

**Why You Should be Teaching an Intergenerational Ministry Course
in Your Youth Ministry Curriculum**

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Abstract:

Some see intergenerational (IG) ministry as a resource-consuming fad; others hope it might improve existing ministries. Over two years, Bruner and Chancey have incorporated IG components—theological and theoretical modules, research projects, and ministerial interventions—into existing youth ministry courses at Oklahoma Christian University, which students perceived to be useful. Consequently, Bruner and Chancey have added a graduate IG ministry survey course that develops competence in four interrelated IG areas: theology and theory, spiritual formation, decision making, and community formation. Projected outcomes include enhanced youth ministry theology and practice, improved resiliency for students, and better connectivity among age-segmented ministerial domains.

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Interviewer: How does having kids change your faith?

Josh: In a very unique way, I am expected to fill a role, as in: exhibit Christian behavior that influences someone else I've never been in this position before. For example, when I'm teaching Bible class, to people 15 years older than me, I'm not thrust into a role where people are looking at me to see how I behave, to see if Josh is a for real Christian or not. These people already have their own faith.

Part of the reason I married Kerri is because she was clearly going to help get me to heaven. Kerri needs me to be a Christian leader in other ways but not in a way that grounds her faith. Paul talks about the gifts and one of Kerri's gifts is faith. So, it's not important if I exude Christian behavior for her to believe in God or not. That's not a critical thing.

It is with Dillon and Page. Looking at my father and using that as a lens to view my relationship with God, how do you not apply that to your own children? How do I not say that Dillon is going to look at me the same way I looked at my father? When we sit down to pray before meals and at bedtime, that's something I'm constantly conscious of . . . with fondest memories of [how] Dillon puts his hands together and bows his head. It's the tiny things. That's something that gives me great pride to think that he's watching me for those kinds of cues and that I'm going to have that kind of influence. The point there is being an example. My behavior is observed in a way that wasn't before. The pressure mounts (Chancey and Bruner, 2013).

This young father lives his life with an awareness of the intergenerational connections that shape the faith of each member of his family.¹ Having grown up in a very spiritual family with deep religious roots, he has, in years past, disassembled the faith that he inherited and reassembled one of his own. The result is a faith that empowers him to bring up his own children in the church with complete confidence in God. Josh understands who he is and that

¹ Names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the respondents and students in this work.

his role as a father is to impress the story of faith upon his children. What he is less certain of is exactly how he ought to respond to the challenge of sharing his faith: “The pressure mounts.”

Josh, as it happens, is a fourth generation member of the Churches of Christ, part of a movement of free churches that constitutes one of the three strands of the SCM. The experience of Josh as a parent, both blessed and challenged, is typical of many of his peers within the Churches of Christ. Typical, because the pressure mounts for others, too; not just parents of pre-school children like Josh, but also for parents of young adults (like Josh’s mother and father) and for parents of middle-aged adults (like Josh’s grandparents). Each generation copes with unique concerns that a spiritual legacy, meaningful to and constructed by them, ought to remain even after they are gone.

Consequently, within the Churches of Christ, the legacy of faith and the shape that it ought to take in the future is very much a matter for conversation among the various generations. There is also a growing awareness that this ought to be an intergenerational conversation that can only take place in communities where cross-generational relationships are valued, planted, and nurtured (Editorial, 2013; Bruner, 2013, Chancey, 2009). As a matter of practical ministry, the question of how to bring this about in local congregations naturally arises. Research into the field of intergenerational ministry quickly reveals that these concerns are common among most faith groups, not just Churches of Christ (Chechowich, 2012).

This work, therefore, considers the problem from the academic perspective: how can the faculty of a university in a particular context create curriculum that engenders well-informed, theologically robust ministry that is intentionally intergenerational? We will examine first the context in which both need and resources for intergenerational ministry have arisen,

defining key terms as necessary. We will then discuss who might lead this intergenerational effort. A discussion of previous trials of course components in graduate and undergraduate classes follows. This data then informs our discussion of the design of a graduate course completely focused on intentional intergenerational ministry. A connection of intergenerational ministry and the components of this course with practical theology follows.

