (2005:25) insists that the narrative construct of consumerism, rather

than challenging us toward subjecting ourselves to God, actually invites us to put God at our service. In essence, by Barger's account, consumerism "trivializes God."

Barger (:27) suggests that this tendency to want to allude transformation is an agenda as old as Eden. In its American consumerist manifestation, it invites us to say, "I am in charge. I will change if I choose." This, says Barger (:49), is the kingdom of self. The sort of compartmentalized thinking this encourages toward God and the church "means that instead of the church and its sacred story being the organizing principle that informs, gives shape, and holds together a lifestyle, the lifestyle is what is finally served" (:56).

To illustrate the power of this consumerist mindset in undermining personal transformation, we can appropriate Nietzsche's concept of the "will to power." Reno (2002:98) explains the significance of this concept:

[A]s Nietzsche recognized clearly when he identified the will to power, the only way we can acquire the freedom to be ourselves is to change everything else. The world must reflect me so that I do not reflect the world. The upshot is a complex attitude toward revision, reform, discipline, and change. We deny the inward need to reform our souls, and at the same time we insist upon the need to reform all outward cultural forms.

Nietzsche's idea of the will to power helps us appreciate that, in a context in which ever increasing arenas of life are reduced to a matter of personal preferences and choices, our consumer mindset becomes the principle by which we are empowered to order our lives to reflect ourselves.

We can connect this with Sartre's (1989:45) claim that "Hell is other people." When we employ a consumer mindset as the basis for community affiliation, we may be prone to choose the "paradise" of groups that reflect ourselves, thereby insulating us against the "hell" of those whose differences might challenge us to change. As Volf (1996:91) asserts, the "self" is prone to put boundaries around its soul in its effort "to guard the integrity of its territory." Frost and Hirsch (2003:46) suggest that, when we surround ourselves with people "who are like us, who think the same thoughts, who have the same things, and who want the same things", this "confirms us... It is a form of self-justification." Thus, we may be tempted to select those settings that reflect us without transforming us.

Woodley (2001:30) suggests that this gravitation toward those who are “just like us” invites us to establish our faith upon the foundation of comfort. Elolia (2005:155) similarly notes that “most people, particularly visitors, may likely be comfortable and likely to join churches with others of their kind (much like joining a social club).” However, as we suggested in sections 3.5.1.3 and 5.2.2.3, this approach tends to foster shallowness (Follis 1991:1). A concern for salvation and justice can become replaced by the desire for personal well-being and psychological security (Miller 2005:85). In essence, asserts Schmiechen (1996:161-162), because it confines our thoughts to the horizontal plane of human choice, the principle of voluntary association is inadequate. “While the concept serves well to emphasize that membership in the church involves a free decision,” he notes, “it fails to lift before us the fact that the church is grounded in God’s goodwill, which creates a new spiritual reality in this world.” Indeed, as Brownson et al (2003:5) urge us to consider, the social script that encourages us to view ourselves as self-interested consumers is fundamentally at odds with the mission of God.

This leads us to a second concern: the distortion of the church and its mission that a consumer-oriented focus on homogeneity fosters. Hines and DeYoung (2000:5) see the homogeneous approach to church as a “half-hearted attempt” at realizing God’s true agenda of reconciliation and an “easy fix” that actually moves away from God’s intentions for the church. The focus becomes centred in “the realm of private feelings and values rather than in the shared mission in which God’s people participate” (Brownson et al 2003:7). In a market-driven culture, the church comes to be perceived as an entity that offers programs and experiences to meet people’s needs (Barger 2005:2-3). Barger (:3) suggests that this framework conditions us for “gimmicks” and for immediate gratification. As a result, however, the concept of “church” actually is distanced from its members (Hunsberger 1998:85).

In turn, the emphasis on programs, technique, and growth actually tends to undermine the experience of intimacy and authentic community that God desires for the church and for which many people long (Miller 2004:120-121). Gibbs and Bolger (2005:139) explain this reality:

Consumer churches promote self-interested exchange and thus violate an inherent part of the gospel, that of the gift. They want satisfied customers who

will return the next week. This distorts relationships among church members who expect certain things from others depending on whether they play the role of consumer or producer.

The limitations of this understanding of church life lead DeYoung (1995:154) to assert that, even among those who are “alike”, very little community exists; he sees such churches as making only limited attempts within narrow parameters. Faith rooted in separation has become the norm, while unity is now a unique occurrence (:58; cf. Moltmann 1978:29). Even though many churches strive to be “friendly,” their capacity to embody redemptive community proves quite limited (Hall 1997:26-27). Schmiechen (1996:14) suggests that this is an inevitable result of the church’s uncritical embrace of our culture’s “low view of institutions and community.” As he suggests, when community becomes utilitarian in nature, “the things that nurture, sustain, and build up a common life” tend to be neglected.

A third concern that must be expressed here is the great potential of this approach to church life in perpetuating prejudice and in reinforcing exclusivity. While proponents of the HU Principle insist that it is not intended as a justification for exclusion or prejudice, we are compelled to question whether this model sufficiently challenges the innate tendency toward ethnocentrism. Osborne (2005:43) asserts that homogeneity can flow out of either the flesh or the Spirit. However, can this approach truly be reduced neatly to such simple and dichotomized categories? Van Gelder (1998:73) suggests that an inherent flaw in church growth thinking is the assumption of the neutrality of culture. As a result of this, he suggests, the brokenness evident within society can be seen as normative for the life of the church, as well. As he expresses, the condition of the church being “divided and conflictive in its historical expressions” is “accepted as inevitable, and, for the most part, unresolvable” (Van Gelder 2000:121).

Even apart from the justification that the principle of homogeneity provides, the church may reflect the “inter-communal antipathies present in the society at large” (Volf 1996:36-37). As DeYoung (1997:7) expresses, the church’s experience of community can be limited by “the same walls we construct in society.” Gustin (2005:48) asserts that the inherent human tendency to exclusiveness and ethnocentrism” poses a challenge to unity and harmony; it inevitably fosters “distrust,

prejudice, and interpersonal division in all its forms.” Thus, when churches consciously employ a strategy that follows the lines of division drawn within the broader society, there is great potential that they will reinforce rather than heal the wounds of society (Woodley 2001:98).

Some critics insist that prejudice is not only a potential problem within the homogenous church, but inherent to the very concept. Writing from an indigenous Native American perspective, Woodley (2001:62) assesses the focus on homogeneity as constituting a sophisticated form of “-isms.” He asserts that numerical growth at the expense of inclusiveness is not true success because the ends never justify the means (:63). Woodley (:117) further insists that community established on the basis of division cannot produce true unity. Rather, its members are forced to seek uniformity. However, uniformity as a means of achieving unity, cautions Gustin (2005:48), is not only unrealistic, but unhealthy. In reflecting upon the application of this homogeneous approach among the generations of American church-goers, Stuart Briscoe (quoted in Zahn 2002) is compelled to compare intergenerational relations in the church with the system of apartheid (www.christianitytoday.com).

While homogeneity most certainly can be rooted in ungodly intentions (Gibbs 1981:124), overt rejection or discrimination toward others may not be necessary for homogeneity to cause those from outside of the dominant cultural group to experience exclusion. Simple neglect and insensitivity toward them may adequately achieve this. A market-based approach, as Anderson (1990:165) poignantly illustrates, requires us to make choices about who to serve. However, this also has the potential to legitimize the human tendency to be friendly to “our kind of people” (Angrosino 2001:vi, vii; Woodley 2001:101; Hammett & Pierce 2007:76). In essence, the church can become inadvertently a “closed system” (Van Gelder 2007:126). Moltmann (1978:30), noting that “birds of a feather flock together”, suggests that “[t]o those who are ‘in,’ this seems to be the most natural thing in the world.” However, he adds, “those on the ‘outside’ feel excluded, degraded, and wounded.” Thus, as McNeal (2003:30) asserts, monoculturalism “does not embrace kingdom growth, because it insists that people conform to a cultural standard in order to gain admittance to the religious club.”

The narrowness that this generates actually may hinder the effectiveness of the church's witness. Homogeneity limits the congregation's worldview (Hawn 2003:6). For example, in generationally-homogeneous congregations, insights about the faith that naturally arise in a generationally diverse context become lost (Van Gelder 2007:52). This is true whether a homogeneous church is composed predominantly of younger or older members. Gibbs (1981:128) expresses concern that a church that "identifies exclusively with one group" is at risk of living "a self-centred, impoverished life." Frost and Hirsch (2003:39) see this evident in the many churches that they describe as being plagued by "bland middle-class conformity" and a "stifling monoculture." As a result of this, suggest Hines and DeYoung (2000:22), when congregations become "merely a nice crowd of saved 'look-alike, smell-alike, sound-alike' people...they will not be ready or able to impact the society around them and bring about the kind of change God desires to see in this world" (cf. Gibbs 1981:124-125). Frost and Hirsch (2003:46) similarly articulate that such a church "will always be severely impeded in its attempts to win the world for Christ." Thus, in a culturally complex environment, this homogeneous "ghetto mentality" simply is not adequate (Woodley 2001:98).

As the preceding chapters have evidenced, this focus on homogeneity actually may threaten the sustainability of the church's witness. Visser't Hooft (1956:77) offers the fascinating observation that the death of the church in North Africa was linked to its rootedness in one particular class, language, and culture. Similarly, asserts Gibbs (1981:128), when the group of which a homogeneous congregation is composed dwindles, "the church will face extinction." As we saw in section 5.4, many established churches today are threatened by the seeming inevitability of this prospect. If the planting of new churches for the sake of reaching the young is guided by a mindset of homogeneity, can the long-term prospects of these churches be any more optimistic? We noted in section 2.6 that the presence of multiple generations within the church is essential for the sustaining of the church's witness through time. However, suggests Murray Zoba (1999:68), "being a 'youth church' by definition precludes the development of healthy intergenerational relationships within the church." Thus, we are compelled to question whether the potential for these churches to develop a sustainable witness is likely to be any greater than that of their predecessors.

Furthermore, we must note that reliance upon homogeneity can compromise the credibility of the church's witness in a post-modern context. McNeal (2003:58) suggests that, in a post-modern culture, redemption must be understood as inherently relational. Thus, the community of reconciliation also is a crucial part of Christian witness in relation to this culture (Long 1997:97). Citizens of the post-modern world are crying for "oases of cohesion" (Miller 2004:180). This being the case, the market mindset about the church's mission is likely to hinder the cause of Christ in this generation greatly. As White (2001:180) explains, relational unity is necessary for the church's growth among the members of the first post-modern generation: "Without unity, we have little to offer the world that it does not already have...[I]t is no longer enough to present the gospel's propositional truths." Thus, the dependence upon homogeneity minimizes the church's impact on its social context (Gibbs 1981:126). As Hines and DeYoung (2000:22) insist, people do not need to encounter the same brokenness in the church that they find within society at large. The church's embrace of homogeneity actually damages its testimony to the world as a community of the new creation (Dawn 2001:98-99).

Another problem inherent in this dependence upon the use of homogeneity is the potential for the endless proliferation of churches devoted to specific subgroups (Follis 1999:1). As Schmiechen (1996:63) notes, the "demand for differentiation" within our society essentially constitutes a slippery slope in which all past expressions of freedom must be surpassed. Post-modern tribalism certainly has the potential to cause division and distance within our society to increase (Dietterich 1998:176). Thus, we would do well to contemplate how one identifies what sort of cultural factors should serve as a basis for the formation of distinct homogeneous groups? In other words, at what level of cultural distance should we identify the barriers that separate people as beyond direct structural confrontation by the gospel of reconciliation?

In McGavran's treatment of this subject, it seems as though he made little effort to assign any relative weight to the various sorts of "barriers" that separate groups. However, we are forced to ask, are all language, ethnic, economic, and socio-cultural barriers created equal? This is a particularly crucial question with which to grapple in

a context in which, as Nalunnakkal (2005:46) expresses, the market now “determines the destiny of people” and “decides one’s dignity and identity.” Should the church allow itself to be guided by the lines of demarcation that have been drawn within a market economy, or should it strive to transcend and transform these artificial distinctions? While this is not meant to diminish the distinctions that exist between the first post-modern generation and their modern elders, we must question to what degree contemporary churches are permitting stylistic differences in musical preferences and other facets of generational experience to serve as the basis for perpetuating fragmentation. How many of these churches are truly engaged in what Turner (1993:60-69) has called “deep mission”, the work of critiquing and converting in the “deeper” layers of culture (which we introduced in section 2.2)?

As we saw in section 3.4, in the late 1800’s, concerns were being raised about young people forming their own churches. In section 3.5.2.5, we noted that, by the 1970’s, this prospect had been realized among the members of the Boomer generation. Now, this trend continues among the members of Generation X (section 5.4.6.4). Benke and Benke (2002:6) affirmingly predict “an ongoing trend toward churches that are focused in outreach toward selective generational groups, as opposed to a multigenerational orientation.” Is this trend truly something to which we can add our affirmation? When will we reverse this tide in an effort to bring people together rather than apart? Bosch (1996:466) insists that we

cannot but take a stand against the *proliferation of new churches*, which are often formed on the basis of extremely questionable distinctions. This Protestant virus may no longer be tolerated as though it is the most natural thing in the world for a group of people to start their own church, which mirrors their foibles, fears, and suspicions, nurtures their prejudices, and makes them feel comfortable and relaxed. If Wagner (1979) is praised (on the dust cover of his book) for having transformed “the statement that ‘11 A.M. on Sunday is the most segregated hour in America’ from a millstone around Christian necks into a dynamic tool for assuring Christian growth”, then something is drastically wrong...[T]he essence of heresy, says Hoekendijk, is the “fundamental refusal to participate in a common history” (1967a:348).

If Best and Kellner (1997:279) are able to assert that there is still common ground of experience and shared concern between moderns and post-moderns within society at large, how much more should this be true within the reconciled body of Christ?

These observations leave us with some serious questions about a generationally homogeneous approach to church life. Frost and Hirsch (2003:52) suggest that “leaders of suburban, middle-class churches are being hypocritical” when they criticize the validity of the HU Principle for the missional church to fulfil its imperative to reach specific people groups. Responding fully to that claim is perhaps best reserved for another study. However, it is worth noting that these authors do acknowledge the legitimacy of the concerns of church leaders toward the limitations of generationally heterogeneous churches. As we have demonstrated above, a focus on homogeneity does not offer the best hope for helping established churches navigate the challenges associated with the current generational climate. Neither does it provide these established churches with a viable framework for living in renewed faithfulness to their missional vocation (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:95, 125).

Armour and Browning (1995:156) claim that few viable alternatives to this model have been proposed. However, a lack of alternatives hardly constitutes a legitimate reason to defer to this approach to church life as the only option. Frazee (2001:88) reminds us that what we measure is our mission. Increased numbers of attendees certainly can be an indication of kingdom growth. However, as Keener (2005:39) argues, “[W]e dare not use data about ‘homogeneous’ churches’ rapid growth to ignore [God’s] invitations to diversity.” Is it enough merely to measure numerical growth while deemphasizing the implications of the gospel for our relationship to our neighbour (Van Rheenen 2004:5)? Gibbs (1981:127) insists that this cannot really be justified biblically. For the church that is striving to live in faithfulness to its missional vocation, the indicators of success “are not determined by quantitative measures”, but by “the quality of Christian love experienced in the midst of its common life and ministry” (Dietterich 1998:156). As McNeal (2003:67) asserts, the missional renewal of the church must involve changing the ministry “scorecard.”

Clearly, if established churches are to experience missional renewal in the post-modern transition, they will need to find a better framework within which to operate than the HU Principle. An individualistic solution to a systemic problem invites inattention to the true issues needing to be addressed (Conder 2006:73). As Rendle (2002:118) expresses, “Pretending that all members can shape congregational life in their preferred image does not help generations... negotiate how to live together, share

worship, or pass on the faith.” Howard Merritt (2007:9) suggests that the models espoused within the CGM often are not attainable unless one is planting a new church. However, as Keener (2005:38) expresses, “differences of opinion will show up in even the most niched congregations.” In contrast to the CGM’s focus on “the uniqueness and distinctiveness of people groups”, the missional church is rooted in the assumption that “the gospel breaks socio-economic and ethnic divisions between peoples so that all become one in Christ....[It] views God’s mission holistically” (Van Rheenen 2004:3). Thus, the established church that is striving to be renewed as a missional community will endeavour to move beyond the dynamics of likeness, fragmentation, and competition (Conder 2006:157), and will work to embody intergenerational reconciliation.

7.2.4 Pursuing Intergenerational Reconciliation in the Church

7.2.4.1 Pursuing Intergenerational Unity in Diversity

Clearly, if established churches are to strive toward an experience of missional renewal that encompasses Gen X, this will require a paradigm shift in the “intergenerationality” of the church (Allen 2005:328). These churches must find a way to overcome the dynamics of fragmentation, division, and alienation that plague our society. The current intergenerational climate provides the church with the opportunity to lead the way in modelling “how to live more respectfully and caringly” for the rest of society (Gambone 1998:20). The church has the potential to be the place where true intergenerational community might be achieved (Harkness 1998:6). As Whitesel and Hunter (2000:100) express, the church “has a contribution to make as a tri-generational refuge.” Fortunately, a growing number of churches are recognizing this reality and are working to bring the generations together (Peterson 1999:107, 108). Zahn (2002) notes that, in many congregations, a renewed concern for building cross-generational relationships is motivated by a desire to strengthen faith formation in community (www.christianitytoday.com).

The renewed emphasis upon intergenerational community resonates with the values of Generation X. This generation is steeped in a culture for which bringing things together in holistic harmony is an important objective (Drane 2000:125). Furthermore, for the members of this generation, integrating diverse people groups

into the church is a central goal (Cunningham 2006:59). Frazee (2001:195) reflects upon this change in emphasis:

[T]he growing value of intergenerational life is being recognized by young adults in their twenties; driven by postmodern values, they seem to be crying out for it. One Gen X couple is recorded as saying, “Our generation, without necessarily knowing it, is calling the church back to what the church has always been called to be—a multigenerational, multicultural, open, orthodox, and culturally engaged body of believers.” Dieter and Valerie Zander, pastors and baby-boomer mentors to Gen Xers, make this comment: “The potentially endless proliferation of new subgroups begins to look like it is based on nothing more than catering to new styles. That kind of shallowness won’t last.”

Frazee predicts that Xers likely will never fully see these ideals realized.

Nonetheless, strides toward the realization of this vision can be achieved within the life of local churches. As Staub (2003) asserts, the best scenario for reaching Xers is provided by those churches that are composed of at least three generations, because they offer the potential for meaningful intergenerational connections (www.christianitytoday.com).

This, of course, presents the church with the considerable challenge of actually pursuing unity. Scripture leaves little doubt as to the imperative nature of the call to unity (Gustin 2005:46). White (2001:178) asserts that “Jesus clearly maintained that there was a direct relationship between Christian unity and effective evangelism (John 13 and 17). He taught that the world’s attention would be arrested if His followers would maintain relational unity.” Gustin (2005:47) also reflects upon the relationship between unity and our witness:

[T]he biggest single reason that both Jesus and Paul gave for maintaining unity is the impact it has on our witness. Unity brings glory to God. It demonstrates to the world the power of the gospel to do what humans cannot do alone. The unity of the church is the greatest advertisement there is for God’s power and grace. This demonstration of unity empowers our mission and enables our witness. To the extent that the church reflects the reality that it is the body of Christ, united in love—to that extent, the church’s mission will succeed.

In seeking to be unified, the church expresses its commitment to its missional task of promoting healing as a reconciled and reconciling community. This healing task goes against the grain of the prevailing expectations within the dominant culture (Barrett 1998:134, 135; Riddell 1998:69). Thus, it also will powerfully confirm the church’s testimony in the world.

The unity that God desires for the church encompasses a rich and complex diversity. This is evident in the life of the early church. As Woodley (2001:34) suggests, Pentecost was marked by diverse people being blessed by unity. Though the first conflict in the church (Acts 6) was a cultural conflict, this community remained together (:67). Lohfink (1999:174) urges us to contemplate the improbability of the early church's experience of community:

We should try to imagine how such different people could sit at one table. They were like fire and water. But just there began the miracle of the eschatological people of God. If each one were to remain in his or her own corner and individual house nothing of the reign of God could be seen. Its fascination can only appear when people of different backgrounds, different gifts, different colors, men and women sit together at a single table.

Lohfink (:218) further insists that the Christian community in Jerusalem “did not see themselves as a group of like-minded friends and also not as a group of people who had joined because of particular interests; they were a gathering created by God.” Snyder and Runion (2002:24) describe the unity evident among these first Christians as “miraculous” and “one of the most amazing things about the early church.”

The legacy of the early church also helps us to appreciate that the unity God desires for the church is not dependent upon members being pressed toward conformity or uniformity (Gibbs 1981:124). Angrosino (2001:2) points to the Acts 15 account of the Jerusalem Council as evidence that God does not condemn cultural differences or require people to change their cultural identity. Eloia (2005:156-157) sees this emphasis reinforced in Galatians 3:26-28:

Paul does not envision a community in which differences disappear but one which affirms and celebrates differences...By affirming our differences as members of the human family, we can recognize others as members of the same family, though they may belong to distinct social and ethnic groups. The Galatians passage therefore calls us to affirm the wealth of human diversity; anything less is a violation of the good news.

Reflecting on the more than thirty occurrences of the metaphor of “the body” to describe the church within the Pauline epistles, Steinke (1992:56-57) insists that the presence of diversity within the church actually is quite necessary: “When a group is diverse, it is more resourceful, having many ideas, gifts, and functions at work... The church is a gathering of dissimilar parts. It is not necessary that the parts be identical

to one another. It is necessary that they be identified with one another.” Thus, in the New Testament, we see evidence of a church that gained its strength not from uniformity, but from “unanimity” (Lohfink 1999:236).

The work of God within the early church remains relevant in today’s complex intergenerational context, as well. Clearly, cultural differences need not necessarily be barriers to human community (DeYoung 1995:180). Thus, the fact that ministry among the contemporary generations is complicated by cross-cultural dynamics does not necessarily discount the possibility of intergenerational unity. Furthermore, as Volf (1996:48) observes, within the “differentiated body of Christ”, “[b]odily inscribed differences are brought together, not removed.” Explains Volf, the body of Christ “lives as a complex interplay of differentiated bodies—Jewish and gentile, female and male, slave and free—of those who have partaken of Christ’s self-sacrifice.” The Spirit does not erase such “bodily inscribed differences,” but rather allows the people in possession of such differences to enjoy access into the one body of Christ on the same terms. In section 2.3.2, we were introduced to the concept of generational “age location in history” (Strauss & Howe 1992:48). We can assert that the differences between the generations in terms of their current location within the human life course constitute one category of “bodily inscribed differences.” By Volf’s account, this category of differentiation certainly does not lie beyond the scope of Christ’s unifying work.

This recognition presents the contemporary church with an important choice. As Foster (1997:35) asserts, when encountering diversity, the church has to make decisions about its life and work. Will we strive to move toward greater faithfulness to God’s intent for the church or away from it? In reflecting upon the challenges associated with bringing the generations together in the church, Driscoll (2005:42) frames this same question in poignant and potent terms:

[R]egarding diversity in the church there are really only two destinations: Babel or Pentecost... The way a church travels toward Babel is by asking, ‘How can we glorify ourselves by growing our ministry?’ This desire leads to a false gospel that does not call me to love my neighbor and show hospitality toward those who are different from me. This gospel expects that I love only those who are like me and who share my same values and interests.

Conversely, Pentecost is God’s attempt at kingdom unity through diversity—hanging out with people unlike me because God has been gracious

to us all... The way a church travels toward Pentecost is by asking, ‘How can we glorify Jesus by expanding his kingdom?’ This desire leads to the true gospel that calls me to love my neighbors who are unlike me, and welcome them into Christ’s church.

Driscoll insists that the real question for us is not whether we are pursuing diversity, but rather whether we genuinely are following the gospel of Christ. If we are living in accordance with the gospel, he asserts, “diversity will occur as a result of the reconciliation accomplished in Jesus Christ.” Thus, we should not only tolerate diversity, but seek and celebrate it; we should not only accept it, but appreciate it (Woodley 2001:43).

7.2.4.2 Pursuing Intergenerational Inclusivity

As with the early church, this diversity challenges local congregations beyond uniformity to a genuine inclusivity. As Dietterich (1998:179) expresses, a church that is striving to be faithful to its missional vocation will “welcome and nurture the incredible richness and particularity of perspectives, backgrounds, and gifts, but always within the embrace of God’s reconciling unity.” This requires the church to live as an open system, rather than one that is closed to “others.” Law (2000:16) notes that all organizations are by nature exclusive: “When an organization declares its existence, it defines its boundary and, therefore, defines who is part of the organization and who is not.” Law (:18) adds that all communities have a “boundary function”, which is “the mechanism by which a person or group is accepted as a full member of the community” and “is transformed from being ‘them’ to ‘us.’” For the church, the boundaries by which its existence is defined are intimately wrapped up in the gracious invitation of Jesus.

Thus, as Law (2000:26) insists, “One of the central missions of the Christian community is to welcome those who are excluded...In other words, the boundary function of a faithful Christian community begins with inclusion.” This sort of openness is only possible when a community “operates on the assumption that there is always an abundance of God’s grace” and thus is secure enough to open its boundaries to include others (:35). While Law (:14) suggests that exclusion does have a place in preserving the community, he also insists that it should not “overshadow”

or outweigh the work of including outsiders. Thus, churches must be willing to reassess those attitudes and practices that have fostered distance in relation to post-modern young adults. As Long (1997:117) cautions, by standing in the way of Gen X's encounter with the grace of God, the church mirrors the disposition of the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son.

The effort to be inclusive requires that members of the church be willing to open themselves to embrace those whose generational identity is distinct from their own. Embrace, as Foster (1997:1) notes, entails an interplay of both "differentiation and intimacy." Thus, rather than expecting that newcomers assimilate into the cultural patterns of the majority culture represented within the congregation, a culturally open congregation "will display a spirit of receptivity toward the community's cultural diversity" (Hawn 2003:8). In essence, the church is enabled to be "a 'Church for others'," one that embraces "the 'other' and the 'outsider'" (DeGruchy 2002:94). In reflecting upon Buber's "I-It/I-Thou" distinction, Elolia (2005:150) observes that the "other" is not to be an 'it,' which connotes both detachment and depersonalization, but rather a 'thou,' which expresses the dignity of human personhood for the other." In section 2.5, we noted the intergroup dynamics that cause the members of differing generations within "small world" contexts to develop an "I-It" posture in relating to one another. As we have seen throughout chapters three through five, these dynamics are evident both throughout society and within the church. The evidence provided in preceding chapters suggests that Generation Xers have suffered the impact of this depersonalization at least as much as any generation.

However, the gospel serves as an "antidote to dehumanization" (Bosch 1995:45). Xers must be provided opportunity to experience this hope through the "embodied apologetic" of the local congregation. For a generation that struggles with a sense of alienation from their families and society as a whole, the church has the potential to offer a place of belonging, involvement, and serving a greater purpose (Zustiak 1999:192). Thus, it is important that churches to go out of their way to cultivate "a congenial environment for young adults" (Kew 2001:64). As Zustiak (1999:166) notes,

What Xers don't need is more criticism and rejection. They have lived their whole lives with a sense of failure and disappointment. Bridges need to be

built between the generations and healing administered to fragile and broken lives. Generation X is not going to respond to new arguments about the truth claims of Christianity. They are going to respond when they experience the genuine care, concern and involvement of Christian people reaching out in compassion and understanding.

This challenges churches to invite Xer participation in their activities and to make it clear that both they and God desire to receive the members of this generation as “they are right now” (:217).

A culturally open church recognizes the neighbour as a divine agent of blessing or even of challenge (Foster 1997:51). According to Angrosino (2001:4), sometimes those who seem to be of our culture on the surface are hardest to understand and accept. As we noted in section 4.6.2, this is precisely the situation that many older church members face as they struggle to understand the post-modern young adults with whom they come into contact. Thus, perhaps the current state of intergenerational relations in the church should come as no surprise to us. However, insists Moltmann (1978:30-31), as we accept one another “as Christ has accepted [us]”, we are provided “a new orientation”, one that “opens us up for others as they really are so that we gain a longing for and an interest in them.” This invites us beyond friendship “within a closed circle of the faithful and pious,” toward “open friendship” with those who are different than ourselves (:60-62).

This has powerful implications for the church’s ministry among Xers. However, as Zustiak (1999:192) observes, “The typical church is going to have to make some adjustments in attitude and approach if it is going to be effective in reaching out to Generation X.” In section 7.2.1, we noted that Xers tend to respond negatively to the “programs” of hospitality employed in many churches. As we have noted, they prefer to be known and understood. They desire to encounter authenticity and honesty (Reifschneider 1999:37). Thus, as established churches strive to demonstrate an open receptivity to Xers, it is important that they be sensitive to the reality that patterns of hospitality “are specific to each culture, and knowing the nuances of what counts for hospitality in any given culture is essential to the exercise of hospitality in that culture” (Schreiter 1998:89). Corpus (1999:13) suggests that the church should strive to extend the same respectful “cross-cultural grace” to people from another generation that they would in welcoming “someone from a distant culture.”