The Context

Founded in 1950, Oklahoma Christian University (OC) has served students from the Churches of Christ in providing degrees in several disciplines. Over time, a growing portion of the student population has come from other faith communities: Baptist, the Conservative Christian Church, non-denominational churches, and Presbyterians, among others. OC has offered degrees in youth ministry (graduate and undergraduate) for 15 years and graduate degrees in ministry for over 20 years. The current student population in the Graduate School of Theology is mixed in faith background and gender (see table 1). Because of growing concerns about the transmission of faith between generations, OC founded the Intergenerational Faith Center in 2011 by utilizing the gift of a generous donor; the administration appointed Dudley Chancey and Ron Bruner to co-direct it.

Table 1						
Oklahoma Christian University						
2013 Student Demographics						
	Total students	Female students	Male students	Average age	Churches of Christ	Other faith groups
Undergraduate	1,969	958	1,011	20	1,127	842
Graduate	456	185	271	31	103	353
Graduate School of Theology	64	10	54	32	43	21

Since its beginnings, the primary constituency of OC has been the Churches of Christ, one of three significant strands of the SCM. With roots in Scotland and Ireland (McMillon, 1988), this movement grew rapidly in the United States in the early 19th century. Although shaped by many, two of the most important leaders in the early SCM were Barton Stone (1772-1844) and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866). The SCM is rooted in the quest for church unity through the restoration of the principles and practices of the primitive first-century church (Allen & Hughes, 1988; Hughes, 1996; Holloway & Foster, 2001). Initially rejecting the use of any but canonical materials to understand the primitive church, the careful reading of Scripture, and particularly the New Testament, was of primary importance among members of the SCM. An intergenerational ecology in the church was also of real importance to early leaders in the movement (Hamilton, 2010).

The unity of the SCM was regrettably brief. Through the course of the Civil War and the following Reconstruction era, enduring issues emerged that eventually divided the movement: slavery and the SCM's internal disparities in culture, class, wealth, education, and power. These real tensions were often disguised underneath arguments about two competing ideas valued with the SCM: the drive for progress (especially towards unity) and the defense of key principles. By the census of 1906, the completeness of the division was obvious to all (Holloway & Foster, p. 101). In general terms, the Disciples of Christ and Conservative Christian Churches were predominant in the North; Churches of Christ were predominant in the South.

Members of the Churches of Christ have prided themselves in being called "a people of the book" and have sought to connect all aspects of belief to the Scriptures, thus significantly

shaping the theology of the movement. Essentially orthodox in many regards, the differences that came to define this group can largely be found in its ecclesiology, liturgy, and soteriology.

In ecclesiology, the Churches of Christ are free churches, devoid of attachments to any particular government (Ferguson, 1996). With no overarching governing body or convention, the polity of these churches is based on radical congregational autonomy, with a multiplicity of local elders (bishops, shepherds) governing each individual congregation separately. This movement has historically eschewed clergy-laity distinctions, considering every member to be part of a royal priesthood (1 Pet 2:9); in practice, though distinctions are sometimes implicit. Without ordained clergy Churches of Christ do not typically use the term “sacraments”; early SCM figures used instead the term “ordinances,” particularly for baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

The worship practices of this faith group are free-form and not based on any formal liturgy. These churches assert biblical authority for five “acts of worship” that must take place each first day of the week: prayer, song, sermon, giving, and the Lord’s Supper. One of the most distinctive features of this fellowship is *a capella* congregational singing. In the 20th century this became the practice of four-part singing (soprano, alto, tenor, bass), though some now worry that youth in these churches are losing the skill of four-part harmony, even though they do enjoy singing (Browning, 2001).

The soteriology of this group is rooted in the practice of believer’s baptism by immersion. SCM churches hold that baptism is the means by which God saves and adds humans to the church. Since SCM churches have rejected the Augustinian concept of inherited depravity, they see children safely living among the community of faith (although capable of wrong) until either they accept their own faith through baptism or they become accountable, at

which time they are no longer viewed as innocent but fully responsible for their own sin (Bruner, 2005). This theology has significantly impacted the practice of youth ministry.