As the church strives to know and understand Generation Xers, listening must be the beginning point of relationship (Peterson 1999:146). As Householder (1999:45, 46) expresses, “The church needs to talk less and listen more, label less and love more.” Otherwise, it is unlikely to gain the trust of this generation. Corpus (1999:13) suggests that it may actually come as a relief for many Christians to know that sharing the gospel with younger generations entails talking less and listening more. However, “Listening is a simple and obvious strategy with people who are different from you, but listening between generations does not always come easily.” Nonetheless, asserts Howard Merritt (2007:127), “When we understand the context of young adults and listen to them, without smugly dismissing or denying their realities, we begin to connect with those under forty in our midst, where they live and how they live.” As a result, the church’s leaders will be blessed and challenged with fuller and more meaningful insight into what it might mean to engage in mission in a post-modern context.

7.2.4.3 Pursuing Intergenerational Mutuality

In section 2.2, we introduced the concept of “solidarity” to describe the “glue” by which “group cohesiveness” is maintained within a given society or community (Roberts, Richards, & Bengston 1991:12). Throughout chapters three and four, we chronicled the decline of solidarity between the generations and identified this as a challenge within contemporary society. Foster (1997:68) notes that some theologians have adopted this term to describe “the dynamics in communities that affirm and embrace these incomprehensible differences as gifts to our common life.” However, he argues, an even more helpful term might be “mutuality.” As he explains,

In the experience of mutuality different peoples share similar feelings or ideas. It involves an action of reciprocity, of give and take. The goal of mutuality is to have the sense of belonging to one another—of having empathy for the other. The impetus in groups—including congregations—toward the experience of mutuality is powerful. It originates in our human quest to be connected to others, to share a sense of commitment to one another, to be on intimate terms with another. It draws on the persistent assumption that despite our differences we have something in common.

Foster insists that the differences that exist among people within the church cannot be reduced to some cultural “common denominator.” To illustrate this, he specifically

cites the intergenerational distance between the experience of the child born in the 1990s and that of his or her parents at the same age. It is precisely because of this weighty challenge that Whitesel and Hunter (2000:85, 127) advance a framework for the “peaceful co-existence” of the generations within the church that “insulates” them organizationally from one another. However, is this mutual protection from one another truly all that we can hope to achieve in a multigenerational context? As we endeavour to bring diverse generations together within one unified body, how can mutuality ever be experienced truly among these generations? What will it take to cultivate such mutuality?

At this moment in history, the pursuit of mutuality will require the church to break out of its cultural blindness and to make a genuine effort at bridging the generation gaps that exist within our society (Roof & Clark 2002:208, 210). It will challenge us to cultivate a shared life together that expresses the reality of God’s reconciling work. Schmiechen (1996:145) insists that the experience of reconciliation is possible “in the here and now,” even despite “the weakness and brokenness of the church.” However, building a church for the future will take all of the sense of community that we can summon (Mead 1991:63). It will require a rediscovery of community as central to Christian faith and practice (Drane 2000:120). In the face of our individualistic culture, we will need to engage in a “remoralization” of social life, so that we are enabled to move beyond narrow self-interest (Roof 1995:254). This renewed moral commitment will entail an emphasis upon interconnected relationships and mutual dependence. This is consistent with the marks of missional vitality. As Riddell (1998:169-171) asserts, a missionally vital congregation will be one that is open to others and that places a high premium on relationships. The missional church is one in which the freedom and reconciliation opened in principle in Christ must be lived out in social concreteness (Dietterich 1998:159). Thus, Snyder and Runion (2002:40-41) encourage churches that are striving to live in faithfulness to their missional vocation to focus upon “building vital, accountable community.”

Amid the intergenerational challenges with which the church is faced today, the cultivation of a community of mutuality is no small task. Because peace is not something that we work out with those we like or simply a matter of imposing our will on the other, it is not easy to achieve (Schmiechen 1996:133). As Lohfink

(1999:320) asserts, the experience of community is not something that can be accomplished by means of human effort:

Where [community] exists it has a share in the great history through which God leads God's people. Therefore it cannot be 'made,' but is created by God alone. Hence also the many disappointed people who came together to make something new for themselves, usually to meet their own needs, only to see the new thing slip through their fingers.

The experience of genuine Christian community can only occur when people are challenged toward an experience of reconciliation that they could not achieve "without God's supernatural help" (Hines & DeYoung 2000:51). This reconciliation cannot be substituted by human "counterfeits", such as the "lesser goals" of "integration, accommodation, and tolerance" (:51). Neither is it something that can be realized solely through conflict mediation strategies (Schreiter 1992:25). As Schreiter (1998:14) notes, "reconciliation is not a human achievement, but the work of God within us." It is a ministry of the Spirit and takes place in the Spirit (Kim 2005:22). Through the Holy Spirit, churches that are striving to live in faithfulness to their missional vocation "are empowered to participate in God's shattering of all barriers" (Dietterich 1998:162).

Thus, if the generations within the church are to be remade into a community of mutuality, this will require a disposition of reliance upon and devotion to God (Woodley 2001:43). Schreiter (1998:26) believes that reconciliation "is more a matter of spirituality than strategy." As he explains, "Reconciliation is not mastered, but discovered. Mediation is a technical rationality, a matter of skill and problems. Reconciliation is more about attitude than skill, a stance before the broken world rather than a tool to repair that world." This is not to suggest that the pursuit of reconciliation does not entail strategies (:16). The key is for Christians involved in reconciliation "to understand how they interact with the work of God and how they become instruments of God's work in all of this" (:12). In other words, they must remain attentive to the relationship between spirituality and strategy:

There is, then, a balance between spirituality and strategy. A spirituality that does not lead to strategies does not fulfil its goal. A strategy that is not based in a spirituality will fall short of the mark. There must be this mutual interaction. In that interaction it is the spirituality that should guide the strategy.

(:17)

Thus, asserts Schreiter (:16) “the cultivation of a relationship with God” becomes the basis by which reconciliation can happen.

In addition to this reliance upon God, the congregation will only be able to rediscover life together as a community of mutuality as its members return to an authentic vision of the church. This entails putting to death false notions of the church and reconnecting with the ancient and authentic story of the gospel in a way that forms a community of faith with passion and character (Barger 2005:71). The church is not ours, but God’s; it does not bear witness to the choices we make, but to the choices God has made and continues to make (Barger 2005:22, 76). As Snyder and Runion (2002:52-53) express, “When the Bible speaks of being a part of Christ’s body, the emphasis is not on the individual’s action but on God’s action as he joins us to Christ, makes us part of the body, and adopts us as his children.” The biblical vision of the church critiques the assumptions of consumerist individualism and the practices of volunteerism as being inadequate (Van Gelder 1998:71). Thus, as Miller (2005:228) suggests, our consumer culture’s focus on the private realm of the individual must be brought into an ecclesial discourse to enable us to discern and address both its appropriate and illegitimate claims upon our lives.

Our culture’s emphasis on consumerism does not have to be viewed solely as a problem to be solved. Rather, as Miller (2005:228) suggests, the importance placed upon choice can be appropriated to challenge Christians to choose to live in accordance with the values of God’s reign. As Brownson et al (2003:34, 53) note, scripture calls us to become “swept up in God’s larger purpose” and to participate in God’s reign. As we live in the reign of God, we are enabled to overcome “consumer spirituality” (Lynch 2002:107). In its place, we are able to practice a missional spirituality that emphasizes our commonality and that subverts the reign of the individual (Riddell 1998:132-135). Mahedy and Bernardi (1994:66) suggest that, when the church becomes more “we-centred” and less driven by market values, “Generation X may begin to see in us the living God.” At the same time, by inviting Xers to be engaged by the story of God’s reign, churches are well positioned to challenge Xers to examine how their own spirituality has been shaped by the “deep influences of culture” to much the same degree as the institutions they are prone to criticize (Beaudoin 1998:59). In essence, the biblical vision of the church challenges

local congregations to “entwine an intergenerational community that connects with God, each other, and the world” (Howard Merritt 2007:137).

In addition to relying upon God and returning to the true story of God’s reign, the pursuit of mutuality must entail the diverse members of the congregation turning toward one another for the purpose of “remaking” relationships (Schreiter 1998:35). If old relational patterns are not changed, the result will be unsatisfying.

Reconciliation does not amount merely to the restoration of the *status quo* (Schreiter 1992:55). Rather, it takes all parties to “a new place” (:56; cf. Schreiter 1998:30). However, the establishment of peace can only begin when “opposing sides are willing and able to adopt a new beginning” (Schmiechen 1996:133). DeYoung (1997:74) asserts that true reconciliation is “centered in relationships that empower all parties involved” and “takes place between equals who acknowledge their need for each other.”

This cannot be merely a hasty peace, a superficial substitute for genuine Christian reconciliation (DeYoung 1997:18). DeGruchy (2002:71) insists that “[t]here is nothing cheap about God’s reconciliation.” Thus, the reconciliation we are called to pursue is no less “cheap” (Hines & DeYoung 2000:2). Hill (2002:162) asserts that “[t]he business of the body of Christ is to build bridges between the generations, and the wood used for the bridge is the cross of Christ. It is the cross of Christ that brings us together, and it is the life of the cross that we are called to live.” The church that is striving to live in faithfulness to its missional vocation must be intentional about investing time, energy, and resources in helping people to unlearn old patterns and to learn the new ways of living that will help to build reconciled relationships (Dietterich 1998:152; DeGruchy 2002:184). Thus, the work of intergenerational ministry will need to focus upon intergenerational healing and reconciliation (Loper 1999:37). This is an important consideration for a generation that, as we saw in sections 4.4 and 4.5, largely has not had the advantage of seeing healthy relationships modelled. As we saw, while many members of this generation hunger for a more meaningful experience of relationship, they struggle to know how to achieve this. However, as we saw in chapter five, the need for relational healing certainly exists among the other generations within the congregation, as well.

As the generations within the congregation strive to rebuild reconciled relationships, they also will be challenged to identify and address those structures and mindsets within the congregation's life that undermine mutuality. As Miller (2004:187) observes, we need "to gain a more systemic understanding of our unintentionally destructive actions." Furthermore, suggest Hines and DeYoung (2000:32-33), we must be prepared to turn away from these barriers to reconciliation:

We must repent of everything in our local congregations that would nullify reconciliation and hinder the solidarity that God intends us to have. We must repent of everything that has developed in our communities and regions that cuts us off from this solidarity... We must renounce attitudes, traditions, customs, and structures that embarrass and compromise our testimony of reconciliation and solidarity.

Unless local churches are prepared to acknowledge and deal with these unpleasant realities, they will continue to subvert their best intentions to look and be like Christ (Woodley 2001:66). However, a commitment to repentance for the sake of rebuilding intergenerational relationships will come to bear upon the life of the congregation in several important ways. We will consider three of these ways briefly here.

First, if the church is going to provide a context for the rebuilding of reconciled relationships between the generations, this will require it to move away from ways of organizing its life that reinforce barriers between people rather than promoting reconciliation (Foster 1997:16; DeYoung 2000:140-141). Lohfink (1999:220) asserts that the centre of the church's life does not reside in some kind of bureaucracy or the activity of a group, but rather in "the assembly in which the whole community comes together or is at least represented, and in which the union with the whole Church is preserved." Thus, assembling together is integral to the church's identity. As Lohfink explains "The communion of believers thus is not something that is merely spiritual and intellectual. It must be embodied. It needs a place, a realm in which it can take shape" (:262). Furthermore, the assembly provides the basis for mutual reconciliation; it offers a context "where solutions allowing for a new beginning can be found" (:235). Thus, if the church is going to make progress in fostering intergenerational reconciliation, it must find ways "to get older people and younger people spending meaningful time with each other" (Loper 1999:12).

This is a complex task. As we noted in section 5.2.2.2, the church's imagination tends to be limited by the legacy of "solid church" that has been embedded deeply in its consciousness. This causes the generations within the church to be prone to focus their attention on the Sunday morning worship services and, as a result, to move rather swiftly toward win/loss power struggles over what takes place during that time. Furthermore, because the generations have been shaped by distinct paradigms, they also have distinct expectations regarding the essence of how "unity" is expressed within the assembly (Miller 2004:140-141). The elder generations tend to emphasize the sharing of a rational worldview. Boomers tend to emphasize experience. Post-modern young adults favour interactive relational connections. While this poses a challenge for the church, it is not impossible to provide structured opportunities for intergenerational interaction. Gibbs (1981:127) notes that, when divisions arose between Hebrews and Hellenists in Acts 6, "the solution was not to divide these people according to their ethnic and cultural differences," but to address the problem administratively.

How might churches today respond to the intergenerational complexities they face by finding organizational answers that foster the restoration of relationship? Bosch (1995:34-35) insists that, as churches incarnate God's mission of reconciliation in the world, "we can initiate approximations of God's coming reign." Thus, while the structural solutions that churches employ might not be perfect, they can provide a context for the generations within the church to express a "non-final reconciliation" in the midst of their struggle to work out a lasting peace (Volf 1996:110). Anderson (1994:150) offers realistic and sage counsel in recommending that church leaders "not introduce the most important changes at the point of greatest risk." As he explains, the point of greatest risk often is "the Sunday morning assembly... Sunday morning assemblies are the most 'sacred' time and the most sensitive place and thus should be least tampered with." Perhaps established churches will need to begin elsewhere in developing opportunities for the generations to cultivate mutuality.

Snyder and Runion (2002:39-40) suggest that organizational structures must be designed to work in harmony with the relational system that they are intended to facilitate. Thus, structure is "a functional question" in that it must "help the church really be the church" (cf. Van Gelder 2000:37). Miller (2005:225) suggests that the

sort of structures that have been employed in recent years have tended systematically to confuse well-intentioned people. Now, rather than structuring the church with an orientation to individual choice and consumption, the church must strive to develop forms that reflect its identity as God's "new family" (Westerhoff 1974:131, 160). Westerhoff (1974:130) suggests that this should lead the church to endeavour to bring together at least three generations for activities as often as possible. Indeed, as Frazee (2001:195) notes, "In all places of effective community,...the various strata of generations spend both structured and spontaneous time together." One way that the church can accomplish this is through "counterbalancing the nature of its purpose-driven meetings and programs with less structured family gatherings and more interactive formats" (Miller 2004:191). In a very real sense, this coming together can be recognized as an expression of God's mission. As Moltmann (1978:107) asserts, "Mission does not mean only proclamation, teaching, and healing, but it also involves eating and drinking. Mission happens through community in eating and drinking."

Second, as the generations come together, the commitment to rebuilding reconciled relationships will challenge all prejudices and intergroup stereotypes that do not contribute constructively to wholeness among God's people. The generations within the congregation must decide how they will define the "other" hereafter (Schreiter 1992:54). As Elolia (2005:151) expresses, "Do we define them as reflecting God's image, or does some kind of demeaning image shape our definition?" This certainly has relevance for our present discussion. As Householder (1999:45) notes, the church must recognize its prejudice and condescension toward Generation X: "[M]any in today's church have over-labelled and under-estimated Generation X." It is almost as though this generation has been assigned the role of the "scapegoat" or "identified patient" within an anxious society and within anxious churches (Shults & Sandage 2003:73-74). However, the gospel provides for this generation to experience "re-naming", which brings about the removal of false and exclusionary labels (e.g., "slacker"). It also provides for the "re-making" of this generation, which involves tearing down the barriers that prevent them from moving from excluded to included (Volf 1996:73).

Furthermore, the rebuilding of relationships has the potential to transform the way in which the participants of all generations view one another. Anderson (1990:257)

cautions that one-dimensional identities, the sort that give rise to the intergroup dynamics and stereotyping that takes place between the generations, are no longer adequate in a post-modern world. The pursuit of reconciliation challenges all members in the community to view themselves and one another in light of their shared human-ness (Volf 1996:124; DeYoung 1997:104; Foster 1997:15). In essence, we share in a solidarity of sin; there are no innocents (Volf 1996:80, 82). As DeGruchy (2002:92) notes, as fallen humans, we share “an ‘ethical solidarity’, but it is one of ethical failure.” Thus, we cannot be divided into neat categories of victims and violators (Volf 1996:80). A genuine embrace of this reality has great potential for drawing the members of the first post-modern generation into a meaningful experience of mutuality; as McNeal (2003:58) notes, “Brokenness is what unites people in the postmodern world.”

In Christ, we have been called to a renewed identity as one new humanity (DeYoung 1995:28; Hawn 2003:12). As Colijn (2004:77) suggests, old group identities are superseded by our new citizenship and new family identity. Our new identity in Christ calls us beyond “clean” identities that group “us” over against “them” (Volf 1996:126). This new identity makes it possible for the members of the body to employ both a catholic personality, one that is enriched rather than threatened by the culture of the other, and an evangelical personality, one that has been “brought to repentance and shaped by the Gospel” (Volf 1996:126). This also has the potential to radically alter the damaging intergroup dynamics that exist within the church and to foster mutuality in Christ. As Rendle (2002:116) expresses, the generations within the church have been called together “to find a larger common spiritual identity with those not in our identity tribes or pure-markets” (Rendle 2002:116).

Third, the effort to rebuild relationships between the generations also must entail a commitment to heal the memories of past disappointments and wounds. As Volf (1996:132-133) expresses, a memory of exclusion “is itself a form of exclusion...In my memory of the other’s transgression the other is locked in unredemption and we are bound together in a relationship of nonreconciliation.” Certainly, some Gen Xers retain the memories of painful experiences with the church from their formative years. Others have been disillusioned by the exclusion they have experienced as young adults. Many struggle with distrust because of the brokenness they experience within

their homes and society. Older members of the congregation have been touched by pain, as well. Some are plagued by the pain of intergenerational win/loss struggles that have divided their congregations. Movement beyond these memories will not be accomplished through denying the particular history of what has occurred (Schmiechen 1996:111). It is not merely something that can be achieved “intrapsychically,” within oneself. Rather, it must be expressed “intersubjectively” in relationship with the other generations who are present within the congregation (Shults & Sandage 2003:14, 37, 38).

In order for this to occur, however, the church must be prepared to function as community of memory. As Schreiter (1998:94-95) explains, a community of memory is “a place where a people can come to common memory of the past...For a past truly to be overcome, people must come to a common memory of it. Otherwise the divisions of the past are perpetuated in the present.” In order for this common memory to be formed, the participants must be permitted to retell their stories of what has happened (Schreiter 1998:45). Rendle (2002:41-42) sees the congregation as one of the few institutions remaining in our culture that has this potential of inviting people of different generations to sit together and share their stories. Capitalizing upon this potential will require considerable care. As we noted in section 4.3.2, modernity and post-modernity foster distinct understandings of the relationship between our narratives and reality. Thus, even the telling of stories has the potential to be a source of conflict. Nonetheless, it is important and worthwhile for the church to endeavour to provide space for these stories to be told. With time, an effort must be made to connect these narratives of brokenness with the redemptive narrative of Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection (Schreiter 1992:61).

However, for the church to be the sort of community in which the rebuilding of relationships is fostered, it cannot remain oriented solely to the past (Schreiter 1998:91). Rather, the generations within the church must strive to cooperate in writing a new story together. As the members of diverse generations share in life together, they can learn to listen to one another and care for each other (Hill 2002:162; Howard Merritt 2007:21). They can learn to value and share their differences (Keener 2005:42; Hammett & Pierce 2007:166). While the generations have found it difficult to communicate meaningfully with one another (section 4.6.2),

they now will need to “identify and develop a new language that expresses both our diversity as well as our unity in order to build the kind of community that can rightly be called the Body of Christ” (Elolia 2005:162). Furthermore, they will need to learn to see life through one another’s eyes. As Hines and DeYoung (2000:42) suggest, “We can use aspects of our own life in tandem with a disciplined listening ear to gain a sense of what others are experiencing. We must gain points of reference for understanding if we are going to create lasting, meaningful relationships.”

The congregation’s efforts to place the story of God’s mission at the centre of its shared life can provide a powerful basis for the generation to write a new story together. Lohfink (1999:236) insists that unanimity is achieved within the congregation when “they allow themselves to be united in favor of something that is beyond themselves: the will of God, God’s work, God’s gospel, the history that God has begun in the world.” In reflecting upon the relationship between mission and unity in the New Testament, Lohfink (1984:119) observes that “Paul made the ‘common work’ (ergon) the ‘core which guaranteed unity.’” Thus, a commitment to God’s mission can in fact be “a major method for maintaining unity” (Gustin 2005:47). As Gustin (:48) explains, by focusing on our shared mission,

we find unity of purpose and action that ties us together in a very practical and deeply meaningful way....Mission unites people at a deep level that allows for an underlying unity that does not require some kind of outer uniformity... We come to realize that the things that unite us are greater than those that divide us.

The unifying impact of our mandate to be witnesses in the world can enable us to recognize ourselves as “brothers and sisters of those who are completely different from us” (Elolia 2005:160). Thus, as Conder (2006:169) expresses, “In a society that experiences intense boredom, loneliness, and deep-seated individualism, the creation of churches as missional communities offers disconnected individuals opportunities for meaning and involvement.”

This shared intergenerational life promises to enrich the members of all generations (Harkness 1998:4; Hill 2002:162; Allen 2005:320). Gen Xers can experience the benefit of interacting with older members of the body who exemplify stability of commitment and who possess wisdom about life. Those who were not presented with healthy conditions for identity formation during their adolescent years can now

experience the local church as a context for discovering and being formed in accordance with a new identity in Christ. The church also can offer a setting in which they are included in healthy family activities and in which they are mentored by the members of older generations.

The older members of the congregation certainly will stand to benefit, as well. As Eggers and Hensley (2004:95-100) note, intergenerational interaction causes the elderly to experience joyfulness and fun. It also bolsters their faith that the future is secure in the next generation. They are provided a sense of purpose and meaning through helping the younger generation, the feeling of being wanted and needed, and the satisfaction of significant connections with other. In essence, says Johnson (1999:108), when we bring the generations together, it “keeps the old younger.” The church can be an exception to the “crisis of generativity” introduced in section 4.6.1. In turn, says Corpus (1999:13), interaction with young adults is actually likely to deepen the spiritual life of these older members of the church.

At times, a commitment to remaining together across generational lines will be uncomfortable and challenging. It will require the generations within the church to learn to sacrifice their preferences for one another. However, asserts Driscoll (2005:41), this process of learning to sacrifice for others is integral to the maturing of our faith (cf. Frazee 2001:195; Keener 2005:38). In prophetic contrast to the carceral continuum of American society, the ultimate goal of God’s redemptive program is not the “kingdom of freedom”, but rather one of love (Volf 1996:105). This transforms the “project of liberation” as we have understood it. As Schmiechen (1996:127) expresses, “Freedom is always the freedom to be in Christ and with one another. Life with one another is not something added on to liberated persons; life together is the purpose of our liberation.” Thus, rather than asserting their own preferences, the various generations can learn to live in accordance with the “Titanium Rule”: “Do unto others, keeping their preferences in mind” (Raines 2003:34). This will enable the church to model a level of civility that is notably lacking amid the win-loss competitions so prevalent within our society (Rendle 2002:21). Hines and DeYoung (2000:115) insist that this commitment to submit to one another in diversity will be more powerful than illegitimate unity. Indeed, they insist, God will bless the church.

The challenges associated with cultivating mutuality within a diverse intergenerational community can be a threatening prospect. In fact, some might find it too risky to imagine ever undertaking this intergenerational paradigm shift. However, asserts Woodley (2001:30), God can handle the risks associated with diversity. Thus, he insists, we should not fear it. Hanson (2005:136) is confident that, when we are defined by our faith, rather than our fears, we will grow together: “Fear hardens lives and closes borders. Faith calls us to see the world through the eyes of God’s vision for the world—a vision of the goodness of creation, humanity created in God’s image, interdependent, praising God, and pursuing justice and peace.” By finding the faith-filled courage to turn their hearts toward one another, the generations within the family of faith will actually come to reflect the heart of their Father (Woodley 2001:67).

In a culture plagued by fragmentation and alienation, this can provide a powerful testimony to the world (Harkness 1997:17-18). When we relate to one another as family, the community’s “intentional alternative lifestyle” demonstrates tangibly the reality of God’s reign and the freedom of the Spirit (Moltmann 1978:119). In turn, suggests Dawn (2001:147), “our life as a community of peace” has the potential to “make ready an interest on the part of our neighbors in hearing the good news of God’s shalom, which we proclaim in Christ.” As we have considered above, this embodied witness can communicate powerfully within a sceptical post-modern context. As Gambone (1998:20) notes, the credibility of the congregation’s commitment to intergenerational life enables it to increase its outreach “by saying to communities that are fragmented, isolated, and separated, ‘Come and experience our faith community which is working every day to promote authentic relationships between generations.’” Thus, a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation truly can be a powerful component of the missional renewal process within established congregations.

7.3 Intergenerational Justice

7.3.1 Intergenerational Injustice in the Church

In addition to what has already been articulated above regarding the essentialness of intergenerational reconciliation within the process of missional renewal, we turn now

to a consideration of the theme of intergenerational justice. We must assert that this too is a crucial consideration within the process of missional renewal. To a certain degree, this assertion is rather self evident, for it is impossible to achieve reconciliation without also striving to do justly (Schreiter 1992:37; 1998:22, 65). In reality, these two concepts are interrelated and inseparable. Nonetheless, in light of the specific challenges outlined in the preceding chapters, it will be valuable for us to engage in a more sustained exploration of the theme of intergenerational justice in its own right.

In chapter four, we learned that many Xers have experienced considerable inequity and marginalization throughout their life course. Furthermore, chapter four has shown us that the formative experiences of this generation have caused them to be particularly sensitized to issues of justice within institutional settings. When injustice is perceived, the allegiance of the members of this generation often is difficult to secure. Within a congregational setting, suggest Whitesel and Hunter (2000:185), the sensitivity and scepticism of this generation gives rise to concerns regarding “the question of how a church is organized and governed.” These authors add that the formative experiences of Generation X also have provided them with a sensitivity to whether there is “accountability for the leadership as well as clear lines of communication.”

In chapter five, we discovered that established churches have all too commonly chosen to reflect the marginalization that Xers have experienced within society at large. Xers frequently have been hindered from contributing meaningfully or from assuming positions of leadership within the church. In many cases, opportunity to influence the bearing of tradition meaningfully within the congregation has been hindered, as older generations presently in leadership have been concerned to preserve their traditional ways. These congregations frequently demonstrate a tendency to resist or dismiss the need for involving the younger generations equitably in their organizational life. Thus, those post-modern young people present within the congregation frequently feel disempowered and, as a result, are not likely to be utilized to their full potential in aiding the congregation toward greater engagement with the post-modern context. In turn, many Xers have either left or simply become disengaged from active participation. As Everist and Nesson (2008:91) explain, “To

be inside a structure and trivialized may be more frustrating than exercising power from outside the institution.”

Celebrated CEO and author Max DePree (1997) has reflected upon the importance of justice within the life of organizations, particularly those within the non-profit realm, in terms that are of relevance to the experiences of many Xers. He notes that justice is an important issue in contemporary organizations: “Justice is high on most people’s list of ideas that tell us the way life ought to be...[J]ustice [in the non-profit realm] begins with the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution” (:61). DePree continues by suggesting that justice within organizational settings is demonstrated through *equity*. “Equity is a characteristic of healthy communities,” he asserts (:63). “The heart of justice in organizations is relationships constructed on right practice” and “is related to everybody in the organization” (:106). Equity, asserts DePree (:156), “means to be fairly treated” and “to have access.” Unfortunately, as we have seen, many Xers do not feel as though the church is a place in which they have been afforded such fairness and access.

In seeking to describe these experiences, we can employ two social-scientific categories: “power” and “capital.” First, Weber’s (1978:53) classic definition of power describes it as “the chances which a [person] or group of [persons] have to realize their will in a communal activity, even against the opposition of others taking part in it.” Power is not bad or good in itself. The question is not whether there is power in a church, but rather how it is used (:130). Thompson (2003:114) notes that power in the congregation is often a function of status, class, or party:

[C]ongregations have a strong tendency to regard certain individuals and groups more highly than others...Persons whose secular, community status is high are likely to be held in similar esteem by the congregation; conversely, those who are otherwise regarded as less important to society likely will be considered the same in a church.

Not merely the possession of power, but also the *perception* of power matters, suggests Law (1993:14-15), for “the perception of power is our sense of authority and ability to influence and control others...This perception of power expresses itself through one’s behavior and attitude.”

Unfortunately, inequitable power dynamics can become institutionalized within organizational systems. When this occurs, suggests Van Gelder (2007:124), “it is quite difficult to reform.” Tragically, as DeYoung (1997:9-10) notes, such “systemic injustice is at the root of many inequities in our society.” Even more tragic is the reality that systems of injustice can be at work within the life of the church. As Law (1993:14) notes, when people of diverse cultures come together, the power dynamics that cause one group to dominate and claim more power than others are perhaps inevitable. However, the systems of injustice that perpetuate these inequities, suggests DeYoung (1997:12), “exact a heavy cost on those outside the centers of power” within both church and society. Everist and Nesson (2008:89) note that “[w]hen those in power hold that power clearly and firmly, they feel they can afford to ignore the powerless.” As we saw in chapter five, when we consider both the possession and perception of power, we find that Xers have not experienced equity within the systemic functioning of many established congregations. Many Xers have been left with the impression that their voices are not valued within the congregation (Corpus 1999:14). As Regele (1995:234) observes, the church has often been experienced by Xers as “a telling place.”

Secondly, we can observe that the inequitable distribution of power has caused Xers to be impacted by an imbalanced appropriation of “human capital” within the congregation. This term, borrowed from the realm of economics, “consists of the ways that persons apply their own experience, skills, energy, and interests toward certain activities and programs, with the expectation that such an ‘investment’ will pay ‘dividends’ to them” (Thompson 2003:101). Thompson (:103) insists that this concept provides helpful insight into the relationship between individual members and the life of the church:

For believers...gifts of the Spirit become—in a sense—part of the human capital...What believers have to invest are abilities given to them, yes, but to exercise through the body of believers. In other words, their investment of human capital into the congregation pays off for them as the congregation benefits from what they provide.

Thompson further notes that those churches that thwart the efforts of participants to use their gifts can expect to lose members. As we have seen, in many established congregations, Xers have faced limits in the degree to which they are able to bring their gifts, experiences, and insight to bear on the way in which their faith tradition is

expressed. They have not been permitted to exercise their creativity and passion in ways that help to promote the renewal of their traditions within the post-modern context, nor have they been empowered to exercise leadership. Rather, older generations have seemed to be more concerned with their own *dividends* than with making *capital investments* in future generations.

Another author who provides us some helpful lenses for understanding the experiences of Xers in many established congregations is the ethicist John Rawls (1999:251-258), who has written about the issue of justice with specific regard for the intergenerationally just distribution of resources within society. Says Rawls (:252), “Each generation must not only preserve the gains of culture and civilization, and maintain intact those just institutions that have been established, but it must also put aside in each period of time a suitable amount of real capital accumulation.” In essence, Rawls is advocating for the choice of the generations presently in control to allocate resources for the sake of the continued advancing of society within future generations. Rawls (:254) continues, “It is a natural fact that generations are spread out in time and actual economic benefits flow only in one direction....[I]f all generations are to gain (except perhaps the earlier ones), the parties must agree to a savings principle that insures that each generation receives its due from its predecessors and does its fair share for those to come.”

Rawls (1999:257) further posits that it is not acceptable for the dominant contemporary generation to justify prioritizing its own interests at the expense of future generations:

[A]ll generations have their appropriate aims. They are not subordinate to one another any more than individuals are and no generation has stronger claims than any other. The life of a people is conceived as a scheme of cooperation spread out in historical time. It is to be governed by the same conception of justice that regulates the cooperation of contemporaries.

According to Rawls, this recognition will have significant implications for the ethical choices that each generation makes in relation to those that follow it: “We can now see that persons in different generations have duties and obligations to one another just as contemporaries do. The present generation cannot do as it pleases but is bound by the principles that would be chosen in the original position to define justice between persons at different moments of time.”

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, there has arisen something of a crisis of intergenerational responsibility within our culture. We would add here that, amid the praxis of modern society, many established churches also have failed to exemplify a commitment to intergenerational justice. Employing the language of DePree and Rawls, this can be restated as follows: there has been a lack of systemic equity and, more specifically, a lack of concern regarding the equitable distribution of the resources of power and human capital among the generations of which the congregational system is composed. As we have seen, at times this gives rise to win/loss scenarios in which either young or old end up as victims of inequity. As Lyons (1995:93) asserts, “Generational conflict...is fundamentally about justice within and between generations.” However, as we also have seen, many times this has simply resulted in the withdrawal of disillusioned Xers from congregational life. In turn, this poses an even more egregious inequity in that the love and grace of Christ is essentially being withheld from those post-modern Xers who reside just outside the doors of the church, yet who remain at considerable cultural distance from its traditional forms. This is captured poignantly in the reflections of Cunningham (2006:25): “Should my generation continue to invest in local churches that don’t connect with us and with our peers? Can we maintain unity with the previous generation’s churches without sacrificing the best opportunities to influence our generation?”

Elbel (2002:110) insists that, in a society marked by intergenerational struggles, “Intergenerational justice must be given equal consideration to social justice.” He adds, “Are we stealing from the future for the sake of the present, thus abdicating our tradition of leaving things better than it was?” He continues, “Future generations deserve nothing less from us than our full compassion and our every effort to ensure them a sustainable future.” If this is true for society at large, how much more so should it be for the community of Christ? As we noted in section 5.4.6.2, many churches have sought to champion significant causes of social justice, while at the same time neglecting issues of intergenerational justice within their own ranks. Now, if it is not merely to reproduce the injustices that presently exist within society or even to create new and potentially more injurious injustices, the church must recognize its need to reflect ethically upon what constitutes a proper response to the complexities

of intergenerational coexistence (Lyon 1995:96). This is a matter of “the moral callings of the generations in their relations with one another” (:93-94). If not properly addressed, this issue ultimately may pose a crisis for the sustainability of the church’s witness.

7.3.2 A Theological Vision of Justice

Lyon (1995:95) urges us to reflect upon this theme of intergenerational justice from a distinctively Christian vantage point:

We must grapple with the moral callings of the generations in their relationships with one another in the midst of the particular social, cultural, and psychodynamic contexts of their realization. To ask these questions and to see them as important in individual and communal formation is to recover an older tradition of ethical reflection. Only as we struggle with such questions can we have a chance of achieving compelling cultural and religious resources that might resist the influence of the market.

What insight can the church’s theological resources provide in addressing the reality of injustice within its own ranks? As we will see, if the missional renewal of the church is to help it achieve renewed connectedness with its identity as a sign and foretaste of the reign of God, this must also lead it to a renewed concern to embody justice. As Lohfink (1999:132) suggests, “The reign of God means justice.”

We must acknowledge that the relationship of justice to the renewal process will certainly not be obvious to all. As Wolterstorff (2004:79) notes, some Christians see justice as a concept concerned entirely with the future:

Christian hope is no hope for what might transpire in history but hope for a state of *eudaimonia* that transcends history. Hence it has nothing in particular to do with the struggle for justice within history. Christian hope is not hope that our struggle for justice will bear fruit; nor is it hope that our longing for justice will be satisfied.

Understandably, the practical outworking of this sort of thinking is that Christians are excused from working for the establishment of justice within the present reality.

Wolterstorff (:82) insists that this is a mistake. True Christian hope, he asserts, entails two distinct hopes, “neither to be assimilated to the other: hope for a new creation, and hope for the just reign of God within the present creation” (:87). Wolterstorff (:86) insists that “what is intrinsic to the redemptive story line...[is] God’s seeking

justice—that is, God’s working to undo injustice.” DeGruchy (2002:54) notes that this theme is intimately linked to God’s agenda of reconciliation: “[T]o say that God was reconciling the world in Christ is another way of saying that God was busy restoring God’s reign of justice.” Thus, the Christian hope for justice is not only about the future, “but about the impact which God’s future has on our present experience” (:210).

This being the case, as we have articulated above with reference to reconciliation, the justice of God is to be embodied in the concrete social reality of the life of God’s people. As Lohfink (1999:132) articulates, “justice cannot exist in a single person.” The Old Testament account of the nation of Israel helps us to understand the place of justice within the covenantal community. Notes Birch (1991:177), in reflecting upon the Hebrew nation, “Righteousness and justice are the terms most often used to characterize what is called for in covenant society....[T]hey are lived out in relationships (with God and with neighbor) which require discernment and judgment.” He adds,

These qualities are rooted in the character of God who has acted in justice and righteousness toward the people. God then expects these qualities to be reflected in the life of God’s people in their relationships to one another and to God...Justice and righteousness are also the moral values which are to characterize covenant obedience. They are basic to the identity of the covenant community if it is to be faithful to its relationship with God.
(:259-260)

Stated simply, within this covenantal understanding of justice, “the vertical and the horizontal are inseparable,” while “the system of human justice can work only if it is seen as a reflection of God’s justice” (Dunn & Suggate 1993:32, 36).

The call to embody justice factors prominently in the life of the New Testament community, as well. DeGruchy (2002:54) notes that, for this community born out of the redemptive work of God in Christ, “To be reconciled to God and to do justice are part and parcel of the same process.” Relationships of justice within the community, thus, “arise out of gratitude for God’s initiative” (Dunn & Suggate 1993:36).

Brownson et al (2003:83-84) offer these reflections upon the place of justice within the life of the church:

It is not about our desires or interests, nor even in the first place about our rights, but about the boundless depths and heights of God’s concern for us and

for all creation...In human terms, it is the way we are called to live for one another and for God...It is basically a contribution in a concrete relationship, directed toward affirming other persons as God affirms them, healing relationships that have been broken or damaged.

Through their behaviour in contributing to the building up of the community, members of the church are able to participate “here and now” in the just reality that Christ will bring about fully in the future (Koester 2004:311). As Koester (:312-313) asserts, the body of Christ “is challenged to already make real the vision of the future by the way its members order their own lives with each other.” What matters most, he suggests, is “how one relates to one’s brothers and sisters” (:313).

While a comprehensive exploration of biblical justice is not possible within the scope of this present project, it will be helpful for us to consider what theological insight we might be able to gain regarding the issues of equity introduced above. One crucial implication of the biblical witness on the subject of justice is that the church is called to be a community of equality (DeYoung 1995:174). As Koester (2004:311) notes, members of the new community have been asked “to establish equality and justice in their own midst and to spread the message, the gospel, to as many people as they can, inviting them to join the new community of justice and love.” He insists that the celebration of the Eucharist speaks powerfully to this aspect of the community’s character: “[T]he shared bread establishes and maintains a new community of equality and mutual care and respect.” In this community, suggests Koester (:313), “Total equality, regardless of any inherited differentiations, is the basis for ethical behavior.” This principle cuts across every boundary line that humans might establish. The church, thus, can be described as a “world community of responsible relationships that transcends nations and cultures and gives them a creative place in the economy of God” (Brownson et al 2003:101).

The distribution and exercise of power, which is of particular concern within our present discussion, is implicated in this theological vision. Law (1993:13) suggests that biblical justice is concerned with “equal distribution of power and privilege among all people.” In reflecting upon the nation of Israel, Birch (1991:259) notes that justice “relates to the claim to life and participation by all persons in the structures and dealings of the community, and especially to equity in the legal system.”

Similarly, the New Testament community is shown by Koester (2004:312) to be one guided by a vision of the church constituting “a functioning social and political entity in its own right, distinct from such political organizations as the Roman society and its imperial hierarchy.” This community’s distinctiveness is found in part in its concern with the pursuit of goals “in terms of quality relationships, not quantities of power or possession” (Brownson et al 2003:102).

This is not to suggest that authority and power are not to exist within the church. Rather, as Lohfink (1984:116) suggests, it means that “authority must not be domination of the sort that is exercised in the rest of society.” He adds that, within the church, “authority must derive completely from service” and thus can only be exercised by “one who abstracts from oneself and one’s own interests and lives a life for others.” This means that, within the Christian community, “relationships of domination are not permitted” (:49). Instead, the Christian community must strive to make God’s justice a present reality within its political and social organization (Koester 2004:314).

This being said, much of the biblical witness regarding justice is rooted in the context of addressing the presence of inequity within the world. Wolterstorff (2004:84-85) helps us to appreciate the nature of injustice in his explanation of what it means, from a biblical perspective, to be “wronged”:

It is to fail to receive or enjoy what is due one... Injustice occurs when someone is deprived of some good that is due him or her—that is, when a person is wronged, when that person is deprived of something to which he or she has a right. Conversely, justice is present in some community insofar as its members enjoy those goods that are due them, to which they have a right. Justice is present when no one is being wronged.

As we have already noted above, the reality of injustice can arise as a result of “the operation of a transpersonal ‘system’ that is both ‘institutional’ and ‘spiritual’”, one in which dominative power is employed “to exclude others from scarce goods, whether they are economic, social, or psychological” (Volf 1996:87). Often, this is cloaked as “the low-intensity evil of the way ‘things work’ or the way ‘things simply are,’ the exclusionary vapors of institutional or communal cultures under which many suffer but for which no one is responsible.”

DeYoung (1995:118-119) asserts that the presence of such injustice threatens the very peace that God intends to reside at the centre of his renewed creation, for peace is inextricably linked with the establishment of just and equal relations among people. As DeYoung (:120) expresses, justice and peace “walk hand in hand as complimentary components of God’s desire for this world.” Hunsberger (1998:91) asserts that, “Without justice, there can be no real peace, and without peace, no real justice.” Thus, a significant biblical theme is the restoration of justice within those systems and settings where injustice is present. Harris (1996:78) notes that this entails “the restoration of a situation or an environment that promoted equity and harmony—shalom—in a community.” In her treatment of this subject, Harris (:79) encourages us to consider the Old Testament imagery of the celebration of jubilee.

Wright (2006:265-323) also has reflected at length upon the contemporary implications of jubilee. In its original context, the year of jubilee “was to be a proclamation of liberty to Israelites who had become enslaved for debt and a restoration of land to families who had been compelled to sell it out of economic need sometime during the previous fifty years” (:290). This practice reflected within the nation of Israel what God desires in principle for all of humanity: “broadly equitable distribution of the resources of the earth...and a curb on the tendency to accumulation with its inevitable oppression and alienation” (:296). Properly understood, this was not a “redistribution” of resources, but rather a “restoration” (:297). In essence, the jubilee had two central thrusts: release/liberty and return/restoration (:300). Notes Wright (:297), “the jubilee approach was immensely practical and fundamentally socioeconomic. It established specific structural mechanisms to regulate the economic effects of debt.”

Wright (2006:300-301) argues that the contemporary relevance of the jubilee tradition is rooted in the ministry of Jesus. According to Wright, in his announcement of the imminent arrival of the reign of God, Jesus appropriated the imagery of the jubilee. In fact, he asserts, Jesus actually “fulfilled” the jubilee that he proclaimed (:301). Thus, posits Wright (:300), “The theological underpinning of the socioeconomic legislation of the jubilee is identical to that which undergirds the proclamation of the kingdom of God.” Harris (1996:76) suggests that, within our contemporary context, the jubilee tradition invites us to “a fiery, prophetic, unrelenting” commitment to

explore and establish “what belongs to whom and to return it to them.” She adds, “the particular meaning of justice that Jubilee stresses is the notion of ‘return,’ not in the Jubilee journey sense of a return home but return as relinquishing, giving back, and handing over what is not ours to God and to those crying for justice throughout the whole, round earth” (:79). Harris sees this as a gift from God. The practical implications of this are potent, for a serious consideration of “Jubilee justice” may lead us to the recognition that “we—and our possessions—must decrease if justice is to increase” (:90).

It is essential for us to note here that the biblical vision of justice extends not only into the ethical conduct of contemporaries within the covenant community, but also into the relations among generations across time. As Klay and Steen (1995:987) suggest, a concern for intergenerational justice is a significant theme in scripture:

In the context of both old and new covenant our actions are a channel of either blessing or curse for generations to come. The Old Testament offers specific instructions for protecting the future and honouring the past....Without such a picture, it is difficult to sustain any ethic of sacrificial responsibility among generations.

Consistent with the things we have affirmed above, these authors suggest that it is unlikely that any “nonmetaphysical scheme” will provide a sufficient motivation for members of the community to make the sacrifices necessary to sustain moral commitments across generations. Rather, inspiration is drawn from the church’s eschatological nature. “For Christians,” they assert, “the fundamental basis of generational justice is God’s timeless love” (:992). This scriptural attention to intergenerational justice suggests that a concern for sustainability should supersede the propensity to exhaust the resources which the community has at its disposal in the present.

The jubilee tradition can actually be understood as illustrating scripture’s intergenerational concern. Wright (2006:291) notes that the jubilee was intended chiefly as a means of economic protection for “the father’s house.” Wright explains that this term, the father’s house, referred to “an extended family that could comprise three or four generations living together.” The original intend of Israel’s land system had been for the land to be distributed as widely as possible throughout the entire kinship system. While the land was in Israel’s possession, it remained under God’s

ownership (:292). Thus, while financially challenged members of the community might have found it necessary periodically to sell their land and even to sell themselves as bondservants, God established jubilee as a means of assuring that this “undesirable state of affairs” would only continue “not more than one generation” (:294). God did not desire the inequities forged within one generation to be perpetuated to the next. The declaration of liberty from the burden of debt and the return of the family to its ancestral property was intended to help preserve “the survival and welfare of the families in Israel” (:295). In essence, the central thrusts of freedom and return had inherently intergenerational implications.

7.3.3 Doing Justice Intergenerationally in the Established Church

What insight might this theological vision have for established churches engaged in the process of missional renewal? What would it mean for churches to strive to live in accordance with this vision within their own systemic functioning? Surely the reality of intergenerational injustice is not grounds for abdicating “the covenant promise of God and therefore not doing justice but wallowing in resignation, inertia and melancholy” (DeGruchy 2002:210). Rather, the church must grapple with the practical implications of the call “to do justly” (Micah 6:8) within the concrete realities of their present context. How might this be applied to the life of the established church seeking missional renewal within a post-modern context?

7.3.3.1 Intergenerational Equity in the Established Church

First, the spirit of jubilee justice necessitates that established churches regain a proper perspective regarding *whose* resources are at stake within the life of the church. While we have appropriated social-scientific categories to describe the resources of power and capital within the church, we can affirm that the deeper spiritual realities these categories describe are fundamentally imparted to the congregation by virtue of God’s grace. For example, the true essence of the power at work within the church can be understood as residing in the missional authority with which the Lord invests every member of the body. As Van Kooten and Barrett (2004:140) articulate, “The Holy Spirit gives the missional church a community of persons who, in a variety of ways and with a diversity of functional roles and titles, together practice the missional

authority that cultivates within the community the discernment of missional vocation and is intentional about the practices that embed that vocation in the community's life." This means that communities of the Spirit are neither hierarchical nor egalitarian. They are not autocratic or democratic, but "pneumocratic" (ruled by the Holy Spirit). Thus, "Authority within missional communities is found neither in particular status nor in majority opinion. It is dispersed throughout the whole body through the illumination and empowerment of the Spirit" (Dietterich 1998:173-174). Because the power of the Holy Spirit is unlimited, ministry in the church "is not a competitive sport" (Everist & Nesson 2008:87).

Furthermore, the issue of human capital within the church is inextricably linked with the "gifts of the Spirit" that the Apostle Paul demonstrates as playing an integral role in the *upbuilding* of the congregation (I Corinthians 12). Far from being the possession of any individual, Paul explicitly explains that these gifts are distributed among the members of the body "according to the grace given to us" (Romans 12:6). Dietterich (1998:173-174) reflects upon the practical implications of this for the life of the faith community:

Because all receive gifts to contribute to the common good, everyone enjoys the right and the obligation of participating authoritatively in decisions of faith and practice. Yet because the Spirit distributes different gifts, responsibilities, and functions, there is also an element of differentiation. Spiritual gifts are not distributed in monotonous uniformity but in rich diversity...None is given advantage; all are equipped for service.

Within this framework, notes Volf (2005:116), "the Spirit puts the talents of each person at Christ's disposal." Thus, we can understand this to imply that any artificial categories the congregation may employ in limiting the exercise of gifts has the potential to be an affront to the intended administration of the Spirit's endowments and, thus, is likely to compromise and impair Christ's purposes in building up his church.

Volf (2005:57) suggests that a proper understanding of God's economy will profoundly impact the spirit in which the members of the community participate in their shared life. In essence, it will foster the sort of *freedom* for which jubilee justice calls. In contrast to a "sales mode," in which "we give something in order to get a rough equivalent in exchange," Volf insists that the Christian community is to be

guided by a “gift mode” in which members give generously. He suggests that this is possible because the “new self” indwelt by Christ is able to overcome the self-centeredness of the “old self.” Underlying this we find two interrelated realities: first, the Christ who dwells within the members of the community is not a “taker” nor a “getter,” but a “giver;” second, because God has given to us, we should share with others (:58-59). Volf (:60) suggests that, “if we are blessed without being a blessing, then we fail in our purpose as channels” and are indeed “at odds with ourselves.” Because of our identity as “channels of gifts,...we can’t just do with them as we please.” As Volf explains, “They come to us with an ultimate name and address other than our own.” Thus, being a channel involves God’s intentions for the good of others. “If I block the flow of God’s gifts,” suggests Volf, “I haven’t just failed the giving God; I’ve also failed the intended recipient.” To be a giver, then, is to renounce gain for oneself and to bestow it on others (:68).

Volf (2005:73) suggests that this sort of generosity provides a foretaste of an eschatological future: “Gifts are most generously given, and therefore all things are common: that’s a Christian vision of the world to come.” In the present, this vision should inspire Christians to engage in gift giving that establishes parity “in the midst of drastic and pervasive inequality” (:82). This will have a profound impact upon the way in which the resources of the Spirit of God are appropriated within the life of the church:

Each one, gifted to give, now gives to others...The reciprocal exchange of gifts expresses and nourishes a community of love. Take reciprocity out of gift giving, and community disintegrates into discrete individuals...Take gift giving out of reciprocity, and community degenerates into individuals who’ll cooperate and split apart when it suits their interests...The best gift we can give to each other may be...our own generosity. With that ‘incredible gift’ called Christ, God gave us a generous self and a community founded on generosity...[I]t subverts hierarchies and transforms rivalries into mutual exaltations. And in all of this, it forges lasting bonds of reciprocal love.

(:86-87)

Essentially, as the Lord entrusts the community with stewardship over his resources, all members of the community must be free, in terms of both giving and receiving, to share that which the Spirit has dispersed among the members of the body. The aim of this is not absolute uniformity, insists Volf (:82). The biblical vision of equality does allow for one member to have much while the other has little. However, this vision is incompatible with one member having “‘too much’ while the other has ‘too little.’”

7.3.3.2 Intergenerational Empowerment in the Established Church

Thus, if the spirit of jubilee justice should cause us to *return* the rightful administration of power and capital to God, and if it should cause all to be liberated to participate freely in a fellowship of mutual sharing, this will have profound implications for our present discussion of intergenerational justice. Established churches will be challenged to consider what it will mean to promote a more equitable distribution of power among the generations. Howard Merritt (2007:9, 92) describes this as “power sharing” within the multigenerational congregation. All generations must be free to participate fully in the missional authority of the body. Thus, as Law (1993:14) notes, “To do justice, then is to be able to see and recognize the uneven distribution of power and to take steps to change the system so that we can redistribute power equally.” The practical outworking of this, he insists, will be to give attention to the “Power Distance” evident within a system, which he defines as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations accept that power is distributed unequally.” For the disempowered, “this means gaining more power themselves and getting into the power system, forcing the system to change” (:20). Law (:48) asserts that this is accomplished through a “power analysis,” which lends attention to which participants in the system have power and which are disempowered. It will require the church “to take time to recognize and talk about power dynamics” (Everist & Nessian 2008:92).

For older generations accustomed to holding power within the church, the implications of this are significant. Howard Merritt (2007:96) notes that, while many congregations desire to achieve intergenerational growth, they often experience stress once it occurs: “Often churches do not realize that inviting young members into their congregations means allowing them to have some weight in decisions, and sharing power can be the largest obstacle in the way of ministering with young adults.” When those who have been accustomed to holding power see others begin to gain *some* power, they may assume that these new participants will eventually want to take all the power; thus, they may be tempted to try to regain their hold on the power dynamics (Everist & Nessian 2008:93). Thus, the tension of attempting to please those in current leadership while also engaging and empowering post-modern young people

poses something of a dichotomy in many congregations (Hammett & Pierce 2007:96). Yet, this will be essential to the process of missional renewal in a post-modern world, for the mission of God is never ours to possess or control. Suggests Riddell (1998:67), following Christ “is a pilgrimage which involves learning how to give up power for the sake of others,” one that “produces a freedom from fear and anxiety, so that followers can relinquish the need for control.”

If the church is to practice justice, this means that older members of the congregation will need to learn to *give up* or *return* power as an exercise of faith in the capacity of their Lord to administer his reign justly. Follis (1999:1) suggests that, while Xers can be ambassadors for a new and disorienting world, any effort to engage this generation in relearning ministry within a post-modern context will require the church to be willing to engage in “sharing power and resources with those who have some fluency in that new environment.” This will help to foster a commitment to sustainability within the congregation (Miller 2004:132-134). Beyond this, however, as Howard Merritt (2007:146) notes, “We will need to share power, not just for the sake of institutional viability, but for the sake of young adults. We can show the next generation what it means to be a part of a caring supportive environment, so they might function as valued members of the body of Christ.”

In the previous section on reconciliation, we noted the importance of listening in ministering among Xers. A listening posture is also one simple, yet profound way in which a commitment to empowering young adults can be expressed (Drury 1996; Hammett & Pierce 2007:68). Howard Merritt (2007:145) notes that this will constitute something more than merely drawing together a “focus group” of young adults: “[S]ignificant ministry to a new generation will occur when we listen to the voices of young adults regularly, when their insight becomes crucial in forming our vision, when we encourage people in their twenties and thirties to have some space around the table every month.” This is consistent with Regele’s (1995:234) suggestion that, if the church is to bridge the gap with Generation X, it must begin to engage in “systemic listening.”

While listening across generational lines will not always be easy, it offers something valuable to the life of the church:

Church leaders need to listen to this generation. Those who push back and challenge methodology are doing so only because they care about the church. And if they are critical about how things are done in a postmodern world, often their criticism has an element of truth. If nothing else, it reflects the thinking of that age group and should be taken seriously if the church is to reach and keep this generation.

(Hammett & Pierce 2007:68)

Hammett and Pierce suggest that, when older church members listen to young adults, there is a good chance that these young people will in turn listen to their elders. As a result, a spirit of generosity may be enabled to flow in all directions. The benefits of this are potentially powerful. The members of Generation X are well acquainted with change (Hicks & Hicks 1999:255; Zustiak 1999:196). Kew (2001:26) suggests that this generation may actually help to provide “a significant change of climate in the way we handle controversy and divisiveness.” As this is the first generation to have come to maturity within the post-modern world, and because of their formative experiences, Xers “seem to have certain instincts that could make them better able to handle the kind of tensions the withdrawal of Modernity is leaving behind...their attitudes could very well be a catalyst helping us to look at our circumstances from a different angle” (cf. Best & Kellner 1997:280).

In addition, a commitment to intergenerational justice will necessitate that the church be willing to empower post-modern young adults with the freedom to contribute actively to leadership (Howard Merritt 2007:68). This seems logical in light of what we have affirmed above regarding the gifts and talents with which the Spirit has invested members being essential for the upbuilding of the body. We can assert that the gifts and talents of every member *of every generation* are important. Thus, suggests Barna (2004), those in power within congregations need to be prepared “to graciously and joyously let go of the reins” to allow gifted young adults to emerge into leadership (www.barna.org). Howard Merritt (2007:93) asserts that, while young adults “usually do not have power, time, or money”, they do possess the valuable resources of “potential, creativity, imagination, vision, and ideas.” Their contribution needs to be recognized as a valuable asset.

In reflecting upon the need for empowering young adults, Barna employs categories that are consistent with the concern we have developed above regarding the intergenerationally just stewarding of God's resources within the community of faith:

If we can objectively examine the big picture we will realize that our efforts cannot bear the maximum return on our investment until we enable those who follow us to embrace and enhance what we developed...The purpose of our leadership is not to magnify self but to be used by God in the furtherance of His kingdom. Insistence upon continued control is a clear reflection that we do not understand God's purposes for us, and that we have misled the community of believers. As an act of Christian stewardship it is our responsibility to pass on the baton with grace, love, hope, excitement, and joy. This is not a 'sacrifice' on our part: it was God who allowed us to lead, for a season, and it is His prerogative to usher in a new cadre of leaders to pick up where we left off.

(www.barna.org)

Whitesel and Hunter (2000:19-20) caution that the local church will not be successful in assimilating young adults if it does not open leadership positions to them or "if they are frozen out of the planning and decision-making process." Unless the local church is willing to learn from Xers and to permit them to lead, insists Follis (1999:2), it is not likely to survive long in a post-modern context. At the same time, when Xers are enabled to have ownership of a decision, asserts Long (1997:154), this will foster greater commitment.