The Trajectory of Youth Ministry in a Changing Context

The year 1965 marked the date that the World Council of Churches dispatched a document to its constituent mainline denominations with a singular and surprising recommendation: disband youth ministries. The Council's rooted its decision in the belief that youth groups were becoming ghettos isolated from the larger body of the church (Oestreicher, 2008, p. 50). Ironically, in that same year, two large Churches of Christ in Texas called the first full-time youth ministers in Churches of Christ to work with their young people (Joiner, 1988, p. 21-23). Several key components of youth ministry were already in place: Bible schools, church camps, youth rallies, and volunteer youth ministry. Parents and volunteers had worked for many years to address the spiritual needs of their children. Ministers, often wearing other titles, were drawn to youth work because of their gifts, passion, and openness to young people.

In June of 1965, Dan Warden became the youth minister at the Central Church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas and three months later Don Williams moved to the Broadway Church in Lubbock, Texas. Over the next few years, these ministers were joined by others who defined the initial practice of youth ministry, established professional ministerial roles, and created a support network for practitioners that continues to function within this fellowship (Joiner, p. 23-28). This first cohort felt that they started their ministries lacking a philosophy, theology, or model of youth ministry (Joiner, p. 28). Their first apparent need was to find a decision-making methodology. Which scriptural imperatives were central? What programs were important?

What would a good model of ministry look like? The challenge confronting youth ministers was not so much deciding what practices were good or bad, but which were best. Soon both Don Williams (1937-2012) and Wally Wilkerson (1929-2007), leaders of the first cohort, developed unique discernment practices for decision making in their ministries that empowered sustainable ministry (Bruner, 2009).

The 1970's brought a second cohort of youth ministers who discovered that youth ministry had gained credibility in the church. They also found mentoring and accountability from the first cohort. They expanded their resources by enlisting the aid of peers among other faith fellowships. This cohort found the work of Mike Yaconelli and Wayne Rice at Youth Specialties useful and soon began to attend its conventions and seminars (Bruner, 2009). When Thom Shultz started Group Publishing in 1974, it became a second resource. The second cohort began to find assistance from Christian colleges and universities affiliated with the Churches of Christ. After years of imploring colleges to train youth ministers, Williams began teaching youth ministry at Pepperdine in 1971 (Bruner, 2009). Ben Zickefoose was soon teaching a class in youth work at Abilene Christian University. Later David Lewis would assume responsibility for a youth ministry degree program at ACU. Other colleges remained hesitant or asserted that youth ministry was merely a stepping stone to the pulpit. A significant number of second cohort youth ministers serving Churches of Christ entered graduate programs in varying disciplines to hone their skills and better serve the youth in their care. Many felt that this was a necessary effort to improve their ability to respond to an ever-increasing array of complex ministry issues.

In his 1988 master's thesis delineating the history of youth ministry within Churches of Christ, Stephen Joiner noted deficiencies in youth ministry as it was being practiced. He

projected that “Another task of youth ministries in the future will be to support families in their own nurturing of adolescents” (Joiner, 1988, p. 95). At the same time, Joiner observed that “many parents are not comfortable with that role of transmitter of faith to their children” (p. 96). As he worked on his thesis, Joiner found insight in Jim Burns’ *The Youth Builder* (1988). Built on a relational model of ministry, Burn’s book was a readily adapted “how-to” manual for youth ministry. At the same time, Joiner was influenced by Charles M. Sell’s *Family Ministry* (1981). Throughout his thesis, Joiner traces the complex and sometimes troubled relationship between parents, children, and ministers. To find a solution that was consistent with the Deuteronomic imperative (Dt 6:5-6) and the best ministerial theory available to him at the time, Joiner proposed a synthesis: youth and family ministry (p. 101-102). Despite Joiner’s warning about potential complications from ill-prepared change (p. 98-101), many congregations in the Churches of Christ began to title youth leaders as “youth and family” ministers with little regard for ministerial age or training, even less serious consideration of the feasibility of performing the duties of merged youth and family ministry within a particular church ecology.

In the same year that Joiner was writing his thesis, James White was publishing the first textbook on intergenerational ministry: *Intergenerational Religious Education: Models, Theory, and Prescription for Interage Life and Learning in the Faith Community* (1988). Although White’s work became a classic for specialists, it did not change the paradigms of very many practitioners in the United States.