In order for this to become a reality, the church will need to create the kind of environment that will enable younger leaders to prosper (Reed 2000:28). Suggests Howard Merritt (2007:146), "As we begin to trust younger people in our congregations, pulpits, and governing bodies, and we allow them to have some power, then our churches will reflect that leadership." This will require the church to take seriously its need not only to provide an excellent CE and youth ministry, but to follow this with "a congenial environment for younger adults" (Kew 2001:64). It will require the church to endeavour to counsel, guide, train, and enable emerging leaders (Kew 2001:9). It will necessitate that Xers be empowered in their tasks, rather than controlled (Long 1997:156). As young people engage in leadership, it inevitably will introduce changes into the community. However, as Corpus (1999:9) suggests, "We can anticipate that such change will enliven the church as new believers share new gifts in the body of Christ." This has the potential to offer a sense of significance and worth to older members of the church, as well. As Bolinger (1999:105) articulates,

“When the generations lead together...there is a wonderful synergy of ideas, mentoring, and spiritual refreshment.” In turn, the “crisis of generativity” that we have considered in previous sections of this study can be powerfully overcome as the church cultivates an intergenerationally sustainable leadership culture.

A commitment to intergenerational justice also will profoundly inform the extent to which the congregation empowers young adults to be free to influence the bearing of its tradition. Volf (2005:107) insists that the spirit of generosity that accompanies properly locating ourselves within God’s economy will impact our attitude toward “goods.” As he notes, “Our relation to things changes once we truly understand that everything has been given to us by God.” This recognition enables us to draw an analogy to the protective control of the traditioning dynamic that often occurs within many congregations. As we saw in section 2.6.2.1, McIntyre (1984:222) has argued that a *living* tradition entails the continuous presence of an argument internal to that tradition regarding the *goods* with which it is concerned. As we noted in that same chapter, the “goods” with which the Christian tradition is concerned centre in God’s gracious gift, the *transgenerational* Good News of Christ.

Thus, if a congregation’s tradition is to remain vital, the generations of which it is composed must be willing to *return* any illegitimate claims regarding possession of its essential *goods*. Furthermore, they must strive to do justice through the freedom they afford the rising generation in influencing the shape of the tradition (Howard Merritt 2007:82). In essence, the church needs to become “a place of flexible stability” (Scrifres 1998:49), one that allows the entrepreneurial spirit of Generation X to gain expression (Peterson 1999:160). Notes Howard Merritt (2007:85), “The body will become aware of the gifts and needs of that particular group and respond to them by teaching the traditions of belief and practice in a more fluid, not rigid, way. The congregation will...become open to forming affirming traditions.” Furthermore, she adds, the church may need to strive to permit young adults to nurture their own spiritual traditions. As Tapia (1994:6) urges, Gen Xer Christians need to be empowered to serve the Lord in their generation, not that of their predecessors.

In addition, suggests Volf (2005:108), the spirit of generosity that accompanies properly locating ourselves within God’s economy will transform our attitude toward

“others.” Often, he notes, we do not give to others “unless the difference is so great that the competition is no longer a contest, in which case we’ll be able to afford to give.” As we saw in section 5.4.6, the need for this is all too evident in those churches where young adults are welcome to participate only on the terms dictated by the older generations. In addition, we have seen how *pure market* intergroup dynamics often lead to conflict with *others* over the perception of limited resources within the congregation. However, insists Volf, within the economy of the giving God, it is no longer appropriate to think of others as competitors for the possession of goods.

Thus, suggests Howard Merritt (2007:143), “if there is reluctance for the next generation to take over some of the customs of our congregations, we need to grieve that loss, but we have to let some things go.” Older members of the congregation can actually come to see young adults as collaborators in sustaining a vital tradition *until he comes*. Asserts Kew (2001:29), “it is highly likely that as they [young adults] forage through the basements and attics of the church, deep but forgotten spiritual riches from the diversity of classic Christian traditions will pour back into the church’s life.” This has the potential of being a great blessing to the congregation. Furthermore, the church can model to the broader society what it might mean to move beyond fragmentary identity politics toward a more holistic vision of shared life, a societal need that Best and Kellner (1997:278) identify as being of imperative significance.

Thus far, one may gain the impression that the call to intergenerational justice places demands solely upon the members of older generations. However, the way of intergenerational justice also promises to pay dividends for these older members of the congregation. As Schreier (1998:29) notes, God’s path of justice not only calls for the end of dominative power, but also precludes the disempowered choosing to “counter power with the same kind of power.” While doing so may restrain the power of another group, it does not bring about peace. Rather, it merely perpetuates the violent cycle of dominative power in a new form (:37). Thus, if we apply this awareness to the intergenerational dynamics within the established church, we must recognize that a call to intergenerational justice provides no room for the victimization of the elderly in the process of reaching the young. As Hammett and

Pierce (2007:81) insist, targeting a younger generation does not mean neglecting those who are over sixty. Neither does it mean doing violence to their sense of place within the congregation. Clearly, the church must find a way beyond the pattern of win/loss conflicts that has characterized recent decades.

As Schreiter (1998:29) advocates, there exists a need for a spirituality that “involves not directing one’s thinking along the lines of traditional channels of power, but making possible the springing up of alternatives to dominative power.” Reflecting on the description of the “wolf and lamb” in Isaiah 11:6-9, Law (1993:3) observes that, “In order for the animals to co-exist in this Peaceable Realm, very ‘unnatural’ behaviors are required from all who are involved.” Thus, he asserts, “Perhaps we have to go against the ‘instinct’ of our cultures in order for us to stop replaying the fierce-devouring-the-small scenario of intercultural encounter” (:4). Within our present discussion, we certainly can recognize the relevance of this counsel for the destructive patterns of intergroup interaction between the generations. Notes Volf (1996:116), a change in such patterns is possible only as the powerful and the disempowered both repent of “the seductiveness of the sinful values and practices” and allow “the new order of God’s reign” to be established in their hearts.

The suggestion that the disempowered need to repent sounds at first like an indication of acquiescence to the dominant order. However, notes Volf (1996:116), its true purpose is to create “a haven of God’s new world in the midst of the old and so make the transformation of the old possible.” Furthermore, the call to repentance confronts the temptation of the disempowered to excuse their own reactive behaviour either by claiming they are not responsible for it or that it is somehow necessary (:117). Thus, while Xers may lack confidence in “conventional methods of creating change” (Mahedy & Bernardi 1994:138), they must learn to exercise patience toward the resistance they may encounter from some older members of the congregation (Zustiak 1999:231).

Xers should not be concerned merely with their own interests or with what older church members can do for them, but also with what they can do in helping to prevent the body of Christ from fragmenting along generational lines (Crouch 1999:83). Older members of the congregation will feel threatened if young adults treat them in a

way that communicates that their opinions are second class. Older members also will feel imperilled when younger members give them the impression that the traditions and procedures that mean so much to them are old fashioned and in danger of being eliminated (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:19-20). Thus, a commitment to equity will be expressed in part through the younger members valuing their older counterparts:

You'll win the support of those over sixty in reaching those under forty if they don't feel the church is turning its back on them...Respect them. Ask their opinion. Not all of them have to have their own way. They may just want to be included, to know that they are not forgotten or ignored. And their wisdom is valuable.

(Hammett & Pierce 2007:141)

These older members of the congregation truly are rich in wisdom. Thus, as Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004:236) suggest, it is a shame when they are left feeling as though they are too old to make a contribution. In fact, they note, "It's worth sharing with them, and learning from their solid, lifelong commitment to their faith."

Law (1993:14) proposes that, if interactants of differing cultures are enabled to gain an understanding of the root causes of the "wolf and lamb" scenario, "we can then work together toward finding new ways of being where power is more evenly distributed." However, this means that the pursuit of justice cannot be a univocal concept. Rather, the parties concerned must examine carefully the meaning that they understand this term to convey (Schreiter 1998:121). This is particularly crucial because the existence of competing accounts of what constitutes "justice" is often bound up in the cycle of conflict between groups (Volf 1996:121). Rival traditions and rival cultures give rise to rival justices (:206). Certainly we can appreciate that this is true in the case of the intergenerational power struggles we have described in preceding portions of this study. Thus, if peace is to be of a lasting nature, agreement on justice must be reached (:196). In order for this to occur, suggests Volf (:197), "agreement on justice depends on the will to embrace the other." Indeed, he adds, "justice itself will be unjust as long as it does not become a mutual embrace."

This is challenging, for all accounts of justice are "particular." In other words, even Christians striving to promote the justice of God do so from within their own culture (Volf 1996:198-199). Certainly this is true in an intergenerational context,

particularly one in which the influence of both modern and post-modern values are operative. This requires that the church be the sort of community of equality in which all have a voice and in which a spirit of sharing and listening emerges (DeYoung 1995:174). It calls for a “discipline of dialogue,” a “multidialogical” approach that takes others seriously as persons (:175). Rendle (2002:5) cautions that the tendency to search for “solutions” within the multigenerational congregation has a tendency to undermine prematurely these sorts of “dynamic, productive, and necessary” conversations. However, assert Everist and Nesson (2008:90), when time is taken for the parties to learn from one another, “the ability to respect, to really see the other and to receive each one’s gift fully...is changed. Once this relationship is transformed, fear is lessened, the potential for more just distribution of resources is increased, and growth in partnership is exponential.”

In addition, it necessitates that all participants in this dialogue “distinguish between [their] idea of God’s justice and God’s justice itself” and nurture an awareness of their own fallibility (Volf 1996:199). It requires that participants adopt an “enlarged way of thinking,” which entails a “willingness to reason from the others’ point of view” (:212). This is essential for enriching and correcting the participants’ notions of justice and for fostering some measure of shared understanding (:212, 213). Lyon (1995:94-95) suggests that, in an intergenerational context, systems theory can be a potential resource in helping congregations to cultivate such understanding. In reality, the church must recognize itself from a systems perspective before it is able to do anything about it (Frost & Hirsch 2003:210-211). However, as Gibbs (2000a:34) suggests, a great deal can be learned by paying attention to the differences between how systems are understood within the modern and post-modern contexts. Indeed, the resources of both modernity and post-modernity can be employed in the learning process (Best & Kellner 1997:290).

7.3.3.3 Creative Justice in the Established Church

The restructuring of power relations requires the exercise of “creative justice” (DeGruchy 2002:184, 202). As Harris (1996:81) expresses, this requires that members of the community “dwell in God’s creative presence; trust God’s liberating action while recognizing it usually occurs through human beings; experience God’s

forgiveness; hope in God's promises; and practice God's justice." It enables them to "use power in new, mutually respectful, and energizing ways" (Everist & Nesson 2008:98). Participants must covenant together to restore justice by sharing and, thereby, building a moral community (DeGruchy 2002:207). This entails both reflection upon justice and the active pursuit of justice (Volf 1996:217). An ultimate aim of this is what Schreiter (1998:122) describes as "structural justice," the goal of which is correcting the structural inequities that have existed. As Harris (1996:66) articulates, a concern for structural justice entails "recreating systems, structures, institutions, and practices that oppress or keep people from freedom." Foster (1997:38) provides a realistic picture of this in suggesting that "movement toward this 'peaceable kingdom' comes in small steps." Nonetheless, every step that is taken is important and powerful.

The pursuit of structural justice will most certainly have implications for the way in which the congregation organizes its ministry and engages in decision making. Ammerman (1998:111) suggests that the approach a congregation takes toward making decisions "is an important window on the inner dynamics of its life together." She insists that churches need to be attentive to both *formal* and *informal* decision making processes, recognizing that they may not be altogether consistent (:107). Certainly, the informal processes that impact decision making in the congregation have considerable bearing upon the degree to which justice is embodied. However, the explicit, formal processes play an especially important role within the church's "embodied witness."

Commenting with particular reference to those situations in which Boomers are in leadership, Whitesel and Hunter (2000:61) note that a concern toward the decision making processes that are employed is an especially crucial consideration for Xers:

Generation X views Boomer ideas and suggestions with a measure of suspicion. It will cautiously appraise Boomer ideas, and hold them up in comparison to its own ideas of fairness, justice, and integrity... They suspect Boomer motives, perhaps with good reason, and as such, Gen-Xers must be allowed to participate in the decision-making process or they will not possess goal ownership.

Thus, we can recognize the wisdom in Granberg-Michaelson's (2004:91) assertion that "deciding how we decide" will be crucial to the ongoing effectiveness of the

church's mission. As he explains, "In the years ahead, changes in decision-making processes may represent some of the most fundamental shifts of organizational culture."

It does not lie within the scope of this chapter to propose any specific organizational models. Furthermore, as we have already noted, institutional change must come gradually. By advancing a specific model as a desired *end*, we would undermine the stated purpose of this chapter, which is to focus upon the *process* of missional renewal. In addition, we have asserted in section 6.3.4 that the church's structure must function in service to its particular mission. Thus, rather than proposing a specific model, we must make allowances for a variety of models to emerge in different contexts.

These things being said, there is little question that the process of missional renewal in the post-modern transition will challenge the congregation to move beyond the limitations inherent in the hierarchical model of church life native to modernity. Frost and Hirsch (2003:134, 176) note that, while many residents of the post-modern world "are searching for an inclusive community that is democratic, nonpatriarchal and compassionate", this is not what they encounter in many established congregations:

[T]he Christendom-era church, with its preference for hierarchical structures, favors a chain-of-command approach...Decisions are made at the top end of the structure and filter down to the grass roots. There's no interaction, no broad participation...[T]he membership at the so-called bottom of the system often feel silenced and resentful.

Griffin and Walker (2004:172-173) suggest that the hierarchical model often undermines authentic community and can even function in a manner that subjects members of the congregation to abuse. These are prospects to which Xers are highly sensitive. Furthermore, insist Snyder and Runion (2002:56), hierarchy is antithetical to the biblical picture of community.

Kitchens (2003:71) cautions that the hierarchical approach to church life actually fails to address the desire of Generation X to be engaged by a compelling mission:

Gen X and younger Christians are also interested in finding a place to commit their lives and to make a difference in the world...Neither are they interested in simply providing for the congregation's life and ministry, taking care of its own internal needs. Therefore, the most deadly thing we can do initially with

a postmodern Christian is to stick her or him on a committee. That's definitely not the kind of community or the kind of service in which these folks are interested.

The incongruence between this approach to structuring congregational life and the cultural values of the post-modern generations discourages these young adults from meaningful involvement. As Frost and Hirsch (2003:21) assert, "in the emerging global cultural context the hierarchical model has little to say to a generation that values egalitarianism and community" (cf. Peterson 1999:155). Thus, there is a need to move from *committee* to *community* (Howard Merritt 2007:120).

Kew (2001:61) insists that this is indeed an issue of systemic justice: "until the processes that the older churches use are radically overhauled they will continue to favor the older rather than the younger aspirant, the mature over those whose youth puts them at a disadvantage when seeking to find their way through 'the system.'" This poses a challenge to the congregation to change the "shape of the table" by using new strategies to enable all voices to be heard and by adopting participatory methods for decision-making (Everist & Nesson 2008:98). Because of the different generational cultures represented within the congregation surrounding issues of decision making and team dynamics (Raines 2003:136), changes of this nature will not be easy. However, as Kew (2001:28) asserts, structural changes are inevitable in the hands of the emerging generations. Thus, the church would do well to proceed with a disposition of proactive openness to such changes. The renewal of the church's structures is an expression of its care toward the rising generations and therefore must not be an afterthought (Lyon 1995:94-95).

Peterson (1999:157) suggests that two principles need to be evident in any structural changes that the church undertakes: (1) the church's ministries need to be participatory (team structured), and (2) egalitarian or nonauthoritarian (permission giving). In other words, the church's structures must be "relationally based and empowering." Frost and Hirsch (2003:21) call for a "flattened" organizational structure, one that reflects "heir-archy," rather than hierarchy. They suggest that the church of the future will need to reflect a "movement" ethos, rather than an institutional ethos. Miller (2004:80) describes this as a matter of developing "cooperative wineskins." Hammett and Pierce (2007:96) advocate an approach to

church life that emphasizes “permission-giving and empowerment”, rather than “polity and control”: “Maybe the time has come when streamlining decision-making in your church will expedite decision-making and push it from those who are in positions to those who are filled with passion for ministry, and toward birthing the new rather than just managing the present or past.”

This is a powerful prospect: Gen X, the crucial *hinge* generation being empowered and inspired to contribute to the unfolding intergenerational traditioning of the church’s witness. As we have seen, the promotion of justice is integral to God’s mission. As the Spirit brings about renewal within the church, the congregation should be enlivened with a concern for justice. In turn, as the church strives to embody justice in its shared life, it will exemplify something that is attractive and trustworthy to the cautious members of the first post-modern generation. Stated simply, a commitment to intergenerational justice constitutes an integral dimension of missional renewal in the post-modern transition.

7.4 Conclusion

Throughout chapter six and seven, we have been advancing the hypothesis that, if established churches are to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition, they must engage in a process of missional renewal that encompasses Generation X. Furthermore, we have asserted that, from both a sociological and theological perspective, this process must entail a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice. Chapter seven has been devoted to developing these themes of intergenerational reconciliation and justice. We have demonstrated the sociological reasons why these themes are important and have sought to respond to these sociological challenges by constructing a theological vision rooted in the reign of God.

In light of the legacy of division and alienation within society at large and within the life of many local churches, we have advocated for a restoration of relationship between the generations in Christ. This entails an openness to receiving diversity as a gift, to cultivate mutuality between the generations, and to work actively at rebuilding relationships. In addition, in response to the realities of the marginalization of Xers and the intergroup power struggles that occur in many churches, we have advanced a

vision of intergenerational equity within the church. This entails a returning and releasing of inordinate claims that members have made toward God's resources, the cultivation of an atmosphere in which all members are free and empowered to contribute, and the development of organizational structures that promote equity. While it has not been our purpose here to argue for intergenerational reconciliation and justice as the direct causes of missional renewal within established churches, we have shown that these priorities will be inextricably linked with the pursuit of missional renewal. These priorities give attention to both the spiritual and the systemic dimensions of the process of missional renewal. Thus, they have the potential to help foster a *new and right spirit* within the life of the congregation.

Having completed this final portion of the hermeneutical cycle, we now will proceed in chapter eight by subjecting this interpretation to a process of empirical testing. Chapter eight will help us to determine the degree to which the interpretation provided in chapters three through seven corresponds to the lived reality of local churches.

8. EMPIRICAL EVALUATION OF INTERGENERATIONAL EXPERIENCE

8.1 Introducing the Empirical Process

The present study is concerned with addressing the problem that, as American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established churches struggle to respond faithfully to cultural change within a complex generational context. It has further been suggested that a key manifestation of this problem lies in the reality that many of these same churches are proving ineffective at transmitting their faith traditions to Generation X, the first post-modern generation. As a result, the ability of these churches to sustain their witness through this transitional period has been shown to be in jeopardy. Furthermore, this study has been guided by the hypothesis that, if these churches are to sustain their witness through this transitional period, they must engage in a process of missional renewal that entails a concern for reaching Gen X. It has been asserted that this process will, of necessity, involve a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice.

Throughout this study, we have been employing the practical-theological research paradigm advanced by Gerben Heitink (1999:6). This has led us to maintain an understanding of practical theology as a “theory of action” concerned with “the empirically oriented theological theory of the mediation of the Christian faith in the praxis of modern society” (:6). Heitink outlines a practical-theology research paradigm consisting of three movements: the hermeneutical perspective, the empirical perspective, and the strategic perspective. The first of these is focused upon providing meaning, the second upon testing action, and the third upon systematic action. As Heitink suggests, these three perspectives must be allowed to interrelate as movements within “a distinct circulation system or ‘circuit’ of theory formation” (:165), a conceptual triad that moves along the path of “understanding— explanation—change” (:235). Chapters two through seven of this research project have been devoted to articulating a hermeneutical interpretation of the above-stated problem and hypothesis. The goal of these chapters has been to establish a thorough basis of meaning and understanding. However, the concern in these chapters has not been only with providing a hermeneutical understanding of the nature of the church’s

praxis in society, but furthermore with endeavouring to understanding the very praxis of God in which the church has been called to participate.

Of course, though every effort has been made to provide a fair and accurate presentation of the phenomena under consideration here, the preceding chapters bear the limitations inherent in the subjectivity brought by their author to the process of interpretation. This reality highlights the necessity of the next step in the process of practical-theological research: a movement beyond the development of understanding and toward explanation through the use of the empirical perspective. As Heitink (1999:221) argues, if any practical-theological enterprise is to be faithful to its location within an “empirically-oriented” discipline, the pursuit of explanation must be seen as an integral dimension of the research process. As was explained in section 1.5.3.3, the concept of *empiricism* represents an epistemological approach that recognizes all *scientific* knowledge as based on experience and deducible through sense perceptions. It demands a testing process for the purposes of establishing validity and veracity. In the specific case of formulating a theory of action, it helps to provide a scientific basis for academic inquiry into the meaning or effectiveness of action (:221). Inherent in this process is the assumption that, through empirical testing, critical insight will be provided to strengthen or correct our hermeneutical constructs regarding praxes that truly serve the kingdom of God.

Heitink (1999:225) urges the practical theologian to keep in focus the reality that “improvement of the situation toward the desired praxis is the underlying interest of practical-theological research.” It is precisely that sort of culmination toward which the present research project is directed. Chapter nine of this thesis will be devoted to the third movement of practical-theological research: a strategic perspective that endeavours to make practical proposals regarding the need for change. However, if this project is to be characterized by methodological integrity, it is necessary that we first subject the hermeneutical interpretation developed in chapters two through seven to a process of testing. In order for the development of strategic proposals, the end toward which this study is aimed, to be of optimal benefit to the life of the church, the foundation of interpretation upon which these proposals are constructed must be tested to determine the soundness of its validity and veracity. With this in mind, the empirical dimension of practical-theological research will come into focus in the

present chapter. As we transition from the conclusion of this chapter into an exploration of strategic proposals, we will do so with the aid of a body of empirically-based evidence regarding the ways in which God is inviting the church to enter into missional renewal amidst the post-modern transition.

8.2 Survey Methodology

8.2.1 Designing the Survey

As was articulated in chapter one, numerous methodological options exist regarding how one might proceed with the process of empirical testing. An examination of the benefits, limitations, and challenges inherent in these various methods led this researcher to the conclusion that the present project would be most feasible and best served by a quantitative analysis of the experiences of local churches. This would be accomplished through the conducting of a survey.

This conclusion led the researcher to enlist the aid of Dr. Ed Simanton, Director of Assessment at the University of South Dakota's Sanford School of Medicine. Dr. Simanton has extensive experience in quantitative research and possesses a Ph.D. in Research Methodology from the University of North Dakota. Under his supervision, I prepared a thirty-seven question survey composed of two sections aimed at gathering descriptive statistics.¹ The first section, consisting of twelve multiple-choice questions, focuses largely upon the identity of the respondents, the demographic make-up of the congregations represented, and aspects of the strategic approaches to ministry being employed in each of these local-church contexts. The second section consists of twenty-five statements intended to test the problem statement and hypothesis upon which this research project is based in light of the experiences of these local churches.²

With this in mind, the problem statement and hypothesis were reduced to hermeneutical "zones." These zones essentially equate to the key logical pieces or constituent parts of which the hypothesis and problem statement are composed; the

¹ The survey instrument is included in Appendix A.

² Because this survey was sent out under the letterhead of the North American Baptist Seminary, the institution at which I was employed at the time that the survey was conducted, it also required the approval of the institution's President's Cabinet, which provided another layer of critique.

logical flow and content of chapters two through seven can be summarized within these various zones. Each of the twenty-five questions in section two of the survey was carefully crafted to test the hermeneutical content encompassed by one of these “zones.” The seven zones were isolated as follows:

1. Many established churches struggle to respond faithfully to cultural change.
2. Many established churches struggle to respond faithfully within a complex generational context.
3. Many of these same churches are proving ineffective at transmitting their faith traditions to Generation X, the first post-modern generation.
4. These churches need to engage in a process of missional renewal.
5. This process will entail a concern for reaching Gen X.
6. This process will involve a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation.
7. This process will involve a commitment to intergenerational justice.

In preparing this second section of the survey, the researcher decided to employ a 1-5 Likert Scale, which is derived from an approach developed by Rensis Likert in the 1930s to assess people’s attitudes (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:197). This format enables respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement across a range of five possible responses. For each statement, respondents were asked to indicate whether their opinion was best reflected as “strongly agree,” “agree,” “neutral,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.”

8.2.2 Gathering the Data

The basic rule in statistical research is, “The larger the sample, the better” (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:221). However, the present study had to be conducted within the parameters of limited resources. Thus, in June of 2006, the survey was distributed by post to 150 churches, thirty in each of five denominations: American Baptist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, North American Baptist Conference, Reformed Church in America, and the United Methodist Church. These denominations were selected because of the high number of students from each of them studying at the North American Baptist Seminary (renamed Sioux Falls Seminary in 2007) in Sioux Falls, SD, the institution at which the researcher taught at the time. The desire was to generate data that would be of relevance and benefit to

the NABS student body. Without question, had other denominations been included in this study, this surely would have further enriched the data generated through this study. However, recognizing that the field had to be limited by some means, these were the criteria employed.

The “sample” selected to participate in any survey research project is a critically important consideration. As Leedy and Ormrod (2001:210) note, “the researcher can use the results obtained from the sample to make generalizations about the entire population only if the sample is truly representative of the population.” In essence, this determines the “external validity” of a research project. Thus,

The sampling procedure depends on the purpose of the sampling and a careful consideration of the parameters of the population... The sample should be so carefully chosen that, through it, the researcher is able to see all the characteristics of the total population in the same relationship that they would be seen were the researcher, in fact, to inspect the total population... [U]nless the sampling procedure is carefully planned, the conclusions that the researcher draws from the data are likely to be distorted.

(:211)

Bearing this caution in mind, the churches selected for inclusion in this study were identified with the aid of lists provided through publications and websites of their respective denominations. While surveys were sent to churches in all regions of the United States, roughly seventy-five percent of the surveys were distributed among churches concentrated in urban centres within the six-state region of Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North and South Dakota, and Wisconsin. Two primary criteria were employed in limiting the field in this way. First, as with the decision regarding which denominations to study, the churches within this six-state region provide the main constituency to which the North American Baptist Seminary relates. Second, the states within this region include vast rural areas dependent upon an agricultural economy. Demographic data from numerous sources reveals that, while Gen Xers tend to constitute a fairly small percentage of the population in many of these declining rural areas, they are concentrated in considerably more significant numbers in high-population areas (Dunn 1993:143). This being the case, it was felt that the insights generated by this study would be informed more meaningfully by data gathered among churches within larger communities and would be of most to relevance to such churches.

Each of the 150 envelopes distributed by post to these churches was addressed to “Senior Pastor” at the church’s mailing address. This title commonly is given to the lead pastor within congregations served by a ministry staff composed of multiple pastors. It was hoped that directing the survey to pastors holding specific roles within the church, rather than simply to the church address, might heighten the response rate. Senior pastors were chosen in particular because it was believed that their vantage point within their given congregations would enable them to provide a credible and informed assessment of their churches. Even in those churches that are served by a solo pastor, mail addressed to “Senior Pastor” still would be likely to find their way into his or her hands. In addition to a copy of the thirty-seven question survey and a cover letter on the North American Baptist Seminary stationary, each envelope contained a self-addressed, stamped return envelope. These envelopes were coded to enable the researcher to track responses. While the survey materials did not require respondents to identify themselves or their churches, the cover letter assured survey recipients that all returned forms would be handled with the strictest of confidentiality.

Dr. Simanton’s recommendation was that a fifty percent return rate would be necessary to provide valid data. Because the typical return rate for a mailed questionnaire frequently is less than fifty percent (Rogelberg & Luong 1998), this would constitute a very good rate of return. Thus, the goal of receiving seventy-five completed surveys was established. In an effort to promote maximum response, a reminder postcard was sent out to those churches that had not returned surveys two weeks after the initial mailing. Despite these efforts, at the completion of the survey period, the goal of seventy-five responses had not been accomplished, with a total of only sixty-eight surveys having been returned. A second mailing was conducted in late August, with eighty-two surveys being distributed among those that had not responded to the initial mailing. While this second attempt generated only thirteen additional survey responses, this was enough to exceed the stated goal of a fifty percent response rate. One additional survey was returned after the rest of the data had already been processed, and so was not able to be included in the summary provided in this chapter. The relevance of this research project was validated not only by the number of surveys returned, but also by the fact that six respondents submitted

letters of affirmation with their surveys. Several of these pastors expressed a desire to receive a report about the insights generated by this study.

8.2.3 Interpreting the Data

The data gathered through the returned surveys was processed with the aid of the SPSS software. This software enabled the results of each question in part one of the survey to be expressed in terms of percentages. In addition, because the desire in conducting this survey was to gain insight into the experience of the “average” respondent, the SPSS software was able to calculate the results from part two of the survey as “mean” scores, which provide a measure of “central tendency” or “the fulcrum point for a set of data” (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:264). In determining mean scores, a numerical value is assigned to each of the possible responses, with 1 corresponding to “strongly agree,” 2 being equivalent to “agree,” 3 reflecting neutrality or lack of an opinion, 4 indicating “disagreement,” and 5 corresponding to “strongly disagree.” Thus, whereas a mean score of 1.98 would reflect agreement on the part of the average respondent, a mean score of 3.5 would suggest tentative disagreement. A mean score of 2.45 would indicate unstable or uncertain agreement, while a score of 4.0 reflects firm disagreement.

While the text of this chapter will contain references to these mean scores, this presentation will be augmented by tables that report data crucial for establishing their statistical legitimacy. Specifically, each table will include “standard deviation” and “significance” figures. Standard deviation, “the standard measure of variability” (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:269), reflects the range of answers provided to a given question. A larger standard deviation indicates a greater diversity of opinion. A standard deviation of 1.7 suggests a broad diversity, including respondents who provide both considerably more positive and considerably more negative responses than the mean score indicates. A standard deviation of .4 would indicate little variance of opinion. Standard deviation, therefore, reflects the extent to which respondents agree or disagree in their assessment of a given question.

Significance is an important consideration when comparing the results of multiple survey groups. In order for the differences in how two or more groups answered a

given question to be deemed statistically significant, when inserted into a mathematical “significance” formula, the mean scores of these groups must be shown to be statistically distinct from one another to a ninety-five percent certainty (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:275-276). When this occurs, it is expressed by a significance score of .050 or less. A significance score of .020 reflects that the difference in results between multiple survey groups is statistically significant to a ninety-eight percent certainty. A significance score of .75 suggests that, while the differences in results may have some statistical significance, this cannot be determined conclusively.

Roughly a dozen different formulae for determining significance have been developed over time. Each of these has been adopted and employed to varying degrees within the broader scholarly community. These formulae could be plotted along a continuum in terms of the relative *liberality* or *conservatism* inherent in the approach they represent to establishing statistical significance. That being the case, in an effort to strengthen the integrity of this research project, the decision was made, at Dr. Simanton’s recommendation, to employ the Bonferonni formula, arguably the most conservative formula available for the purposes of establishing statistical significance. As a result, while the differences in experience identified through this survey might not appear as pronounced as they would with the aid of less conservative formulae, those that have been identified as statistically significant are reported here with the added benefit of greater statistical weight.

Before proceeding, we must acknowledge the limitations of the material being presented. Leedy and Ormrod (2001:196) observe that

[s]urvey research captures a fleeting moment in time, much as a camera takes a single-frame photograph of an ongoing activity. By drawing conclusions from one transitory collection of data, we may extrapolate about the state of affairs over a longer time period. At best, the extrapolation is a conjecture, and sometimes a hazardous one at that, but it is our only way to generalize what we see.

So often, the survey reports that we read seem to suggest that what the researcher found in one sample population at one particular time can be accepted for all times as a constant.

These observations help us to appreciate how imperative it is for the following summary to be presented with appropriate humility. Care must be taken to avoid inflating the external validity of this study.

It must also be acknowledged that this survey is effective only to the degree that the researcher chose to pose good questions. Furthermore, the usefulness of the data generated by each of the questions posed, however carefully crafted, is limited by the subjective interpretation of the individual respondent and the bias out of which he or she chose to respond. While the group whose responses provide the basis for the conclusions drawn in this chapter is both fairly sizeable and somewhat diverse, this study would have benefited all the more greatly had the resources been available to conduct this survey on a larger scale. It might also have been helpful to gain additional insight into some of the factors that could contribute to bias on the part of the respondents. For example, it seems that the length of a respondent's tenure at his or her church might influence his or her perceptions. However, respondents were not requested to provide this information.

It also might have been beneficial if some insight could have been gained about the differences between respondents and non-respondents. As Rogelberg & Luong (1998) have demonstrated, non-respondents often are different from respondents in significant ways. For example, they may simply have less interest in the topic being researched or may be too sensitive toward the topic of inquiry to respond. Thus, the fact that our observations can be drawn only from among the eighty-one responding churches is itself an indication that an unavoidable element of bias is present within the results being summarized here (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:223).

In turn, while every effort has been made to handle the data gathered in a fair and accurate manner, the summary provided in this chapter is not altogether free from the subjectivity of its author. Constraining the influence of bias upon the interpretive process is a crucial task for the researcher (Leedy & Ormrod 2001:221-223). However, this simply cannot be avoided altogether. Though the use of interviewing as a qualitative method lies beyond the parameters of the present study, the opportunity to record respondents' descriptions of their experiences in their own words would surely have added intersubjective substance to the interpretation represented here. Despite all of these limitations, however, the present chapter can be trusted to provide valuable insight into the problem and hypothesis under consideration in this study.

8.3 Summarizing the Data

8.3.1 Identity of Respondents

As was mentioned above, five Protestant denominations were targeted through this survey. The highest response rate occurred among those representing congregations from within the Reformed Church in America. Of the thirty RCA churches to which the survey was distributed, twenty-three (28.4 % of total respondents) returned completed surveys. Twenty-one (25.9 % of total respondents) North American Baptist churches responded. Fourteen (17.3 % of total respondents) responses were generated by United Methodists, thirteen (16% of total respondents) by American Baptist churches, and ten (12.3% of total respondents) by Evangelical Lutheran congregations. Unfortunately, the number of respondents within these three final groups was not large enough to make it possible to determine whether any statistically significant differences exist between the experiences of these denominations. However, the ability to engage in such a comparison was not a primary objective of this study. The fact that the data included in this chapter was drawn from a diverse group of denominations only serves to broaden the relevance of this study.

Of all those individuals who completed this survey, sixty-eight, or eighty-four percent, were senior pastors. One respondent was a youth/young adult minister. An additional seven respondents, or 8.6 percent, identified themselves in the category of “Other Ministerial Staff Member.” Five surveys, or 6.2 percent, were completed by individuals who grouped themselves under the category of “Other.” In light of the fact that surveys were addressed simply to the “Senior Pastor” of the churches targeted, rather than to specific individuals, perhaps this should come as little surprise. An unfortunate result of this, however, is that the number of non-senior pastors is insufficient to provide any basis for exploring whether any discernible difference exists in the perspectives of senior pastors and non-senior pastors. Particularly because this study is concerned with investigating perceptions of intergenerational dynamics within the congregation, it would have been interesting to explore whether a comparison of senior pastors with others might have produced any noteworthy insights.

When examined from the perspective of age, the majority of respondents identified themselves as having been born “Between 1945 and 1964”; indeed, fifty-nine (72.8%) belong to this category. This is consistent with what has been stated in previous chapters about the current demographic composition of the church’s leadership. Thus, Boomers provided the overwhelming majority of the data for this study. Comparatively, only seven (8.6%) respondents were pre-Boomers born prior to 1945. An addition fifteen respondents identified themselves as members of the post-modern generations; fourteen (17.3%) respondents were born “Between 1965 and 1981”, while only one was born “After 1981.” In employing these different age categories as a means for comparing how respondents answered questions, it was fascinating to discover that no statistically significant differences emerged on any of the questions posed. Even when comparing the responses of Boomers with those of respondents born after 1965, no such differences arose. Based upon the insights provided in preceding chapters, this does not come as a surprise. While this study did not afford the opportunity to do so, it certainly would be interesting to explore the underlying factors causing this to be so. Regardless, this lack could itself be identified as a profoundly significant discovery generated by this survey.

8.3.2 Character of Churches Represented

It will be helpful to introduce briefly not only the identity of the respondents, but also the makeup of the churches they represent. In crafting this survey, efforts were made to gather specific categories of information about each of these churches that, particularly when employed in multivariate analysis, would provide valuable information to aid in testing the hypothesis being advanced here. We will summarize these categories briefly and explain why they are of interest to this study.

8.3.2.1 The Founding Year of Responding Churches

Respondents were asked to specify the year in which their church was founded. Sixty-eight (84%) of these churches were established before 1965. Eleven (13.6%) were started between 1965 and 1990. Only two (2.5%) came into existence after 1990. Sadly, the shortage of data from churches founded after 1965 weakens our ability to engage in truly conclusive comparative analysis of such churches against

those founded before that date. However, it certainly provides a generous amount of data from the sort of older, established churches with which this study is chiefly concerned. This date of 1965 is significant within the overall contour of this study for at least two reasons. First, as was indicated in section 3.5.2.5, this year constituted the beginning of the downturn in American religious participation patterns. Thus, one could expect that churches founded after this date might reflect the character of having been established with a view to addressing the new cultural realities that were emerging at that time. Second, this year corresponds approximately to the leading edge of the Gen X cohort. This being the case, it seems that churches founded before and after this date might reflect somewhat differing attitudes and experiences based upon how the life course of this generation has interacted with the unfolding life course of the congregation itself. The members of this generation would have been the first babies populating the nurseries of these congregations. Thus, while this data will have to be introduced with caution, we will do well to remain attentive to distinctions arising between churches founded in the different eras represented within this survey.

8.3.2.2 The Missional Clarity of Responding Churches

In addition, an effort was made to explore the clarity of mission out of which each congregation is ministering and the impact of any differences that might arise. This is important because, as was asserted in chapters five through seven, churches that have sought to discern their missional vocation generally are likely to reflect different attitudes about intergenerational reconciliation and justice, and toward Gen X in particular, than churches merely engaged in liminal preoccupations or those suffering from *goal displacement*. Because, as has been noted, the process of identifying a mission statement can itself be a liminal endeavour at times, care was taken within this survey to inquire as to whether or not the “congregation is guided by a clearly articulated, shared sense of mission;” in other words, does an articulated sense of mission matter or serve a vital role within the life of the congregation. The responses to this survey provide a sound opportunity to engage in an analysis of this point. Thirty-two (39.5%) of those who responded to this survey indicate that “Our congregation is guided by a clearly articulated, shared sense of mission.” Thirty-six (44.4%) responding churches presently are engaged in a process of clarifying their

congregational mission. Thirteen churches (16%) indicate that, at the present time, neither of the two above categories is true of their congregations.

8.3.2.3 The Age Demographics of Responding Churches

Important information was provided regarding the age demographics that make up the churches surveyed. This category of enquiry provides us a crucial lens through which to test the hypothesis being advanced here. In the preceding chapters, considerable attention has been given to outlining the attitudes, values, and experiences of each of the generational cohorts of which the American adult population is composed. By exploring the complexion of responding churches according to age, this enables us to gauge the degree to which these churches reflect, or perhaps are distinct from, the generational norms that are at work within the society at large.

Among those churches studied, only three (3.7%) indicate having adult populations in which Silents and GI's (defined as those age sixty-two and older at the time of the survey) make up "More than 75%" of the overall adult membership. In nineteen churches (23.5%), the Silent and GI members constitute "Between 50 and 75%" of the adult membership. Twenty-three churches (28.4%) have a Silent and GI population that amounts to "Between 25 and 50%" of the adult membership. In thirty-six churches (44.4%), Silents and GI's now make up "Less than 25%" of the membership.

Only one of the churches surveyed indicated that Boomers (defined as those 41-62 years of age at the time of the survey) make up "More than 75%" of the membership. Only nine (11.1%) have a Boomer population constituting "Between 50 and 75%" of the membership. Fifty-five churches (67.9%) are composed of "Between 25 and 50%" Boomers. Sixteen (19.8%) have adult memberships of which Boomers make up "Less than 25%."

None of the churches responding to this survey indicated being made up of a proportion of "More than 75%" of Gen Xers (defined as those between 25 and 41 years old at the time of the survey). Only five (6.2%) suggest that Xers constitute "Between 50 and 75%" of their membership. Thirty-six (44.4%) have an Xer

population making up “Between 25 and 50%” of their membership. Meanwhile, forty churches (49.4%) are composed of a demographic distribution in which Xers constitute “Less than 25%” of the overall membership.

8.3.2.4 The Proportionality of Xers within Responding Churches

Because Xers are the primary cohort with which this study is concerned, it seemed important to explore the percentage of each congregation composed of Xers relative to the age composition of the community at large. As was suggested in section 6.4, churches that strive to be faithful to their missional identity should be expected to reflect the demographic makeup of the communities by which they are surrounded. Thus, the posing of this question was motivated by the understanding that such an inquiry might help to provide insight into the effectiveness of local churches in engaging in mission among the post-modern young people of their communities. Forty-two (51.9%) respondents indicated that their churches have “Age demographics similar to those of the community in which it is located.” Eight (9.9%) suggested that “The percentage composed of Gen Xers (adults 25-41 years old) is noticeably higher than in the community at large.” Thirty-one (38.3%) report that “The percentage composed of Gen Xers is noticeably lower than in the community at large.”

8.3.2.5 The Participation Trends of Xers within Responding Churches

Respondents also were asked to characterize the attendance patterns of Gen Xers within their churches over the period of the past three years. In chapters six and seven, some aspects of church growth theory were critiqued on the grounds of their seeming tendency toward the equation of pragmatic success with missional faithfulness. In light of this critique, it would be consistent for data reflecting numerical growth to be employed here only with appropriate care and qualification. Nonetheless, it has been argued in the previous chapters that a commitment to engage in mission among post-modern young adults should manifest itself through a discernable trend of actually reaching these young people. In response to this query, nine (11.1%) respondents indicate that “The number of Gen Xers has decreased” in the last three years. Twenty-eight (34.6%) have seen the number of Gen Xers remain “essentially the same.” Thirty (37%) suggest that the number of Gen Xers in their

churches “has increased slightly,” while thirteen (16%) have observed the number of Xers increase “significantly.”

8.3.2.6 The Size of Responding Churches

Respondents also were asked about the current average weekly worship attendance of their churches. As was explained in chapter seven, Xers are not necessarily attracted to larger churches (indeed, some sources have indicated that many members of this generation actually prefer smaller congregations). However, as Rendle (2003:31) has effectively demonstrated, larger churches possess the resources to be able to appeal to a broader range of “pure markets,” while smaller churches are faced with the reality of only being able to do a limited number of things well. Thus, it is significant to note that thirty-eight (46.9%) respondents indicated that their church has a weekly worship attendance of “Less than 150.” Thirty-one (38.3%) identified themselves as experiencing “150-400” in weekly attendance. Seven churches (8.6%) average between 401-750 attendees each week, while only five (6.2%) are acquainted with a weekly attendance of greater than 750.

8.3.2.7 The Worship Styles Employed within Responding Churches

A rich diversity emerged in the way in which respondents characterized the worship styles employed within their churches. Sixteen (19.8 %) indicated that their churches employ “Mostly traditional music.” Ten (12.3 %) churches employ “Mostly contemporary music.” Thirty-seven churches (45.7%) indicated using “A blend of traditional and contemporary music;” it must be acknowledged that this “blended” category is somewhat imprecise and, perhaps more than the other categories employed in this question, is at the mercy of the subjective interpretation of the respondent. “Two or more services with distinct music styles” are being employed in eighteen (22.2%) of the churches surveyed.

Among the thirty-eight churches with an average attendance of less than 150, the majority claimed to employ a “blended” (55.3%) or “traditional” (28.9%) approach to worship. Among these churches, those using a “contemporary” style and those employing a multiple service format constituted 7.9 percent of respondents each. The

thirty-one churches of 150-400 average attendance favour a blended (38.7%) or multi-service (29%) approach, while a predominantly traditional (16.1%) or contemporary style (16.1%) is employed in considerably fewer cases. Among the seven churches of 400 to 750, none employs an exclusively traditional or contemporary style. Indeed, five (71.4%) are committed to a multi-service approach, while two (28.6%) are endeavouring to cultivate a “blended” approach to their worship gatherings. Among the five churches that fit into the largest size category of 750 or more, two indicate employing contemporary worship patterns exclusively. A further two maintain a blended approach to corporate worship, while one employs a multi-service format.

8.3.3 The Experiences of the Churches Represented

Once again, this study has been designed to explore a perceived problem among established churches in responding to cultural change within an increasingly complex generational context. It has been asserted that, as one consequence of this struggle, many churches have proven ineffective at transmitting their faith traditions to Gen X, the first post-modern generation. This problem constitutes the first three empirical *zones* that contributed to the design of this survey. Against the backdrop of this perceived problem, it has been asserted here that, if churches are to sustain their witness through this transitional period, they must engage in a process of missional renewal that encompasses Gen X. It has further been suggested that this process must entail a concern for intergenerational reconciliation and justice.

In advancing these ideas, this research project essentially is making specific claims about the practices through which the church might fulfil its calling to mediate God’s kingdom purposes for the world. Indeed, a process of missional renewal that encompasses Gen X is being advocated, as is an accompanying concern for intergenerational reconciliation and justice. A fundamental conviction of the practical-theological research paradigm being employed here is that this understanding must be tested empirically. If the hypothesis being advanced here is valid, some compelling evidence of its veracity should emerge from among the churches surveyed. With this in mind, we will explore the survey results in the pages that follow.

8.3.3.1 The Positive Relationship Cluster

In analyzing the surveys returned, significant differences arose in relation to the values, attitudes, priorities, behaviours and experiences evidenced among responding churches. Four factors proved to be of primary significance in distinguishing between the experiences of local churches:

- a. ***Whether or not the church is guided by a clear, shared sense of mission.*** This question proved to be one of the most telling indicators in helping to identify the differences between congregations. Strong differences were evident throughout the data field and were statistically significant for nineteen of the twenty-five items examined in part two.
- b. ***The demographic composition of the congregation relative to the surrounding community.*** In twelve of the items included in part two of the survey, significant statistical differences emerge when the churches in which the Gen X population is similar to or greater than that of the community at large are compared with those in which a percentage of Xers is noticeably lower than the surrounding community.
- c. ***The rate of growth or decline of Xer participants within the church over the last three years.*** When the churches that describe themselves as experiencing either increased or stable involvement of Gen Xers are compared with those that indicate having seen a decrease in Xer involvement, statistically significant differences arise in the data provided in response to twelve of the twenty-five items in part two of the survey.
- d. ***The age make-up of the local congregation.*** Analysis of the data provided by respondents revealed statistical evidence of a stark contrast in experience between churches with a composition including more than twenty-five percent Gen Xers and those with less than twenty-five percent Xers. Statistically significant differences emerged in how representatives of these two categories answered ten of the twenty-five questions in part two of the survey. Consistently, those churches in which Xers compose twenty-five percent or more of the overall

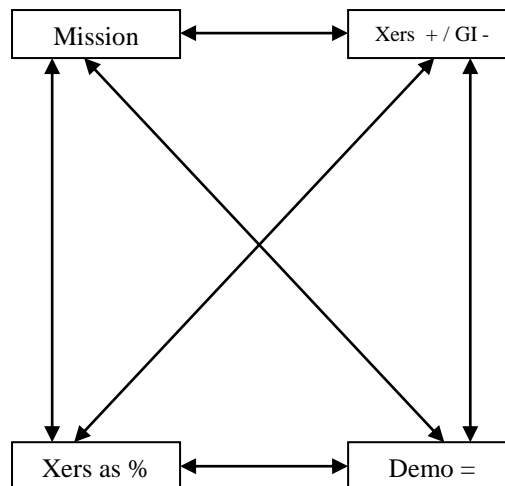
congregation provide a more optimistic assessment of their effectiveness or experience in each one of these categories.

Similarly, in eleven of the twenty-five questions in part two of the survey, statistically significant differences in response were tied to the percentage of the congregation composed of pre-Boomers (G.I.'s and Silents). The most notable differences arise when churches in which pre-Boomers constitute twenty-five percent or more of the congregation are compared with those in which they make up less than twenty-five percent. Repeatedly, the higher the percentage of pre-Boomers in a congregation, the more negative or tentative the responses provided tend to be.

It is important to note, as well, that these two categories of churches, those in which Xers compose more than twenty-five percent and those in which pre-Boomers do so, bear a high degree of statistical distinction from one another. Only sixteen of the eighty-one responding churches report having a congregational composition including more than twenty-five percent pre-Boomers and more than twenty-five percent Xers. Thus, these two factors are related in that they are almost two sides of the same issue.

Throughout this research project, it has been argued that the Boomers function as a *lead cohort* within society. That being the case, one might anticipate that the percentage of a congregation composed of Boomers might be a significant factor influencing the attitudes of that congregation. One might further anticipate that, in comparing congregations, differences in the percentage of the congregation composed of Boomers might be accompanied by differences in attitude and experience. That being said, it is worth noting that differences in the percentage of congregations composed of Boomers did not emerge as being tied to any statistically significant distinction in how respondents characterized the experience of their respective churches.

Figure 8.1—Positive Relationship Cluster



It is worth noting that these factors correspond closely to the expectations articulated in section 8.3.2 above, as well as in previous chapters. **However, perhaps even more worthy of note for the sake of this study is the high degree of statistically significant relationship that exists among these four variables, as figure 8.1 depicts. A significant relationship is evident between the clarity of mission possessed by responding congregations and the percentage of the congregation composed of Xers.** All five of the churches in which Xers make up more than fifty percent of the adult congregation indicated that they presently are guided by a compelling sense of mission. Similarly, among those congregations that report having church body compositions that include twenty-five to fifty percent Xers, 41.7 percent indicated being guided by an articulated mission, while 47.2 percent presently were in the process of clarifying such a mission at the time of the survey. A smaller portion of respondents in this group, 11.1 percent, do not fit into either of these categories. By contrast, among those churches that had compositions including less than twenty-five percent Gen Xers, thirty percent reported being guided by a clearly articulated sense of mission, while 47.5 percent presently were grappling with the need to develop such a focus. The 22.5 percent of churches in this category that were neither guided by a shared sense of mission nor in a process of discerning their mission is considerably higher than in the other two categories combined.

In addition, there existed a strong relationship between the level of articulated mission at work with in the life of local congregations and the degree to which they reflect the demographic makeup of their surrounding communities. Among

those churches that included a proportion of Xers higher than the community at large, seventy-five percent considered themselves to be guided by a well-articulated, shared sense of mission. An additional 12.5 percent were in the process of clarifying their mission. Among those churches indicating that the proportion of Xers within their own ranks was relatively similar to that of the larger community, fifty percent had adopted a unifying mission, while 40.5 percent were in the process of clarifying their mission. Among the churches enjoying percentages of Xer participants higher than or similar to the demographics of the surrounding community, 12.5 and 9.5 percent of each category, respectively, had not yet engaged in a process of discerning their mission. Conversely, among churches with percentages of Xer participants lower than the communities in which they were located, 25.8 had not so much as begun a process of clarifying their mission, while 58.1 percent were engaged in such a process at the time of this survey, and only 16.1 percent were functioning in accordance with an articulated, shared sense of mission.

A strong relationship also was evident between the level of articulated mission and the three-year participation patterns of Xers. Among the thirty-two churches claiming to be guided by a vital, shared sense of mission, twenty-four (66.7%) reported either a slight (16) or a significant (8) increase in Xer attendance over a three-year period, while eight (33%) had seen Xer involvement remain essentially the same. Among those thirty-five churches that presently were engaged in a process of clarifying their mission at the time of this survey, fourteen (40%) had experienced either a slight (12) or a significant (2) increase in Xer attendance over a three-year period, while fourteen (40%) had seen the number of Xers involved remain essentially the same and seven (20%) had experienced declining participation among this age group. Among those twelve churches that had not entered into a process of clarifying their mission, four (33%) had seen any measure of growth among Xers during this period, while among eight, this population had either remained static (6; 50%) or declined (2; 16.7%).

A strong positive relationship also was shown to exist between Xers as an overall percentage of congregational membership (question 8) and the age demographics of the congregation relative to the surrounding community. Among the forty-one churches in which Xers constituted more than twenty-five percent of the membership,

63.9 percent reported having age demographics similar to the surrounding community. Among these churches, 8.3 percent characterized the number of Xers participants as being greater than within the demographic distribution of the surrounding community, while 27.8 percent reported having a lower proportion of Xers than the surrounding community. In contrast, among those churches in which Xers constituted less than twenty-five percent of the adult membership, 52.5 percent had a lower proportion of Xers than the surrounding community and 42.5 percent had a proportion similar to that of the community at large.

Similarly, a positive relationship existed between Xers as an overall percentage of the church's membership and the three-year participation patterns of Xers.

Among the five churches in which Xers constituted a majority of the membership, three reported having experienced a significant increase in Xer participation over the last three years. One had experienced a slight increase, while one reported that the number of Xers participating had remained “essentially the same.” Among the thirty-six churches in which Xers constituted between twenty-five and fifty percent of attendees, twenty-two percent had seen a significant increase in Xer participation, while 44.4 percent had experienced a slight increase. One in four (25%) of these churches had seen the number of Xer participants remain essentially the same, while a modest 8.3 percent reported a decline in the number of Xers. Comparatively, among those churches in which Xers comprised less than twenty-five percent of the membership, only 5.1 percent indicated having seen significant increases in Xer participation over a three-year period, though 33.3 percent did report gradual increases. Almost half (46.2%) of these churches had seen little change in the number of Xers participating in three-years time, while 15.4 percent had experienced a decline in the number of Xers.

A strong relationship also could be identified between recent Xer participation patterns and the degree to which churches reflect the demographic makeup of their communities. Of those churches that included a percentage of Xers higher than the surrounding community, fifty percent had experienced significant growth over a three-year period. An additional 12.5 percent had grown slightly, while twenty-five percent had maintained a number of Xers that is essentially the same. Only 12.5 percent of such congregations had experienced decline. Among those congregations

that included a proportion of Xers similar to that of their surrounding communities, 11.9 percent had experienced a significant increase in Xer participation, 47.6 percent had seen slight increases, and 35.7 percent had maintained essentially the same number of Xers. Only 4.8 percent of these churches reported experiencing decline. Those congregations that included a percentage of Xers lower than their communities at large reflected a somewhat less encouraging, though by no means dismal, condition. A significant number of these churches, 13.3 percent, indicated that they actually had seen the number of their Xer participants grow significantly, while thirty percent suggested that the number of Xers had grown slightly. An additional 36.7 percent of these churches suggested that the number of Xer participants of which they were composed had remained much the same. Perhaps the most significant difference between this category of churches with a lower proportion of Xers and the two preceding categories lay with the twenty percent that reported a decline in the number of Xer participants over a three-year period.

It would be unwise to posit any unwarranted conclusions regarding cause-and-effect relationships underlying the relationships cited here. Such insights simply cannot be drawn on the basis of the data produced by this survey. However, while we are significantly limited in deciphering any cause-and-effect relationships, doing so is not really essential for the primary objective being pursued here. **Rather, it is enough to note that this group of churches, which share in common the characteristics of striving to live in faithfulness to a shared sense of mission, reflecting the demographic makeup of their contexts, including a significant percentage of Gen Xers in their congregational life, and reaching a growing number of the members of this generation, demonstrate statistically significant differences in values, attitudes, priorities, behaviours, and experiences than the churches not bearing these characteristics. For this reason, we have chosen to describe this group as a “positive relationship cluster” (hereafter, referred to as PRC).**

As will become evident below, the differences that emerge when the churches of this group are compared to their counterparts lend considerable empirical weight to support the hypothesis being advanced here. **As we will see, churches that strive to take their mission seriously are not reaching young adults by chance, but rather also are striving to take the objective of ministering to young adults more**

seriously. Furthermore, as will be evident below, these churches also evidence a greater commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice. In exploring the experiences of responding churches, we will begin by summarizing the responses related to hermeneutical zones four through seven and follow this with an exploration of zones one through three.

8.3.3.2 Missional Vitality

It has been proposed here that, if churches are to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition, they must engage in a process of missional renewal. **As one might anticipate, the results of this survey demonstrate that churches falling within the PRC truly possess a more active commitment to mission than those not belonging to this group.** Perhaps not surprisingly, all churches claimed to be rather seriously engaged in “actively exploring how we can participate in God’s mission within our community” (Table 8.1). Yet, those churches that were operating out of a clear, shared sense of mission (mean 1.53) and those that were pursuing such a mission (2.11) affirmed this statement with considerably greater certainty than those churches not actively engaged with a sense of mission (2.85).

TABLE 8.1			
Statement 4: “Our congregation is actively exploring how we can participate in God’s mission within our community.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.00	1.012	N/A
Shared Mission	1.53	.567	.000
Clarifying Mission	2.11	1.036	
Not active	2.85	1.214	

Similarly, all respondents affirmed the notion that their “congregation is engaged actively in efforts to influence our community for the sake of God’s kingdom” (Table 8.2). Perhaps unsurprisingly, a great distinction in response existed between those that were operating out of a clear, shared sense of mission (1.44), those that were clarifying their mission (2.53), and those churches of which neither of these things could be said (3.31). In addition, those churches in which the proportion of Xers was

equal to or greater than in the community at large responded more favourably than those in which this was not the case (2.00 vs. 2.58). The same could be said of those churches in which the number of Xer participants had grown over a three year period when compared to those in which Xer participation had either remained the same or decreased (1.81 vs. 2.62).

TABLE 8.2			
Statement 19: “Our congregation is engaged actively in efforts to influence our community for the sake of God’s kingdom.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.22	1.095	N/A
Shared Mission	1.44	.564	.000
Clarifying Mission	2.53	.941	
Not active	3.31	1.182	
Xers => Community	2.00	1.010	.019
Xers < Community	2.58	1.148	
Xer 3-yr. +	1.81	.648	.000
Xer 3-yr. =/-	2.62	.899	

Of course, in practice, the prioritization of mission over established norms is challenging for most every church. This reality is evidenced by the extent to which respondents chose to characterize their churches as being “more concerned with a commitment to mission than with maintaining established patterns of ministry” (Table 8.3); indeed, the average respondent provided a fairly pessimistic assessment of this statement (3.17). However, a direct correlation exists between churches in which Xers constituted at least twenty-five percent of the overall participants and a more favourable response to this statement (2.86). Conversely, those churches in which Xers made up less than twenty-five percent of attendees responded less optimistically to this statement (3.46). Almost identical results are generated by comparing those churches in which the proportion of Xers was equal to or greater than in the community at large against those in which this was not the case (2.91 vs. 3.57), or by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants grew over a three year period against those in which Xer participation had either remained the same or decreased (2.90 vs. 3.44). So, while a serious commitment to mission is difficult in practice, those churches that have a clear sense of mission and that are proving

effective at reaching Gen Xers consistently demonstrate a higher level of commitment to this than other churches.

TABLE 8.3			
Statement 12: “It often seems that our church is more concerned with a commitment to mission than with maintaining established patterns of ministry.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	3.17	1.159	N/A
Xers 25% >	2.86	1.206	.024
Xers < 25%	3.46	1.047	
Xers => Community	2.91	1.151	.015
Xers < Community	3.57	1.073	
Xer 3-yr. +	2.90	1.114	.042
Xer 3-yr. +/-	3.44	1.133	

8.3.3.3 Concern for Post-modern Young Adults

Another assertion of the hypothesis being advanced in this study is that, in order for churches to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition, they must possess a concern for post-modern young adults. **Among those churches included in this survey, those counted among the PRC evidence such a concern to a greater degree than their counterparts.** For example, respondents were asked to characterize the extent to which their congregations were “searching actively for ways to minister to younger generations of people” (Table 8.4). All respondents provided a fairly optimistic assessment of their churches (mean: 2.20). Perhaps unsurprisingly, a statistically significant distinction in response exists between those that were operating out of a clear, shared sense of mission (1.63), those that currently were clarifying their mission (2.28), and those churches of which neither of these things could be said (3.38). Furthermore, among those congregations in which Xers constituted more than twenty-five percent of attendees, a higher level of agreement with this statement was registered (1.93). Those congregations in which the overall composition included less than twenty-five percent Xers provided a more cautious assessment of this statement (2.48). Quite similar results are generated by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants had grown over a three year

period against those in which Xer participation had either remained the same or decreased (1.77 vs. 2.65).

TABLE 8.4			
Statement 13: “Our congregation is searching actively for ways to minister to younger generations of people.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.20	.993	N/A
Shared Mission	1.63	.609	.000
Clarifying Mission	2.28	.815	
Not active	3.38	1.121	
Xers 25% >	1.93	.755	.012
Xers < 25%	2.48	1.132	
Xer 3-yr. +	1.77	.571	.000
Xer 3-yr. =/-	2.65	1.136	

A similar pattern emerges in the responses provided to the statement, “Older members of our church express a desire to reach the younger generations” (Table 8.5); all respondents provided a fairly positive assessment (mean: 2.32). However, those churches that were operating out of a clear, shared sense of mission (1.97) provided a more strongly affirmative response than those that were in the process of clarifying their mission (2.47), and those churches of which neither of these things could be said (2.77). Among those congregations in which Xers constituted more than twenty-five percent of attendees, a higher level of agreement with this statement was registered (2.10). Those congregations in which the overall composition included less than twenty-five percent Xers provided a more cautious assessment of this statement (2.55). Almost identical results are generated by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants had either decreased or remained the same with those that had experienced growth over a three year period (2.05 vs. 2.57).

TABLE 8.5			
Statement 11: “Older members of our church express a desire to reach the younger generations.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.32	.972	N/A
Shared Mission	1.97	.782	

Clarifying Mission	2.47	.971	.018
Not active	2.77	1.166	
Xers 25% >	2.10	.800	.035
Xers < 25%	2.55	1.085	
Xer 3-yr. +	2.05	.844	.012
Xer 3-yr. =/-	2.57	.959	

We are able to draw some helpful insights from this. Perhaps one might expect those churches that have not been effective in reaching the younger generations to demonstrate a more earnest concern to find ways to do so. However, the strongest relationship exists between a concern with reaching young adults as part of a church’s mission and effectively doing so. This seems to affirm the fairly basic claim that, in order for churches to sustain their witness intergenerational, their sense of mission must actually entail a concern to do so.

8.3.3.4 Concern for Intergenerational Relations

Another facet of the hypothesis being advanced here is that, if churches are to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition, their efforts to renew their mission must entail a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation. This is so, in part, because a concern for reconciliation is native to the gospel message and, thus, integral to what it means for the church to mediate God’s kingdom purposes. However, it also has been demonstrated that relational issues are highly valued by Gen Xers. **The relevance of this point was affirmed widely by respondents.** When presented with the statement, “The Gen Xers with which our church has interacted (whether in the past or presently) seem to reflect a concern for relational issues (e.g., trust, belonging, love)” (Table 8.6), the average respondent seemed to find this to be a valid statement (mean: 2.39). In turn, most respondents indicated that their churches reflected a concern “to find more effective ways to help people of different ages relate well with one another” (Table 8.7; mean: 2.21). However, those churches that were not presently engaged actively in discerning a sense of mission (3.00) provided a neutral response to this statement, while those guided by a clear mission (1.91) and those that were engaged in clarifying their mission (2.20) submitted far more confident affirmations.

TABLE 8.6			
Statement 7: “The Gen Xers with which our church has interacted (whether in the past or presently) seem to reflect a concern for relational issues (e.g., trust, belonging, love).”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.39	.755	N/A

TABLE 8.7			
Statement 17: “Our congregation desires to find more effective ways to help people of different ages relate well with one another.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.21	.852	N/A
Shared Mission (1)	1.91	.466	Comparison of Groups 1 & 2 against Group 3: .377
Clarifying Mission (2)	2.20	.933	
Not active (3)	3.00	.913	

8.3.3.5 Concern for Intergenerational Justice

The hypothesis being advanced here also entails the assertion that, if churches are to sustain their witness through the post-modern transition, their efforts at missional renewal must entail a commitment to intergenerational justice. As with intergenerational reconciliation, this concern is native to what it means for the church to mediate God’s kingdom purposes with integrity. However, it also has been demonstrated that issues of justice and fairness factor prominently in the life experience and values of Xers. **The important of this point seemed to be affirmed by respondents.** For example, respondents seemed to provide measured affirmation of the statement, “The Gen Xers with which our church has interacted (whether in the past or presently) seem sensitive to issues of fairness” (Table 8.8; mean: 2.42). Furthermore, when presented with the statement, “The Gen Xers with which our church has interacted (whether in the past or presently) seem to desire to make a meaningful contribution within the church” (Table 8.9), the average respondent provided an affirmative assessment (mean: 2.13). Those churches that contained a proportion of Xers equal to or greater than the community at large seemed especially attuned to the validity of this statement (1.98 vs. 2.35).

TABLE 8.8			
Statement 10: “The Gen Xers with which our church has interacted (whether in the past or presently) seem sensitive to issues of fairness.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.42	.784	N/A

TABLE 8.9			
Statement 9: “The Gen Xers with which our church has interacted (whether in the past or presently) seem to desire to make a meaningful contribution within the church.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.13	.736	N/A
Xers => Community	1.98	.629	.025
Xers < Community	2.35	.839	

When asked to indicate the level of their agreement with the statement, “Our congregation is working to promote the equal involvement of people of all ages” (Table 8.10), the average respondent actually demonstrated fairly firm agreement (mean: 2.11). However, a direct correlation is evident between how churches responded to this statement and the proportion of Gen Xers within their own congregations in relation to the community at large. Among those churches that involved a proportion of Gen Xer participants equal to or greater than that of the surrounding community, the average response (1.98) was notably higher than that of those churches in which the proportion of Xers was lower than the surrounding community (2.32). Nonetheless, both of these categories indicated a concern to promote the equal involvement of all ages. An almost identical result is achieved by comparing those churches in which the number of Xers had increased over a three year period (1.88) versus those that had either seen this number remain the same or decline (2.35). A comparison of churches with a clearly articulated sense of mission (1.78) with those who were in a process of discerning their missional vocation (2.22) and those that were not actively pursuing a sense of mission (2.62) reveals somewhat more pronounced distinctions.

TABLE 8.10			
Statement 16: “Our congregation is working to promote the equal involvement of people of all ages.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.11	.758	N/A
Xers => Community	1.98	.742	.047
Xers < Community	2.32	.748	
Shared Mission	1.78	.491	.001
Clarifying Mission	2.22	.722	
Not active	2.62	1.044	
Xer 3-yr. +	1.88	.544	.005
Xer 3-yr. =/-	2.35	.889	

Respondents also were asked to assess the statement, “Our congregation is seeking a way to reach young adults without alienating older, established members” (Table 8.11). The average respondent affirmed this statement (mean: 2.16). However, a comparison of churches with a clearly articulated sense of mission (1.97) and those who were in a process of discerning their missional vocation (2.06) against those that were not actively pursuing a sense of mission (2.92) reveals a statistically significant distinction in response. A direct correlation also is evident between how churches responded to this statement and the extent of Gen Xer participation within the congregation. Among those churches in which Xers constituted twenty-five percent of the congregation or more, the average response (1.91) was notably higher than that of churches with less than twenty-five percent Xers (2.43). Thus, while both of these categories indicated a concern to reach young adults without alienating the established members, it seems that those churches that included a higher number of Xers were more likely to be conscious of their own need to seek ways to effectively promote the co-existence of all generations. Furthermore, perhaps it should not surprise us to find a correlation between the possession of a desire to find meaningful ways to include new generations and effectiveness in doing so.

TABLE 8.11			
Statement 18: “Our congregation is seeking a way to reach young adults without alienating older, established members.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.16	.813	N/A

Xers 25%>	1.91	.648	.003
Xers <25%	2.43	.899	
Shared Mission	1.97	.740	.001
Clarifying Mission	2.06	.630	
Not active	2.92	1.038	

One might further expect that, if churches truly are committed to finding ways to promote the full inclusion of young adults, this will manifest itself in part through openness to seeing Xers assume positions of leadership. The average respondent claimed to represent a congregation within which Gen Xers were encouraged to assume positions of leadership (Table 8.12; mean: 2.22). While the average respondent indicated at least a measured optimism in responding to this question, among those congregations in which Xers constituted more than twenty-five percent of attendees, a higher level of agreement with this statement was registered (2.00). Those congregations in which the overall composition includes less than twenty-five percent Xers provided a more cautious assessment of this statement (2.45). Almost identical results are generated by comparing those churches in which the proportion of Xers was equal to or greater than in the community at large against those in which this was not the case (1.98 vs. 2.61). Conversely, the extent of optimism registered in response to this statement corresponds directly to the percentage of the congregation composed of pre-Boomers. The highest levels of agreement (1.89) were evident among those churches in which Silents and G.I.'s made up less than twenty-five percent of the overall number of attendees, while the lowest levels (2.59) arose among those churches in which pre-Boomers comprised more than fifty percent of the congregation. Those churches in which pre-Boomers made up between twenty-five and fifty percent of attendees, the score (2.39) was located almost in the middle of the other two categories.

Statement 24: "Gen Xers within our congregation are encouraged to assume positions of leadership."			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.22	.837	N/A
Xers 25%>	2.00	.671	.015
Xers <25%	2.45	.932	
Xers => Community	1.98	.714	

Xers < Community	2.61	.882	.001
Pre-Boomers <25%	1.89	.622	.003
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.39	.839	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	2.59	.959	

8.3.3.6 Impact on the Challenge of Congregational Confidence

The data reported throughout the preceding pages provides some evidence that lends credibility to the hypothesis under consideration here. As we have seen, there exists a cluster of churches that share in common the characteristics of striving to live in faithfulness to a shared sense of mission, reflecting the demographic makeup of their contexts, including a significant percentage of Gen Xers in their congregational life, and reaching a growing number of the members of this generation. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated above, these churches reflect statistically significant differences in values, attitudes, priorities, behaviours, and experiences when compared to the churches not bearing these characteristics. While this does not necessarily tell us anything conclusive or categorical about cause-and-effect relationships, it does help us to lend empirical credibility to our hypothesis that missional effectiveness in the post-modern transition will surely *entail* a concern for Gen X, for intergenerational reconciliation, and for intergenerational justice.

That being said, the hypothesis being tested here has been presented against the backdrop of a particular problem statement. As has been suggested in the preceding chapters, this problem frequently manifests itself through at least three focal points of anxiety: 1) the concern churches feel toward the impact of the cultural changes taking place around them; 2) the concern churches feel toward the intergenerational dynamics impacting their shared life and ministry; 3) the level of confidence of churches regarding their effectiveness at transmitting their faith traditions to the next generation. If the hypothesis being advanced here truly does provide a helpful response to this problem, we might expect that the churches bearing the characteristics and priorities promoted by this hypothesis to evidence lower levels of preoccupation with this problem. **If churches are proving effective at renewing their mission, incorporating Xers, and addressing intergenerational reconciliation and justice, they should demonstrate greater confidence in**

responding to cultural changes, to the current intergenerational climate, and in passing their tradition to the next generation. Fortunately, the responses provided to this survey provide us the opportunity to test this assumption.

a. Confidence in Responding to Cultural Change

What insights can be gained from this survey about the experiences of established churches in responding to cultural change? Does the evidence support the validity of the hypothesis being advanced here? When asked to indicate whether “[e]stablished members of our congregation seem to feel that changes within our society have impacted the effectiveness of our church’s ministry” (Table 8.13), the average respondent demonstrated cautious optimism toward this statement (mean: 2.71). Perhaps unsurprisingly, among those congregations in which Xers constituted less than twenty-five percent of attendees, a higher level of agreement with this statement was registered (2.46). Those congregations in which the overall composition included at least twenty-five percent Xers provided a more neutral assessment of this statement (2.97). Similarly, those churches in which the proportion of Xers was smaller than the community at large expressed greater agreement (2.27) in responding to this question than those with an equal or greater proportion of Xers (3.00).

TABLE 8.13			
Statement 3: “Established members of our congregation seem to feel that changes within our society have impacted the effectiveness of our church’s ministry.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.71	1.017	N/A
Xers 25%>	2.46	.996	.027
Xers <25%	2.97	.986	
Xers => Community	3.00	1.033	.002
Xers < Community	2.27	.828	

When posed with the statement, “Older members of our congregation respond negatively to the suggestion that our church has a need for change” (Table 8.14), the average respondent did not lend agreement to this statement (mean: 3.35). However, a comparison of churches with a clearly articulated sense of mission (3.72) with those who were in a process of discerning their missional vocation (3.26) and those that

were not actively pursuing a sense of mission (2.67) produces statistically significant distinctions in response. Furthermore, those churches in which pre-Boomers constituted twenty-five percent or more of the congregation seemed to reflect uncertainty in responding to this statement (25-50%: 2.95; 50%>: 2.91). However, among those churches in which Silents and GI's made up less than a quarter of participants, this statement yields rather conclusive disagreement (3.89).

TABLE 8.14			
Statement 8: "Older members of our congregation respond negatively to the suggestion that our church has a need for change."			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	3.35	1.230	N/A
Shared Mission	3.72	1.114	.032
Clarifying Mission	3.26	1.120	
Not active	2.67	1.557	
Pre-Boomers <25%	3.89	.832	.002
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.91	1.306	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	2.95	1.397	

Respondents also were asked whether or not "[o]ur congregation seems optimistic about its ability to respond effectively to changes within the larger culture" (Table 8.15). While the average respondent expressed agreement with this statement (mean: 2.60), a comparison of churches with a clearly articulated sense of mission (1.93) with those who were in a process of discerning their missional vocation (2.82) and those that were not actively pursuing a sense of mission (3.54) reveals pronounced distinctions. In addition, those churches in which pre-Boomers constituted twenty-five percent or more of the congregation seem to reflect uncertainty (25-50%: 2.86; 50%>: 2.95). However, among those churches in which Silents and GI's made up less than a quarter of participants, widespread, albeit modest confidence was evident (2.21). At the same time, perhaps unsurprisingly, among those congregations in which Xers constituted more than twenty-five percent of attendees, a higher level of agreement with this statement was registered (2.24). Those congregations in which the overall composition included less than twenty-five percent Xers provided a more uncertain assessment of this statement (2.95). Almost identical results are generated by comparing those churches in which the proportion of Xers was equal to or greater

than in the community at large against those in which this was not the case (2.36 vs. 2.97) or by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants had grown over a three year period against those in which Xer participation had either remained the same or decreased (2.24 vs. 3.00).

TABLE 8.15			
Statement 15: “Our congregation seems optimistic about its ability to respond effectively to changes within the larger culture.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.60	1.029	N/A
Shared Mission	1.93	.450	.000
Clarifying Mission	2.82	.999	
Not active	3.54	1.127	
Pre-Boomers <25%	2.21	.880	.010
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.95	.865	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	2.86	1.207	
Xers 25%>	2.24	.786	.002
Xers <25%	2.95	1.123	
Xers => Community	2.36	.965	.011
Xers < Community	2.97	1.033	
Xer 3-yr. +	2.24	.692	.001
Xer 3-yr. =/-	3.00	1.206	

b. Confidence toward Intergenerational Situation

We can enquire, as well, regarding the experiences of established churches in responding to the contemporary generational context. For the purposes of this study, we can examine this from three interrelated perspectives: 1) the generalized experience of the church with intergenerational tension; 2) the level of intergenerational relational health perceived in the church, and 3) the presence of healthy intergenerational systems within the church.

1. Generalized Intergenerational Tension

When asked to indicate whether “the efforts our church has made to reach younger generations have resulted in tension” (Table 8.16), respondents provided a fairly cool

assessment (mean: 2.98). However, among those churches in which pre-Boomers composed twenty-five percent or more of the congregation, a noticeably higher level of affirmation (2.64) was registered than among those churches in which Silents and GI's constituted less than one-fourth of participants (3.39). While this data may be helpful, it must be acknowledged as being of limited value. As has already been suggested in previous chapters, tension may not necessarily be a bad thing. The issue of what a church does with the tensions arising within its ranks is the more important issue. Does the tension cause the church to erupt in conflict or abandon efforts to change? Is the tension channelled in a way that is redemptive and productive? This leads to the next question posed on this topic.

TABLE 8.16			
Statement 1: "Some of the efforts our church has made to reach younger generations have resulted in tension."			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.98	1.331	N/A
Pre-Boomers <25%	3.39	1.315	.040
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.64	1.399	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	2.64	1.136	

When asked to indicate the degree to which "[r]esistance to change on the part of older church members has hindered our ability to minister effectively to younger adults" (Table 8.17), the churches in which pre-Boomers constituted twenty-five percent or more of the congregation seem to reflect tentative agreement in responding to this statement (25-50%: 2.62; 50%>: 2.68). However, among those churches in which Silents and GI's made up less than a quarter of participants, this statement yields rather conclusive disagreement (3.88). Correspondingly, among churches in which Xers constituted twenty-five percent or more of the congregation, this statement was met with a higher level of disagreement (3.53), while among those in which Xers made up less than a quarter of the congregation, respondents seemed to provide a more neutral assessment (2.84). Almost identical results are generated by comparing those churches in which the proportion of Xers was equal to or greater than in the community at large against those in which this was not the case (3.49 vs. 2.73), by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants had

grown over a three year period against those in which Xer participation had either remained the same or decreased (3.58 vs. 2.76), or by comparing those churches those guided by a clearly articulated mission (3.72) with those who were clarifying their mission (2.88) and those not actively pursuing their missional vocation (2.67).

TABLE 8.17			
Statement 14: “Resistance to change on the part of older church members has hindered our ability to minister effectively to younger adults.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	3.19	1.278	N/A
Shared Mission	3.72	1.143	.007
Clarifying Mission	2.88	1.166	
Not active	2.67	1.497	
Pre-Boomers <25%	3.88	.977	.000
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.68	1.287	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	2.62	1.203	
Xers 25%>	3.53	1.198	.017
Xers <25%	2.84	1.280	
Xers => Community	3.49	1.159	.010
Xers < Community	2.73	1.337	
Xer 3-yr. +	3.58	1.118	.004
Xer 3-yr. +/-	2.76	1.300	

2. Intergenerational Relational Health

When asked to indicate the degree to which “[p]eople of different generations within our congregation seem to enjoy healthy relationships with one another” (Table 8.18), the average respondent demonstrated rather firm agreement (mean: 2.04). However, the extent of that agreement corresponded directly to the percentage of the congregation composed of pre-Boomers. The highest levels of agreement (1.81) were evident among those churches in which Silents and GI’s made up less than twenty-five percent of the overall number of attendees, while less firm levels (2.41) arose among those churches in which pre-Boomers comprised more than fifty percent of the congregation. Those churches in which pre-Boomers made up between twenty-five

and fifty percent of attendees, the score (2.05) was located almost in the middle of the other two categories.

TABLE 8.18			
Statement 20: “People of different generations within our congregation seem to enjoy healthy relationships with one another.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.04	.863	N/A
Pre-Boomers <25%	1.81	.822	.033
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.05	.722	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	2.41	.959	

Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which their congregations found it difficult to help people of different ages relate to one another meaningfully (Table 8.19). The average respondent did not express much concern on this point (mean: 3.44). However, when responses to this statement are compared on the basis of the percentage of the congregation composed of pre-Boomers, some intriguing results emerge. Those respondents representing churches in which these elders composed fifty percent or more of the total participants did not lend agreement to this statement (3.41). The same is true of those churches in which pre-Boomers constituted less than twenty-five percent of the attendees (3.78). However, among those churches in which Silents and GI’s made up twenty-five to fifty percent of attendees, greater uncertainty was registered in response to this statement (2.96). Similarly, those churches in which the proportion of Xers was smaller than the community at large also expressed greater uncertainty (3.00) in responding to this question than those with an equal or greater proportion of Xers (3.72), who registered rather conclusive disagreement. Similar results are generated by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants had either decreased or remained the same with those that had experienced growth over a three year period (3.19 vs. 3.70).

TABLE 8.19			
Statement 2: “Our congregation finds it difficult to help people of different ages relate to one another meaningfully.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	3.44	1.084	N/A
Pre-Boomers <25%	3.78	.989	

Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.96	1.107	.016
Pre-Boomers 50%>	3.41	1.054	
Xers => Community	3.72	.927	.003
Xers < Community	3.00	1.183	
Xer 3-yr. +	3.70	.989	.035
Xer 3-yr. +/-	3.19	1.126	

What might we conclude from this? While it is necessary to avoid unfounded conclusions, it might be fair to suggest that, among those churches in which elderly members constitute either a majority or a small minority of the total membership, the challenges of helping the generations to relate to one another simply do not become accentuated to a significant degree. Conversely, in those churches in which a diversity of generations coexist in relatively similar proportion to one another, it is reasonable to imagine that these challenges might become more readily evident. Regardless, while not overwhelming, the evidence strongly suggests that a greater commitment to healthy intergenerational relations exists among those churches that are committed to mission and that are actually incorporating Xers into their ranks.

3. Intergenerational Systemic Health

When asked to gauge the degree to which their churches find it difficult to provide ways for people of all ages to participate equally in the church's life, respondents did not generally seem to see this as a matter worthy of great concern (Table 8.20; mean: 3.28). The average respondent felt that "[g]enerally speaking, people of different generations within our congregation seem to be able to work together in a way that affirms the value of all age groups" (Table 8.21; mean: 2.08). However, a comparison of churches with a clearly articulated sense of mission (1.74) and those who were in a process of discerning their missional vocation (2.11) against those that were not actively pursuing a sense of mission (2.77) reveals a statistically significant distinction. Furthermore, the extent of the level of optimism expressed once again corresponds directly to the percentage of the congregation composed of pre-Boomers. The highest levels of agreement (1.81) were evident among those churches in which Silents and GI's made up less than twenty-five percent of the overall number of attendees, while the lowest levels (2.41) arose among those churches in which pre-

Boomers comprised more than fifty percent of the congregation. Those churches in which pre-Boomers made up between twenty-five and fifty percent of attendees, the score (2.09) was located almost precisely in the middle of the other two categories. In those churches in which the proportion of Xers was equal to or greater than the demographic distribution of the surrounding community, stronger affirmation was lent to this statement than in their counterparts (1.92 vs. 2.33).

TABLE 8.20			
Statement 6: “Our congregation finds it difficult to provide ways for people of all ages to participate equally in our church’s life.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	3.28	1.132	N/A

TABLE 8.21			
Statement 21: “Generally speaking, people of different generations within our congregation seem to be able to work together in a way that affirms the value of all age groups.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.08	.776	N/A
Shared Mission (1)	1.74	.445	Comparison of Groups 1 & 2 against Group 3: .000
Clarifying Mission (2)	2.11	.667	
Not active (3)	2.77	1.166	
Pre-Boomers <25%	1.86	.798	.031
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.09	.526	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	2.41	.854	
Xers => Community	1.92	.752	.020
Xers < Community	2.33	.758	

When asked to assess the more specific statement, “It seems that our congregation has implemented effective measures to include younger adults fully in its life” (Table 8.22), those churches in which the proportion of Xers was equal to or greater than in the community at large responded much more favourably than those in which this was not the case (2.34 vs. 3.06). Similarly, a comparison of churches with a clearly articulated sense of mission (2.03) with those who were in a process of discerning their missional vocation (3.06) and those that were not actively pursuing a sense of mission (2.85) reveals a statistically significant distinction. However, those churches in which the pre-Boomer population made up less than twenty-five percent of the

congregation seemed most confident in responding to this question (2.25). Those churches in which Silents and GI's constituted more than twenty-five percent of attendees reflected considerably greater uncertainty (25-50%: 2.83 and 50%>: 3.00).

TABLE 8.22			
Statement 22: "It seems that our congregation has implemented effective measures to include younger adults fully in its life."			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.62	1.079	N/A
Shared Mission	2.03	.967	.000
Clarifying Mission	3.06	.984	
Not active	2.85	.987	
Pre-Boomers <25%	2.25	1.156	.018
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.83	.887	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	3.00	.976	
Xers => Community	2.34	1.081	.003
Xers < Community	3.06	.929	

Above, it was suggested that the degree to which Xers were welcome to assume positions of leadership suggests something about the systemic health of a congregation. So, how have churches succeeded in seeing Xers assume positions of leadership? In responding to the statement, "Gen Xers within our congregation have assumed positions of leadership" (Table 8.23), the average respondent expressed affirmation (mean: 2.19). Despite this, a statistically significant distinction exists between the experiences of churches guided by a sense of mission (1.94) and those that were not (2.62). Furthermore, perhaps unsurprisingly, among those congregations in which Xers constituted more than twenty-five percent of attendees, a higher level of agreement with this statement was registered (1.93). Those congregations in which the overall composition included less than twenty-five percent Xers provided a more cautious assessment of this statement (2.45). Nearly identical results are produced by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants had grown over a three year period against those in which Xer participation had either remained the same or decreased (1.91 vs. 2.49). In contrast to this, the extent of optimism expressed in response to this statement corresponds directly to the percentage of the congregation composed of pre-Boomers. The highest

levels of agreement (1.78) were evident among those churches in which Silents and GI's made up less than twenty-five percent of the overall number of attendees, while the lowest levels (2.77) arose among those churches in which pre-Boomers comprised more than fifty percent of the congregation. Those churches in which pre-Boomers made up between twenty-five and fifty percent of attendees, the score (2.26) was located almost in the middle of the other two categories.

TABLE 8.23

Statement 25: "Gen Xers within our congregation have assumed positions of leadership."

Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.19	.868	N/A
Shared Mission	1.94	.840	.051
Not active	2.62	1.193	
Pre-Boomers <25%	1.78	.485	.000
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	2.26	.752	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	2.77	1.110	
Xers 25%>	1.93	.648	.006
Xers <25%	2.45	.986	
Xer 3-yr. +	1.91	.526	.002
Xer 3-yr. =/-	2.49	1.070	

c. Confidence in Transmitting Tradition

The distinctions in response are evident not only in relation to churches' confidence toward cultural change and intergenerational dynamics, but also in their feelings of confidence toward their effectiveness in transmitting their tradition to Gen X, the first post-modern generation. The statement, "Our congregation seems to be proving effective at ministering among Gen Xers" (Table 8.24; mean: 3.04) yields some valuable insight into this issue. The most marked distinction in response is evident between those churches with a clearly articulated mission (2.38), those that were clarifying their mission (3.36), and those not actively pursuing their missional vocation (3.77). Clearly, while no respondents chose to portray their churches in an overwhelmingly positive light, those that were missionally engaged were considerably more confident.

Those churches in which the pre-Boomer population makes up less than twenty-five percent of the overall number of participants responded positively to this statement (2.61), while responses provided by churches in which GI's and Silents made up more than 25 percent are considerably less positive (25-50%: 3.50; 50>: 3.26). Among those congregations in which Xers constituted more than twenty-five percent of attendees, though somewhat measured, a higher level of agreement with this statement was registered (2.68). Those congregations in which the overall composition included less than twenty-five percent Xers provided a considerably less optimistic assessment of this statement (3.40). Almost identical results are generated by comparing those churches in which the proportion of Xers was equal to or greater than in the community at large against those in which this was not the case (2.70 vs. 3.58), or by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants had grown over a three year period against those in which Xer participation had either remained the same or decreased (2.67 vs. 3.41).

TABLE 8.24

Statement 23: "Our congregation seems to be proving effective at ministering among Gen Xers."			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	3.04	1.089	N/A
Shared Mission	2.38	1.008	.000
Clarifying Mission	3.36	.899	
Not active	3.77	.927	
Pre-Boomers <25%	2.61	1.103	.004
Pre-Boomers 25-50%	3.26	.964	
Pre-Boomers 50%>	3.50	.964	
Xers 25%>	2.68	1.083	.003
Xers <25%	3.40	.982	
Xers =/> Community	2.70	1.035	.000
Xers < Community	3.58	.958	
Xer 3-yr. +	2.67	1.017	.002
Xer 3-yr. =/-	3.41	1.013	

When presented with the statement, "I have confidence in the present effectiveness of our church in passing the faith to Gen Xers (adults 25-41 years old)" (Table 8.25; mean: 2.77), respondents representing churches with a clearly articulated mission

registered a markedly higher level of confidence (2.03) when compared to those who were clarifying their mission (3.15) and those not actively pursuing their missional vocation (3.54). In addition, churches in which Xers constituted less than twenty-five percent of attendees expressed greater uncertainty in responding to this statement (3.08), while those congregations in which the overall composition included at least twenty-five percent Xers seem to reflect a measured confidence (2.45). Similarly, those churches in which the proportion of Xers was smaller than the community at large express markedly greater uncertainty (3.33) in responding to this question than those with an equal or greater proportion of Xers (2.40). Even more pronounced results are generated by comparing those churches in which the number of Xer participants had either decreased or remained the same with those that had experienced growth over a three year period (3.39 vs. 2.28).

TABLE 8.25			
Statement 5: "I have confidence in the present effectiveness of our church in passing the faith to Gen Xers (adults 25-41 years old)."			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
All Respondents	2.77	1.245	N/A
Shared Mission	2.03	1.016	.000
Clarifying Mission	3.15	1.121	
Not active	3.54	1.198	
Xers 25%>	2.45	1.267	.026
Xers <25%	3.08	1.156	
Xers => Community	2.40	1.155	.001
Xers < Community	3.33	1.184	
Xer 3-yr. +	1.91	.526	.002
Xer 3-yr. =/-	2.49	1.070	

Clearly, all churches demonstrate an appropriately serious awareness of the attendant challenges inherent in the present passage of history. Nonetheless, those churches that belong to the Positive Relationship Cluster consistently demonstrate higher levels of confidence toward how they are coping with cultural change, toward the challenges of intergenerational coexistence, and toward their effectiveness in transmitting their traditions intergenerationally. Truly, among churches that are proving effective at discerning their mission and

reaching Gen Xers, they also clearly do so with greater confidence than their counterparts not bearing these characteristics.

8.4 Some Secondary Factors

In addition to the cluster of factors surveyed above, three additional characteristics appear to be significant in impacting the experience of churches: church size, the duration of the congregation's existence, and the worship style being employed. While these factors are of some significance, it is quite evident that their influence is less important than the cluster cited above. We will attempt to record the insights gained about these secondary factors and to provide some account of their relationship to the cluster of primary factors cited above.

8.4.1 Worship Formats Employed

Cross-tab analysis reaps the interesting insight that the churches that are experiencing the greatest growth among Xers consistently are employing a contemporary, blended, or multi-service approach to corporate worship. Among those churches that experienced significant growth, 22.2 percent employed contemporary worship, while 38.9 percent sought to cultivate a blended approach to worship. A considerable number, 33.3 percent, employed a multi-service approach. Among those that indicated a "slight" increase in Xer involvement, 41.7 percent were employing a contemporary style, while 47.2 percent described their worship style as blended. A smaller group, composing 5.6 percent of respondents in this category, were employing a multi-service approach.

It is important to note that the use of progressive approaches to worship does not seem to emerge as a guarantor of growth. Those churches that characterized the Xer involvement as "essentially the same" over a three year period were predominantly employing a multi-service (40%), contemporary (30%), or blended (20%) approach. Those that had experienced decline in Xer involvement through this same period included 37.5 percent that claimed to employ a contemporary style, twenty-five percent that had a blended worship style, and 6.3 percent that maintained multiple services.

While the data does not identify a relationship between innovation in worship style and growth, there does seem to be clear evidence of a relationship between continued use of traditional worship formats and decline. More than thirty-one percent of those churches that had experienced declining Xer involvement continued to employ traditional worship styles, while the same can be said of ten percent of those churches that had seen no meaningful change in Xer involvement in recent years. Conversely, among the two categories of respondents that identified their churches as having experienced growth, only 5.6 percent of churches in each category continued to emphasize a traditional approach to worship.

Statistically significant differences existed between those churches that employed either a traditional or blended worship style and those that employed either a contemporary style or multiple service formats in the responses provided to four statements in this survey.

1. First, in responding to the statement, “It often seems that our church is more concerned with a commitment to mission than with maintaining established patterns of ministry” (Table 8.26), those churches that had adopted a contemporary or multi-service format for corporate worship expressed a higher level of confidence (2.69) in this regard than their “traditional” and “blended” counterparts (3.42). This reflects the possibility that a commitment to mission is precisely what leads many churches to engage in innovation of worship style or perhaps that successfully launching a service was deemed a major triumph heightening a congregation’s esteem. Thus, while the missional framework promoted in the preceding chapters entails a critique of the tendency to reduce church renewal to a matter of *attractional* techniques such as the use of contemporary worship styles, it is clear that a choice to employ new approaches to worship may in fact be an expression of a renewed commitment to mission. However, cross-tab analysis does not provide any statistically significant evidence to suggest a widespread relationship between missional focus and the use of any particular worship style.

TABLE 8.26			
Statement 12: “It often seems that our church is more concerned with a commitment to mission than with maintaining established patterns of ministry.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
Contemporary/Multi	2.69	1.123	.009
Blended/Traditional	3.42	1.108	

2. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in evaluating the statement, “Our congregation is searching actively for ways to minister to younger generations of people” (Table 8.27), a higher level of agreement is evident among the churches employing a contemporary or multi-service approach to worship (1.89) than those that retained a traditional or blended approach (2.36).

TABLE 8.27			
Statement 13: “Our congregation is searching actively for ways to minister to younger generations of people.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
Contemporary/Multi	1.89	.786	.044
Blended/Traditional	2.36	1.058	

3. Closely related to this is the statement, “Our congregation seems to be proving effective at ministering among Gen Xers” (Table 28), which produced similar results. Those churches that employed a contemporary or multi-service approach to worship expressed modest agreement with this statement (2.50), while those engaged in a traditional or blended approach demonstrated considerable uncertainty (3.32).

TABLE 8.28			
Statement 23: “Our congregation seems to be proving effective at ministering among Gen Xers.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
Contemporary/Multi	2.50	1.072	.001
Blended/Traditional	3.32	.996	

4. In responding to the statement, “Gen Xers within our congregation have assumed positions of leadership” (Table 8.29), those churches that had adopted a

contemporary or multi-service approach to worship were able to affirm a considerably higher level of agreement with this statement (1.86 vs. 2.36). While this might genuinely reflect a commitment to a broadly shared leadership culture in these congregations, we might also question whether the decision within some of these churches to offer multiple services enabled Xers to assume positions of leadership without greatly impacting the leadership that members of other generations were accustomed to exercising.

TABLE 8.29			
Statement 25: “Gen Xers within our congregation have assumed positions of leadership.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
Contemporary/Multi	1.86	.591	.012
Blended/Traditional	2.36	.942	

Distinctions in the worship styles churches have chosen to employ clearly are of importance. However, such distinctions seem not to be of primary significance. Rather, the effectiveness of choices about worship style seems to be a subordinate factor depending upon the more primary considerations explored above. This is consistent with the recognition that innovations in worship style can actually be little more than a liminal attempt at changing a church’s fortunes and, thus, potentially of limited value to churches’ effectiveness in mediating God’s kingdom purposes within their communities.

8.4.2 Duration of Church’s Existence

The sample of churches established since 1965 is not large enough to provide any truly conclusive statistical insight into the experiences of churches of this age. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that a comparison of churches founded before 1965 with those founded since that time produces statistically significant differences on four of the twenty-five questions examined in part two of the survey. In each case, those churches established prior to 1965 express a greater degree of difficulty. The following are the points of difference that emerge from such a comparison:

1. When asked to indicate whether “the efforts our church has made to reach younger generations have resulted in tension” (Table 8.30), those churches

founded before 1965 did not demonstrate a high level of agreement with this statement (2.78). That being said, the uncertainty reflected in their responses stands in stark contrast to the fairly firm disagreement expressed by newer churches (4.00).

TABLE 8.30			
Statement 1: “Some of the efforts our church has made to reach younger generations have resulted in tension.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
Since 1965	4.00	1.080	.002
Before 1965	2.78	1.289	

- In responding to the statement, “Our congregation finds it difficult to provide ways for people of all ages to participate equally in our church’s life” (Table 8.31), the churches founded prior to 1965 seemed somewhat uncertain in their response to this statement (3.16). However, newer churches are able to submit more firm disagreement (3.92).

TABLE 8.31			
Statement 6: “Our congregation finds it difficult to provide ways for people of all ages to participate equally in our church’s life.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
Since 1965	3.92	.862	.025
Before 1965	3.16	1.141	

- Similarly, while respondents seem to have provided measured affirmation of the statement, “The Gen Xers with which our church has interacted (whether in the past or presently) seem sensitive to issues of fairness” (Table 8.32), the churches established prior to 1965 seemed to demonstrate a stronger perception of the relevance of this issue than their newer counterparts (2.34 vs. 2.83).

TABLE 8.32			
Statement 10: “The Gen Xers with which our church has interacted (whether in the past or presently) seem sensitive to issues of fairness.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
Since 1965	2.83	.937	.044
Before 1965	2.34	.735	

4. When asked to indicate whether “[r]esistance to change on the part of older church members has hindered our ability to minister effectively to younger adults” (Table 8.33), those churches established after 1965 expressed firm disagreement (4.25) with this statement, while older congregations were neutral (3.00).

TABLE 8.33			
Statement 14: “Resistance to change on the part of older church members has hindered our ability to minister effectively to younger adults.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
Since 1965	4.25	.866	.001
Before 1965	3.00	1.250	

Clearly, to a large degree, the older churches represented in this survey share many of the same struggles and successes as their younger counterparts. However, while this data lacks the statistical weight necessary for these observations to be deemed completely conclusive, older churches do seem to struggle more to provide an atmosphere in which all generations are able to co-exist equitably and without tension. Once again, this reality merely serves to affirm the value of the study being undertaken here.

8.4.3 Church Size

Church size emerged as a factor in responses to only three of the twenty-five questions in part two of the survey. However, it was interesting to note a consistent pattern involving an extremely high degree of similarity between the experiences of churches of less than 150 and those belonging to the 150-400 category. There emerged significant statistical evidence demonstrating that churches of 400 attendees or *less* are having very similar experiences in many important respects. The

statistically significant differences that emerged were between these two categories and the larger churches. Unfortunately, the limited number of respondents from larger churches weakens the conclusiveness of this data. Nonetheless, the existence of this distinction is worth noting. The points of distinction include the following:

1. When asked to assess the statement, “I have confidence in the present effectiveness of our church in passing the faith to Gen Xers (adults 25-41 years old)” (Table 8.34), churches with an average attendance greater than 400 lent solid agreement to this statement (1.75). Churches of 150-400 and those of less than 150, while not registering a negative response, did reflect uncertainty (2.90 and 3.00, respectively).

TABLE 8.34			
Statement 5: “I have confidence in the present effectiveness of our church in passing the faith to Gen Xers (adults 25-41 years old).”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
400>	1.75	.622	.007
150-400	2.90	1.248	
<150	3.00	1.255	

2. A comparison of responses to the statement, “Resistance to change on the part of older church members has hindered our ability to minister effectively to younger adults” (Table 8.35), when examined from the perspective of church size, reveals that this is not a matter of particular concern. That being said, larger churches with an average attendance greater than 400 actually disagreed with this statement (4.00), while smaller churches reflected a much more uncertain view of this issue (150-400: 3.00; <150: 3.09).

TABLE 8.35			
Statement 14: “Resistance to change on the part of older church members has hindered our ability to minister effectively to younger adults.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
400>	4.00	.739	.055
150-400	3.00	1.366	
<150	3.09	1.264	

3. In response to the statement, “Our congregation is engaged actively in efforts to influence our community for the sake of God’s kingdom” (Table 8.36), churches of all sizes seemed to perceive themselves as striving to serve the purposes of God within their communities. However, larger churches with an average attendance of 400 or more were able to affirm this statement much more confidently than their smaller counterparts.

TABLE 8.36			
Statement 19: “Our congregation is engaged actively in efforts to influence our community for the sake of God’s kingdom.”			
Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Significance
400>	1.42	.515	.015
150-400	2.26	1.094	
<150	2.45	1.132	

The fact that some churches have grown to several hundred in size may itself be testimony that they already possess a vital commitment to mission and an ability to negotiate change successfully. Furthermore, larger churches clearly have greater resources at their disposal and, thus, can be expected to demonstrate confidence in their ability to undertake numerous ministry ventures simultaneously. As already has been mentioned, this may enable larger churches to appeal to multiple “pure markets”. **While the evidence gathered through this survey may of limited value in helping us to understand the experiences of these larger churches, it is significant that the churches of less than 400 largely share the same experiences. It is precisely such churches, those that are aware of their ability to engage only in a limited number of ministry endeavours and thus are most deeply impacted by the challenges of intergenerational ministry, to which this study is most directly related.**

8.5 Conclusion

This research project has been devoted to exploring a problem faced by many established churches in responding to cultural change within an increasingly complex generational context. It has been asserted that, as one consequence of this struggle,

many churches have proven ineffective at transmitting their faith traditions to Gen X, the first post-modern generation. Against the backdrop of this perceived problem, the hypothesis has been advanced that, if churches are to sustain their witness through this transitional period, they must engage in a process of missional renewal that encompasses Gen X. It has further been suggested that this process must entail a concern for intergenerational reconciliation and justice.

In this chapter, this hermeneutical rendering of the contemporary church's experience has been subjected to empirical evaluation. The results of the survey conducted among churches from five denominations have lent credibility to the hypothesis being advanced here. As we have seen, there exists a cluster of churches that share in common the characteristics of striving to live in faithfulness to a shared sense of mission, reflecting the demographic makeup of their contexts, including a significant percentage of Gen Xers in their congregational life, and reaching a growing number of the members of this generation. Clearly, most of the churches represented in this survey have demonstrated appreciation and concern toward the themes being explored in this study. However, those churches belonging to the Positive Relationship Cluster reflect statistically significant differences in values, attitudes, priorities, behaviours, and experiences when compared to the churches not bearing these characteristics. The testimony gathered from these churches has helped to affirm the assertion that effective missional renewal in the post-modern transition should be understood as entailing a concern for Gen X, for intergenerational reconciliation, and for intergenerational justice. With the hypothesis guiding this study having been tested empirically in this chapter, we now can proceed to the final movement of the practical-theological research process, that of formulating strategic proposal, with confidence. It is precisely to this focus that we will turn in the final chapter of this study.

9. STRATEGIES FOR THE MISSIONAL RENEWAL PROCESS

9.1 Introduction

Throughout this study, we have been carefully investigating the challenges experienced by many established churches as they endeavour to transmit their faith traditions intergenerationally amid the post-modern transition. In chapters six and seven, we provided a hermeneutical articulation of the following hypothesis:

If established churches are to perpetuate their witness through this transitional period, they must experience a process of missional renewal that encompasses Generation X. From both a sociological and theological perspective, this process must be seen as entailing a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice.

After developing this hypothesis at some length, in chapter eight, we subjected this interpretation to a process of modest empirical testing and discovered that these claims are borne out within the life of many established churches.

While, in the preceding chapters, we have affirmed the need for consideration to be given to the process by which missional renewal is promoted within the congregation, we have not developed this theme beyond identifying (1) the specific challenges to which a process must be sensitive and (2) the need for this process to make space for intergenerational reconciliation and justice to be fostered. In our survey of practical theology methodology in section 1.5, we gained an appreciation of the fact that this discipline takes the accomplishment of change as its eventual aim. This objective of change necessitates that the process of practical-theological research be taken a step beyond interpretation and evaluation. The formulation of a strategic response informed by those prior steps is necessary. This third movement in the research enterprise, which was described in section 1.5.3.3 as the “regulative cycle,” is concerned with the formulation of plans and the implementation of processes. In other words, its central concern corresponds with the very need that remains unmet within the unfolding of this present research project.

Thus, in this final chapter, we will conclude the practical-theological research process by briefly proposing a process by which established churches might pursue missional renewal, one that has the potential to promote good relations and equitable participation among the generations. Our purpose here is not to provide a complete

account of what the process of missional renewal might entail. That is a subject worthy of a complete study in itself, one that a growing number of exceptional writers fortunately have already begun to address (e.g., Branson 2004; Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006). Neither is it our purpose to advocate for a specific *model* of ministry to be implemented within established churches. The very concept of missional renewal should allow for such models to emerge progressively over time as churches endeavour to live out their missional vocation in relation to their own context. The focus of this study is not upon models, but rather about *process*. Thus, our purpose here is simply to provide a brief and basic overview of one process of missional renewal that is proving beneficial within many established congregations and to demonstrate some specific ways in which intergenerational reconciliation and justice can be fostered and expressed in the midst of this process.

9.2 The Missional Change Model

In chapters six and seven, we explored the concept of the congregation as a complex system. As we noted, patterns of relating and dynamics of power are embedded within the systems by which a congregation functions. This awareness is crucial for any leader endeavouring to promote change within an established congregation. As we have seen, there exists an inextricable interplay between the Spirit *within* the congregation and the spirit *of* the congregation. If the renewing work of the Spirit is to be permitted to come to bear on the corporate, structural dimensions of the church's life, careful attention must be given to the interplay of the systemic and spiritual dynamics. Thus, any process of renewal that we might propose must be sensitive to this interplay. Fortunately, some of the leading thinkers presently contributing to the missional conversation within the North American context have sought to develop and advocate for an approach to change that takes this relationship into consideration.

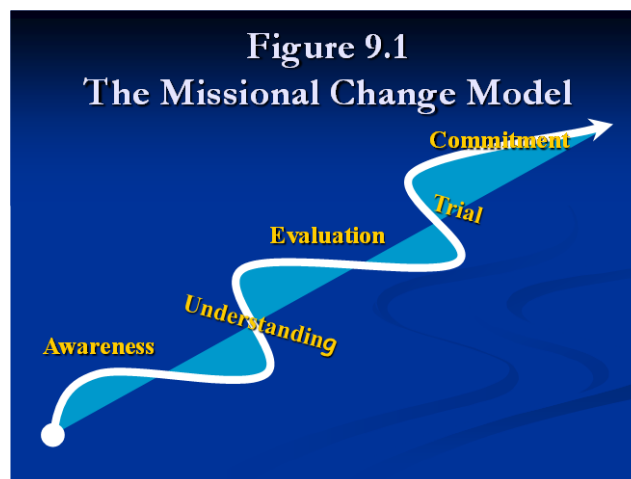
The change model to which we would like to give attention here has been described as "The Missional Change Model" by Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:79-108). A primary resource on which this model is based is *The Diffusion of Innovation* research conducted by anthropologist Everett Rogers, who has devoted much of his life to studying the question of how change takes place within cultures. Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:81) note that, while Rogers's research is far more extensive than can

be adequately summarized here, it does demonstrate “that innovation and integration of a new idea in a system happens according to a particular pattern.” This pattern entails a progressions consisting of five key movements:

1. Knowledge
2. Persuasion
3. Decision
4. Experimentation and implementation
5. Confirmation and reinforcement

(:82; Figure 9.1)

The neglect of any of these steps can subvert the entire process (:83). Thus, in an effort to understand the way in which each step contributes to the contour of the Missional Change Model, we will consider each of the five movements of the change process briefly below.



Keifert also employs the Diffusion of Innovation framework in his description of “Partnership for Missional Church” in *We Are Here Now* (2006:39-59). This book was written at a level intended to be accessible to church lay leaders. In service to this objective, Keifert chose not to include footnotes. However, one unfortunate result of this choice is that Keifert frequently fails to identify the various primary sources whose ideas he employs. In addition to Rogers, Keifert’s bibliography demonstrates his indebtedness to secular thinkers such as Heifetz, Lakoff, and Paul Ricoeur, as well as the theological and missiological contributions of Newbigin, Bosch, Sanneh, and Schreier. While Keifert’s book has received strong endorsements by other key figures within the missional conversation (e.g., Brian

McClaren and Mark Lau Branson), these obvious omissions do cause his text to be of limited and somewhat questionable value within a scholarly context. Nonetheless, Keifert's text does reflect concepts that have been tested through more than two decades of consultancy work among 1,000 congregations, seventy-five national and mid-governing bodies, and two dozen denominations in seven countries and across all fifty United States. Thus, while it is essential that we acknowledge the limitations of this source, it does offer practical tools that are of value to the development of this thesis's *strategic* component. Thus, in the pages that lie ahead, we will appropriate insights from Keifert in our presentation of the Missional Change Model.

Before doing so, however, it is helpful for us to note that giving attention to Rogers's insights fosters an appreciation that the journey toward becoming a missional congregation is a difficult process, even if the destination seems to present an obvious advantage over the existing state of things. It is one that takes time and a concerted investment of attention and energy, one that is accomplished through small and intentional steps (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:64). Furthermore, this model helps us to grasp that change does not occur in a "straight line" (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:82; Keifert 2006:48-49). The "straight line" fallacy, which Keifert (:48-49) describes as the "gap theory," assumes that change is merely a matter of spanning the distance between present reality and envisioned future, between present behaviours and desired behaviours. It is precisely this fallacy that often creates trouble for congregational leaders in their efforts to promote change. In contrast to this approach, the logic of the Missional Change Model is not centred in the expeditious movement of the entire system toward alignment with some BHAG ("big hairy audacious goal"), but rather in the cultivation of cultural change and missional imagination within the congregation (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:56, 64). We will briefly explore each of the five key moments of this model.

9.2.1 Step One: Awareness

Keifert (2006:52) suggests that, even though often "profound and disturbing," broader societal change tends to happen "without people being aware of it." This lack of awareness poses something of a challenge for our objective of promoting change within the life of the established congregation. Riddell (1998:89) similarly observes

that vision “does not fare well in a situation of universal contentment.” Indeed, “those involved may have a heavy psychological investment in keeping reality just the way it is.” Based upon their experience in working with vast numbers of such congregations, Frost and Hirsch (2003:191-192) similarly have gained an appreciation of the reality “that people must be convinced that there is a problem before they are interested in a solution.” These authors insist that people are not likely to change unless they come to recognize the need for doing so. They conclude that many leaders bring to a given situation a keen sense of what the solution might be, yet encounter resistance because of their failure to communicate the problem compellingly. As we discovered in chapters five and six, these struggles certainly are evident within many established churches.

This being so, the first step in responding to the changes occurring within culture is to become aware of what is occurring to us and around us. Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:87) note that, in reality, many of the people within established congregations are already grappling with many questions and feelings about what they are experiencing within a changing world. Many of them sense that something is wrong, but do not know how to express it. Leaders commonly make the mistake of attempting to address these feelings by moving directly to the provision of strategies, plans, or programs. However, if church members are not afforded a way to express these feelings and to be heard, they are likely to continue to be plagued by unarticulated anxiety.

Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:87) suggest that what is essential is that leaders learn to create “a listening space” to aid parishioners in becoming aware of what is happening “within and among them.” Indeed, this awareness requires the cultivation of an environment in which people are able to find the language for talking about what they are experiencing. Mead (1993:76) suggests that the provision of learning spaces necessitates the overcoming of the busyness and preoccupation that often prevents church members from learning from one another. In fact, this “busyness” is often an “escape mechanism” employed “to avoid the pain of learning and change.” Thus, the development of transitional learning structures becomes an integral part of the process of change and a critical means of investing in the ultimate success of innovative initiatives (Riddell 1998:98-99).

“Without words,” note Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:89), “people have little or no capacity to explain, understand, or begin to participate in shaping a meaningful response to the new reality.” However, as they begin to find new language to help them understand what is occurring, new awareness is fostered (:88-89). Furthermore, they are able to begin to look at the “others” in their context in a new light, to listen with new ears, and to see themselves through the eyes of these strangers (:89). This cultivation of awareness is crucially important in the earliest stages of the process for, as Roxburgh and Romanuk (:91) note, “Until they have gained awareness, people cannot commit to change.”

9.2.2 Step Two: Understanding

In and of itself, awareness can be a powerful force in fostering the conditions within which change can emerge. However, the process does not end there. Rather, it progresses from *awareness* to *understanding*. Mead (1993:52) expresses a desire to see congregations take intentional steps toward cultivating understanding:

[T]hese programs need to take very seriously a study of the social environment as a field of mission. For adults and children alike we need to develop ‘mission training’ to help each person to cross the mission frontier more responsibly. Case studies, story-telling, and community analysis need to become staples of religious engagement for church members. I would love to see congregations develop programs of ‘field work’ in mission—sending members out Monday through Friday conscious of being on a mission and using class time on the weekend to reflect and report or to share cases of mission they had attempted during the week.

Kew (2001:68) shares this concern for how local churches might discern what is going on with their contexts:

It is vital that we work hard to understand the changing demographics of our own neighbourhoods—and then set about learning how to be missionary within this setting. It is crucial that our clergy and lay leadership learn to read and understand local, regional, and national demographic trends—only then will they know how to strategize. As we study the figures, thereby discovering what is going on, we will be enabled to see the vast openings that will help us become missionaries to our own little world.

In the second part of the missional change process, the priorities advocated by these authors come into focus. During this stage, members are provided the time and the

space to develop deeper interest in and understanding of the change happening to them and around them.

As we have already suggested, the vast majority of people cannot simply jump into a new idea. Note Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:82), “They need time to build confidence in both leaders and process before being willing to trust change. Transition issues must be addressed before people are ready to act in a new way.” As we saw in the preceding chapters, many established church members struggle with a lack of understanding of the changes occurring around them and the missional endeavours being promoted by their leaders. As we have suggested, it is not necessarily the case that these individuals are mean spirited or averse to the working of the Spirit. Rather, it is often the case that they simply do not understand. Thus, attention to the cultivation of understanding becomes essential.

Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:92) note that the sort of further dialogue that brings together feelings and thoughts is needed “if awareness is to deepen into understanding.” They add,

[U]nderstanding occurs when awareness enables people to ask new questions about what is happening relative to what they have been feeling and thinking. This is a time when people need to gather additional information, try out ideas, and receive feedback so they can check and orient their growing awareness and develop a new kind of knowledge base for ongoing dialogue with others.

Roxburgh and Romanuk (:93) suggest that, as the participants move to a deeper level of understanding, this “requires a good deal of attentive listening for dialogue participants to hear the underlying questions and issues that people bring up.” This process likely will require a dialogue that goes over the same material as the previous step. However, through this continued dialogue, “the richness of the understanding deepens and broadens.” The hope is that, as a result of this deepening dialogue, a new explanatory framework will emerge.

Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:94) insist that true understanding goes beneath “the surface of what usually passes for dialogue and resist[s] the desire to jump ahead to the solution.” These authors emphasize that understanding cannot be completed in one meeting. It is essential that ample time be taken with this process. As they posit, “If the ground is prepared and the leader cultivates the proper environment, shaping a

space rather than forcing a strategy or play, the process of missional formation will encourage a congregation to organize itself and change will occur.” The hope is that awareness and understanding will be fostered of (1) what God is doing among the people of the congregation, (2) how the congregation can imagine itself as being engaged in God’s redemptive activity, and (3) what God is already doing within the congregation’s context (:31-32).

Keifert (2006:64) sees this as a matter of discerning “God’s preferred and promised future” for the congregation. In service to this objective, Keifert (:64-66) suggests that the congregation must be willing to look both backward to the past and forward to the future. This has powerful implication for addressing the *win/loss* dichotomies that often arise between those members of the congregation who value tradition and those who desire innovation. As Keifert (:66) insists, the congregation’s faithfulness must be seen as entailing both “faithfulness to God’s future” and “faithfulness to God’s past.” As he explains, “our God is a living, triune God who dwells in all times, and in the life of God all times are present; the church participates already but not yet in that once and future life of God. Thus the question of faithfulness is not past vs. future but finding a useable past for our faithfulness to God’s preferred and promised future.” Branson’s (2004) treatment of Appreciative Inquiry and congregational change can be a valuable resource in helping to facilitate this process.

9.2.3 Step Three: Evaluation

In the third stage in the missional renewal process, “the congregation examines current actions, attitudes, and values in light of new understanding. People can now consider whether specific activities, programs, and commitments are congruent with their awareness and understanding of missional innovation and the context in which they find themselves” (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:95; cf. Keifert 2006:53). Well crafted evaluative questions become an essential tool at this stage in the process. Keifert (2006:64) offers several examples of questions that the congregation might choose to entertain:

- To whom and across which barriers is God sending us to be a part of God’s mission?

- What is our missional vocation as a congregation?
- How do we walk into and toward God’s preferred and promised future for us as a local congregation?
- What are God’s gifts in our local church?
- How do these gifts relate to what God’s mission is in our context?
- What is God doing within this context?
- How can we be positioned and postured to be a sign and foretaste of God’s preferred and promised future in relation to this context?

Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:96) caution that this is not the time for action and planning, but rather for discernment and decision making. It is essential that this stage in the process not be rushed. Rather, time must be taken to ask questions and to assess the current reality of the church and its context. Roxburgh and Romanuk (:96) also caution that, at this point in the process, the congregation is still likely to struggle with the temptation to develop action steps. However, they caution, “if a congregation does not take enough time for awareness, understanding, and evaluation then most solutions will yield only a short-term burst of hope and energy, but then the congregation will return to its previous state.”

This stage in the process is likely to generate anxiety. Thus, it is essential that leaders clearly and consistently communicate that the church is not going to be forced to embrace “wholesale change,” but rather that the congregation “is going to learn how to develop a missional future by taking small, significant steps” (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:96). Roxburgh and Romanuk insist that leaders must foster a “holding-tank environment” in which much of the church’s life continues as normal, while some experiments are also initiated that will demonstrate “another kind of future that may be developed.”

9.2.4 Step Four: Experimentation

Kew (2001:39) expresses gratitude toward the evidence he sees that Christians “are starting to get over our fear of talking about evangelism and the mission of the church.” In order to continue to make progress in this regard, he insists, “we have to

take the next step toward active strategizing and creative implementation.” The fourth movement in the missional change process constitutes precisely such a step. During this stage, people learn to put the innovation to use and participate in initiating new practices in their congregations (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:82). This part of the process entails the congregation testing “new ways of shaping its missional life.” McNeal (2003:61) notes that members of the congregation accustomed to the Christendom model of church are not likely to vote in favour of becoming a missional church. Thus, a culture of experimentation needs to be nurtured. When people practice and experiment with what they have been learning, real cultural change can be embedded in their lives as a congregation” (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:82).

Keifert (2006:53) notes that this stage allows those who are eager to make changes “to get moving on something.” However, it enables them to do so “in a manner that moves beyond simply technically improving their present way of doing things and toward truly addressing the depth of the cultural change needed to lead to a missional church.” Furthermore, this step provides opportunity for these “sprinters” in a manner that is sensitive to the “long-distance runners” within the congregation, “those who understand that this kind of change requires long-term, deep, cultural engagement that seldom produces or is even helped by quick fixes” (:87). In other words, this stage helps address the seeming polarity that often exists between “early victories” and “long-term change” and the “political realities of people who need quick success to be motivated to action versus those who are suspicious of quick success” (:85).

Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:98) emphasize that Heifetz’s distinction between *adaptive* and *tactical* change becomes particularly important at this point in the process. The goal of missional renewal, they note, “is to introduce a process that invites people into changing the culture of the congregation, not just its programs or organization.” Tactical change is a matter of taking action that improves what is already being done within the church or favouring actions that have always been used, but now are being applied to new challenges (:98). Adaptive change, by contrast, requires that new approaches be designed to address the new challenges being faced. Consistent with this description, Keifert (2006:88) describes missional change as being “about deep patterns of life and ministry in the local church culture rather than something they already know how to do, simply applying their existing competencies

to do it.” However, as Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:99) note, this is precisely the sort of change that congregations often resist. This is partly why, as we noted in section 6.5.1, modern models of strategic planning are not the best approach to bring about such changes.

In the process of adaptive change, the tendency of leaders to impose ambitious plans for change is often a significant reason that anxiety and conflict erupts within the congregation. Snyder’s (1989:267-313) examination of renewal movements reveals that attaching entrenched institutional patterns is *not* an effective means of fostering renewal. Furthermore, renewal often comes from the margins of an institution, rather than from a direct attempt to alter the centre (Frost & Hirsch 2003:194). Thus, rather than taking on “the whole system at once” (Keifert 2006:90), the Missional Change Model calls for “experiments around the edges” that do not overwhelm church members and that do not force them to change (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:99). As Keifert (2006:53) recommends, “Usually it is best to try out options that respond to the breadth and depth of the cultural change but do not try to change the entire system at once.” Keifert (:92) further describes this as an approach to experimentation “that engages the entire system without changing the whole system.” This may involve experimentation with “one or two pieces of local church life and work” that the church chooses to address as it encounters those whom they believe God is calling them to serve in mission (:84).

Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:100) acknowledge that this approach is challenging because, when church leaders evaluate what they should do, the only solutions many are familiar with are tactical, “such as command-and-control or strategic planning.” In contrast to these familiar models, emphasize Roxburgh and Romanuk (:101), the experiments undertaken during the experimentation stage “are not about creating permanent change.” Rather, they are about testing and discovering how the Spirit of God might be leading the congregation through the process of discovery. These experiments provide time and opportunity for the important work of reshaping the human system of the congregation in accordance with this new missional way of life (Frost & Hirsch 2003:210). It is essential that this formation of the human system be addressed before the activities of that system are fully engaged (:211).

Keifert (2006:90) insists that, as an integral dimension of this process, permission must be provided for failure. As he notes, this approach to change allows experimental endeavours to fail “without threatening the whole.” In fact, he suggests, “It may even be a necessary part of the journey of spiritual discernment to fail!” (:90). This step in the process will take time, patience, and courage, but also offers the powerful benefit of enabling new habits and values to become embedded in the life of the congregation. Indeed, assert Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:102), this step “makes long-term cultural change possible. Without the time for experimentation, there can be no missional transformation.”

9.2.5 Step Five: Commitment

In this final stage, as people continue to practice the implementation of an innovation, “they grow in their ability to function with new practices” (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:82). Church members can begin to realize that they are operating in new ways. Positive outcomes become engrained in the life of the congregation as new habits. The confidence of the congregation grows as more and more people become involved in experimentation. In turn, “The innovation becomes a part of the deep values of the culture, and the congregation begins to carry on its usual business according to the innovation” (Keifert 2006:53). This step of adopting the innovation will have implications for the systems and structures of the congregation. Notes Keifert (:53-54), “Once the missional church innovation is adopted, social and organizational changes proceed much more quickly and are apparent to most of the people.” However, this can now be accomplished, not because it is being imposed or championed by a particular leader, “but because the people themselves have taken on a new way of being church together” (Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:102).

9.2.6 The Spiritual Dimension of the Process

This model was introduced above as one that gives proper attention to both the systemic and spiritual dimensions of congregational life. However, in our description of the Missional Change Model, little has been said regarding the specific ways in which *spiritual* renewal might be fostered as an integral facet of the change process. As we advocated in chapter six, the Holy Spirit must be seen as *the* single most

crucial contributor to renewal within the life of the church. The Missional Change Model seeks to be sensitive and responsive to this reality in the approach taken to cultivating the congregation's renewal. As Keifert (2006:63) expresses, this process entails discovering "the most important partner for a missional church: God." Keifert (:64) further describes this process as a matter of "spiritual discernment," one that aids the members of the congregation in finding their place, both personally and corporately, within the mission of the triune God.

The proponents of missional change insist that certain corporate spiritual disciplines are valuable in helping to foster this sort of renewal. "Dwelling in the Word" is a discipline of listening to scripture that enables "the Word of God to use us rather than our using it" (Keifert 2006:69). This discipline invites the congregation to consider its relationship to the narrative of scripture and to become compellingly engaged by how the narrative of God's redemptive purposes provides direction for the church's life and ministry in the here-and-now. In addition, Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:153-155) note how some congregations employ the liturgical practices of the daily offices as a means of cultivating missional life. They recognize this as important for at least two reasons: (1) members are daily shaped in the imagination that life is a gracious gift of God to be embraced and "a vocation to be lived in the presence of God and others" (:154); (2) members are assisted in becoming conscious of "how easily and incessantly other demands and stories enter our own life, and the community's, recasting us in ways other than the gospel." The discipline of hospitality, "a way of practicing the eschatological future by welcoming the stranger to our table as honoured guests", is yet another powerful practice that helps to foster missional renewal (:157). Hospitality provides a space within which one is able to listen to the stranger and, thereby, come to a truer understanding of his or her identity. In turn, this practice contributes to the transformation of the host (:158).

The way in which the congregation cultivates a commitment to corporate prayer and worship also contributes to its missional vitality (Barrett et al 2004:xii-xiv; Roxburgh & Romanuk 2006:153). Through the formation that occurs through these practices and habits, the missional imagination of the congregation can be cultivated in a manner that enlivens its members to a passionate embrace of God's missional future. Indeed, it can cause them to recognize and act upon the reality that God's missional

future is already present in their midst by virtue of the indwelling Spirit's presence and activity (:146).

Keifert (2006:71) laments the absence of proper attention to such spiritual practices among the leaders of many established congregations. He furthermore recognizes the temptation to neglect these practices, even in the midst of change efforts, because of the demands and drivenness by which church leaders are plagued. Nonetheless, he insists, they are essential if God's will for the church is to be discovered: "We dissipate our lives into nothing, and, like cold water onto a hot griddle, our love and action evaporate into thin air if we do not order our loving by God's will" (:72). Apart from these practices, the church's leaders are not likely to be able to aid the church in focusing its missional vocation. Without proper attention being given to spiritual discipline, the prospect is heightened that the *systemic* dynamics of the congregation will subvert its *spiritual* vitality.

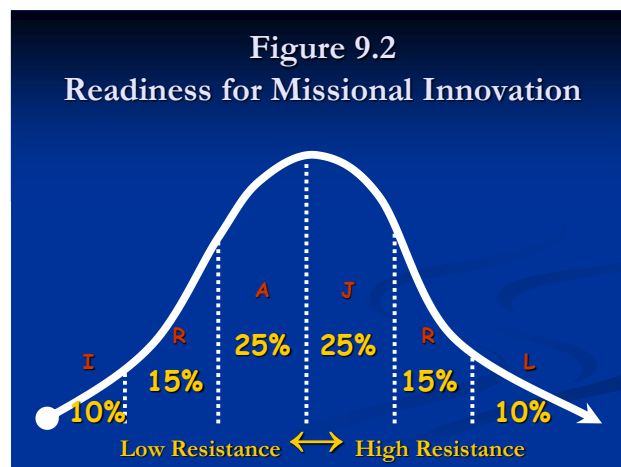
9.2.7 Attention to Readiness Factors

In addition to lending proper priority to cultivating the spiritual life of the congregation, the Missional Change Model also strives to be sensitive to the reality that not all members will possess an equal degree of readiness to embark on the journey of missional transformation. As Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:103) articulate, "an attempt to innovate missional culture in a congregation that tries to begin with universal agreement...is headed for failure from the start." In responding to this reality, the proponents of missional change have appropriated Rogers' concept of the diffusion of innovation *curve*. This concept recognizes that there are a number of levels of readiness for innovation represented within the ranks of any human system.

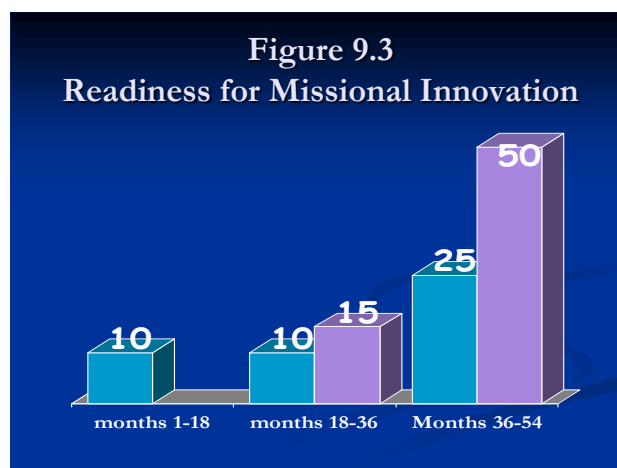
Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:103) provide the following characterization of the various groups represented along the diffusion of innovation curve:

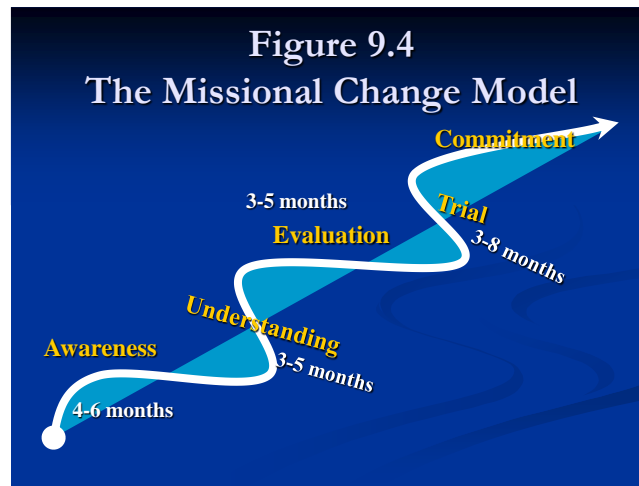
1. Innovators (10% of congregation): These people commonly possess a pre-existing readiness to participate in innovative endeavours. Keifert (2006:55) suggests that these "are the brave who take the risks when the cultural innovation is offered."

2. Responders (15% of congregation): These members are usually quick to recognize the relative advantage inherent in an innovation and to join the innovators in adopting it. Notes Keifert (2006:55), “They do not seek change for change’s sake...but they take a progressive view of life in general or at least life in the local church regarding innovating a missional church.” These members often are “influence brokers” within the congregation; their enlistment often causes the entire innovation process to gain momentum (:56).
3. Adapters (25% of congregation): These members are part of a “pragmatic majority,” the group that assumes a “wait-and-see” stance toward an innovation. However, this group constitutes an “early majority”, one that can be influenced positively by the credibility of the “responders.” Adapters frequently hold positions of governance within the congregation and, thus, have an affinity for an approach to change that reflects thoughtfulness and good process. Failure to engage this group often results in conflict within the congregation (Keifert 2006:56).
4. Joiners (25% of congregation): This “late majority,” often sceptical toward innovations and prone to a “if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” mindset, are concerned especially with the long-range interests of the congregation (Keifert 2006:57). Keifert (:57) cautions that, while it can be exciting to engage this group, “it also creates a lot of anxiety for the local church system and can create considerable drama just before a plan is adopted and put into action.”
5. Resisters (15% of congregation) and Laggards (10%): This group simply does not want to change. Keifert (2006:57) characterizes these members as “caught in traditionalism.”



Roxburgh and Romanuk (2006:103-104) suggest that sensitivity to this curve should be factored into the progression of the journey of missional transformation. The key, they insist, is to begin with the roughly ten to fifteen percent of the congregation who are innovations (Figure 9.3). The first eighteen months should be devoted to helping this group progress to the commitment stage (Figure 9.4). This is likely to entail four to six months of cultivating awareness, three to five months of creating understanding, three to five months of evaluation, and three to eight months of experimentation. During a second eighteen months, the innovators guide the responders through the five movements of the process. As a result, after three years, approximately twenty-five percent of the congregation will have progressed to the commitment stage. During a third period of eighteen-months, an additional fifty to sixty-five percent of the congregation, the adapters and joiners, are invited to journey through the stages toward commitment. Roxburgh and Romanuk (:104) caution that this will be unsettling to the laggards and resisters; as a result, some of these people may leave. This will make it essential for leaders to manage their own anxiety and conflict issues. Fortunately, however, this process has the potential to help prevent a great deal of conflict that might otherwise occur.





9.3 The Intergenerational Component

Thus far in this chapter, we have surveyed a process for the promotion of missional renewal within established congregations. At first glance, this Missional Change Model may appear to be of considerable value for the larger theme being explored within this study. Nonetheless, because our central concern is with exploring intergenerational dimensions of the renewal process, it will be important for us to consider briefly the interplay of these intergenerational objectives and the model outlined above. Fortunately, several authors have offered practical insights that may help to promote the values of intergenerational reconciliation and justice within the local church. Bearing in mind the things articulated in sections 9.2.1 through 9.2.5 regarding the main objectives of each step in the Missional Change Model, we will briefly consider the interplay of these practical insights and the steps of this model.

9.3.1 Awareness, Understanding, and Evaluation

The framework provided by the Missional Change Model offers a wonderful opportunity for the cultivation of intergenerational dialogue within the congregation. Rather than attempting to respond to the challenges posed by young residents of the post-modern world by moving swiftly toward action, a framework such as the one described above provides congregational leaders the opportunity to nurture a culture of intergenerational learning (Rendle 2002:139; McNeal 2003:61; Hammett & Pierce 2007:152). As we also noted above regarding missional innovation, “the shift from

doing something about our differences to learning about our differences requires a different space...where reflection and learning are possible” (Rendle 2002:119). As Benke and Benke (2001:87) insist, if understanding is to be achieved, it is likely to come as a result of a process of educational preparation.

As we have seen in preceding chapters, helping the generations to arrive at a shared understanding of the implications of missional renewal for their particular tradition is one of the most profound challenges of the missional renewal process. In a given situation, if the members of diverse generations are to arrive at anything resembling a shared interpretation of their tradition, this will require dialogue and the exchange of ideas and concerns (Carroll & Roof 2002:209; Hammett & Pierce 2007:166).

Essentially, suggest Martin and Tulgan (2002:40), leaders within a multigenerational context must endeavour to bridge the “understanding gap.” This requires a conscious effort to use generational labels as tools for learning about differences, rather than as weapons (Raines & Hunt 2000:45-46). The point is not for the generations to attempt to change one another, but rather to understand their differences (Twenge 2006:8).

There is no simple formula for accomplishing this (Carroll & Roof 2002:212).

However, while doing so may seem counterintuitive to many leaders, it actually is necessary to entertain the tension between the generations in order to fully capitalize upon the opportunity for learning (Rendle 2002:5). As Rendle (:8) suggests, this may be a mark of good leadership.

Williams and Nussbaum (2001:216-217) note that intergenerational contact programs frequently have failed to produce much in the way of positive results. The key observation to be drawn from their discovery is that greater attention needs to be paid to helping the generations communicate more effectively. As we noted in section 7.2.4.3, this may be precisely the means necessary to aid the generations in “building bridges” to end stereotypes (Lancaster & Stillman 2003:17). Furthermore, as Rouse and Van Gelder (2008:96, 99) note, the development of healthy communication practices actually frees the congregation to focus its energies on God’s mission.

Angrosino (2001:51), in the context of writing about multicultural interaction, offers some guidelines that are of value for intergenerational communication within the church:

1. Acknowledge discomfort
2. Know your own culture first
3. Get to know the culture of the other
4. Be aware of power inequities and histories of discrimination
5. All participants must develop intercultural competence
6. Personal commitment is crucial

Gambone's (1998:27-103) step-by-step guide to planning and facilitating "Intergenerational Dialogue" events can be a valuable resource in helping to foster effective intergenerational dialogue. Gambone outlines practical instructions regarding how church leaders can cultivate the conditions and provide opportunities for this kind of intergenerational interaction.

If the missional change process is to involve committees or task forces, care must be exercised in assuring that the composition of these groups serves the process well. When developing intergenerational teams, leaders often choose individuals who seem most representative of their respective generations' central tendencies (Whitesel & Hunter 2000:131). The challenge inherent in this, however, is that such people often have the hardest time transcending their own generational preferences for the sake of communicating and working effectively with one another. Recognizing this, Rendle (2002:130) recommends that "edgy people" be chosen to serve. These people "live close to the edge of their own value preferences and overlap with individuals who live close to the edge of the competing value system." As a result, they are able to understand, appreciate, and express their own value system without being narrowly tied to it. Martin and Tulgan (2002:115) suggest that such people are "Gen Mixers." Lancaster and Stillman (2003:36) describe these individuals as "cuspers" and insist that they are the best people to serve in an intergenerational context. Note Lancaster and Stillman (:39, 40), "Because Cuspers stand in the gap between the two sides, they become naturals at mediating, translating, and mentoring...Cuspers can provide a voice for those who aren't being heard." Careful attention to this consideration is very important.

Church leaders must surely play a crucial role in helping to facilitate intergenerational understanding. Leaders must be careful to model the sort of communication that they hope to see occur among their congregations. Notes Rendle (2002:123, 125),

When leaders are dealing with generational differences in the congregation, they must work carefully to be descriptive, and they must model descriptive statements for others...A great deal of power rests in describing simply and accurately what occurs in the congregation as an expression of normal and normative generational behaviour.

Throughout the process, leaders also will do well to be intentional about overtly articulating their affirmation of the generations represented within the church (Hammett & Pierce 2007:153). Leaders also can build morale and support through steps such as involving older members in research devoted to understanding the needs of young adults within the emerging culture (Hammett & Pierce 2007:143). When nurtured well, the shared activities of gaining perspective and engaging in evaluation can go a long way in nurturing intergenerational reconciliation and justice within the congregation.

9.3.2 Experimentation

The experimentation stage of the Missional Change Model enables the congregation to make strides of progress in acting upon its deepened intergenerational perspective. As Raines and Hunt (2000:46) suggest, “The next, and far more important steps, involve finding ways based on what we know about generations to make things better by adapting, challenging, experimenting, and changing the way we do things.” The experimentation stage invites those members of the congregation who are ready to participate together in intergenerational ministries “that cross barriers of style and preference” (Miller 2004:82). Raines (2003:44), reflecting upon her extensive experience as an intergenerational consultant within a corporate setting, notes that she has seen many intergenerational teams learn to celebrate their differences and to work together effectively. However, consistent with what has been articulated above in section 9.2.4, Zahn (2002) cautions that, instead of “complete overhaul”, the activities of such teams should be a matter of “small, experimental forays into inter-generational ministry” (www.christianitytoday.com).

At the same time, allowance should be made for young adults to engage in their own experiments and to develop their own forms (Hammett & Pierce 2007:149). Essentially, this is a matter of what Frost and Hirsch (2003:175) have described as a “fit and split” approach to congregational life. As they explain, the term *fit* refers to

that which binds an organization together in unity. It is the group's common ethos and purpose. *Split* happens when an intentional allowance is made for a diversity of expressions within the team. Law (1993:79-80) suggests that it is important for monocultural (for the purposes of our study, mono-generational) groups to have opportunity to find their own identity and "to do homework together." At the same time, he notes that it will be important for the diverse groups within the congregation to have times and places to encounter one another and to be challenged "to step beyond [their] cultural boundaries." In essence, the experimentation stage provides powerful opportunities for the congregation to practice both intergenerational reconciliation and intergenerational justice as integral dimensions of the process of missional renewal. Hopefully, this also will enable the generations to move together toward commitment in a way that reflects the kingdom values of reconciliation and justice and that helps the congregation to embrace its missional identity within the post-modern transition.

9.4 Conclusion

This study was designed to respond to a specific problem with which the church in the United States is concerned:

As American society journeys through the post-modern transition, many established congregations struggle to respond faithfully to cultural change within an increasingly complex generational context. The resulting ineffectiveness of these churches in transmitting their faith traditions to Generation X, the first post-modern generation, threatens the ability of these churches to sustain their witness through this transitional period.

Chapters three through five of this study were devoted to a hermeneutical exploration of this problem. As we have seen, this reality has come about as a result of significant changes that have occurred within society and within the church as it strives to mediate God's purposes in relation to society. We have noted the impact of the shift from Christendom to post-Christendom, the shift from modernity to post-modernity, and the profound changes in intergenerational life that have unfolded alongside these changes. We have considered how these realities have shaped the formative experience of Generation X and the ways in which this rising generation has chosen to respond to the world in which it finds itself.

In response to this problem, we have advanced the following hypothesis:

If these established congregations are to sustain their witness through the post-modern transitional period, they must undertake a process of missional renewal that encompasses Generation X. From both a sociological and a theological perspective, this process must entail a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice.

Chapters six and seven of this study have been devoted to developing this hypothesis from a hermeneutical perspective. In chapter six, we explored what it might mean for established churches to experience missional renewal. We noted that the involvement of the members of Generation X constitutes a crucial aspect of this process. However, we also noted that both the members of this generation and the members of other generations within established churches are hindered by sensitivities that make it difficult for them to cooperate together in the pursuit of God's mission. These realities helped us to emphasize the importance of *process*. As we noted at the conclusion of chapter six, healthy processes within the church will give attention to both the spiritual and the sociological dimensions of the congregation's existence.

Chapter seven built upon this foundation by identifying intergenerational reconciliation and justice as essential dimensions of the missional renewal process within the post-modern transition. This chapter demonstrated that reconciliation and justice are clearly marks of God's reign. Any genuine effort to live in faithfulness to God's mission will call the church to strive to embody reconciliation and justice. In addition, we have demonstrated that these themes address some of the fundamental values and concerns of Generation X. A commitment to reconciliation and justice heightens the church's credibility in the eyes of this generation. Furthermore, while our primary focus is upon Generation X, we have noted that a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice also offers a range of benefits to the members of older generations.

In chapter eight, we subjected our hypothesis to a process of empirical testing. Drawing upon the responses from congregations representing five different denominations, we discovered solid evidence of a positive relationship between a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice and congregational effectiveness in reaching Generation X. In addition, we discovered a positive relationship between a congregation's commitment to intergenerational reconciliation

and justice and its level of engagement in discerning its own missional vocation. The evidence provided in this chapter, while somewhat modest, does seem to affirm the central hypothesis of this study. Within the experience of many churches, a commitment to intergenerational reconciliation and justice is integrally linked to the church's experience of renewed missional vitality within the post-modern transition and is contributing positively to the church's effectiveness in ministering among the members of Generation X.

This final chapter has sought to provide one process that can enable the church to engage in strategic action. The Missional Change Model has been introduced as a process that enables cultural change to occur progressively through time. As we have seen, this process provides the congregation the opportunity to learn and experiment. It allows missional innovation to become embedded in the congregation's culture in a way that promotes adaptive change. It provides an opportunity for both the systemic and the spiritual dimensions of the congregation's life to be engaged. Furthermore, it enables the diverse generational groups within the church an opportunity to practice the kingdom values of reconciliation and justice as they endeavour to experience missional renewal together.

This study has been concerned with the intergenerational challenges being posed by the church within one particular culture. However, there is little question that the issues explored within this study are of tremendous importance to churches throughout the world. As Esler (1971:38) notes, during the twentieth century, the emergence of youth cultures became "a global mass movement." Raines (2003:17-18) provides the vital observation that, as one consequence of this, "generation gaps do exist worldwide." Raines adds to this the clarification that generation gaps "vary from country to country" and that "the generations and their differences are unique to each country." At the same time, Raines insists that her research has revealed that "global patterns clearly exist." By no means is she alone in this assessment. Several of the sources employed in this study, such as Hilborn and Bird (2002; UK) and Codrington and Grant-Marshall (2004; South Africa), illustrate the reality that churches in many corners of the globe are grappling with the challenges of the contemporary intergenerational context. This being the case, while this study has focused upon the particularities of the American context, it also has been guided by

the hope that the insights produced here will offer something of use for churches in a variety of contexts.

Bolinger (1999:105) predicts that the sort of intergenerational challenges surveyed within this study will only continue to intensify. McManus (2001:136) shares this concern and expresses that these challenges are likely to have a profound impact on our religious institutions. Recognizing this prospect, may established churches everywhere grow in their embodiment of reconciliation and justice as they strive to live by the power of the Spirit in renewed faithfulness to God's mission. As they do so, may we see a vital faith being transmitted from generation to generation.

Furthermore, may we delight in seeing God continue to receive glory "throughout all generations" (Eph. 3:21).