The catalyst for rethinking ministry with youth and families, at least for youth ministers, was the 1994 book of Presbyterian youth pastor Mark DeVries: *Family-Based Youth Ministry*. Speaking of American churches, DeVries observed:

It might be hoped that churches would stand in the gap and provide an environment in which children and youth could dialogue and collaborate with adults. But sadly enough, for many teenagers, the place they are the most segregated from the world of adults in their church. And churches with the more “successful” youth program seem to particularly exacerbate this problem (1994, p. 41).

Although the family-based youth ministry of DeVries was more of a concept than a practice that he had yet extensively proven, convicted youth ministers began to seek more information about ministering to more than one generation. Many, at least those in Churches of Christ, found help in Royce Money’s *Ministering to Families* (1987) and Don Hebbard’s *Complete Handbook for Family Life Ministry* (1995), resources constructed within their own faith family. Some found confirmation for their suspicions about the difference in story, culture, and values between varying generational cohorts in Strauss and Howe’s *Generations* (1991).

The emergence of family ministry and a fully realized concept of youth and family ministry have been serious efforts to deal with some of these important issues, yet are they sufficiently broad? Does either serve well members of the congregation who have no biological family present? Does family ministry adequately take into account and empower potentially spiritual formative relationships within a congregation that originate outside the biological family? We think that, important as family ministry is, a broader effort is required.

We assert that intentional intergenerational ministry is more likely to meet the current needs of local congregations, not just in Churches of Christ, but in other faith families as well. Although intergenerational ministry has a history spanning more than three decades, serious attention to the intentional practice of that discipline in the United States is fairly recent. This deepening interest appears to be connected with several parallel phenomena: a growing awareness that many younger Christians are exiting their original faith traditions, and often

leaving faith altogether (Smith & Denton, 2005; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011); widespread congregational conflict over polarizing issues that unique generational perspectives tend to exacerbate (Strauss & Howe, 1991; Menconi, 2010; Maybry, 2013); and deepening theological conversations among long-term practitioners of youth ministry calling for a more substantial connection of youth to older generations (Dean, 1998, 2010; Oestricher, 2008). For a more extensive proof of the significance of intergenerational ministry, we refer readers to the work of Holly Allen and Christine Ross: *Intergenerational Christian Formation* (2012).

First, a definition of terms. There are several expressions used to describe ministry with more than one generation. Holly Allen lists three terms currently in use in the church: cross-generational, multi-generational, and intergenerational (Allen, 2012). Since multi-generational describes more than one generation without the necessity of interaction or mutuality and practitioners less commonly use the term cross-generational, we will use the word intergenerational. By this term we mean, as Allen defines it, the following concepts consistently present in the use of it: (1) multiple persons from multiple generations are present, (2) a mutuality of activity: conversation, sharing, and learning, (3) many different kinds of practices are involved, and (4) the underlying aim of these efforts is spiritual formation. Consequently, we provisionally define intergenerational ministry as: ministry where representatives from several generations share Christian practices in ways that are mutually formative spiritually.

Why Train Youth Ministers in Intergenerational Ministry?

There are a number of reasons why youth ministers in particular should study intergenerational ministry: theological, theoretical, practical, and political. Theologically, youth

ministry should not create practices and habits that encourage students to inhabit a generational ghetto indefinitely, but prepare them to function fully as a part of the larger body of Christ. In keeping with a clear theoretical (social science) perspective, the best youth ministry goes beyond conversion or confirmation; it prepares young people developmentally to launch into the next part of their faith journey. This is best done when those who minister with them understand not only the developmental and cultural issues relevant to adolescents, but spiritual progress through the potential life courses confronting contemporary students. In practical terms: in most of the congregations that can support more than one full-time minister, the youth minister is usually the second minister hired. Consequently, when small to medium-sized churches enact intergenerational ministry, that task will usually fall to the youth minister. In larger congregations, youth ministers who study (and practice) intergenerational ministry are empowered to resist “silo” or departmental thinking (Joiner, R., 2009, p. 122-133), which often sacrifices the best interests of the community for one aspect of it. From a political perspective, working as a minister with all of the age cohorts of the congregation increases the probability that these varying constituencies will perceive the youth minister to be competent and helpful, thus increasing the minister’s expert, connection, and referent power (Raven, 1999). Since youth ministers are often vulnerable within congregations because of their lack of appropriate kinds of power, the utilization of intergenerational ministry could be helpful. Also, since so many young parents are seeking stronger spiritual intergenerational connections for their children, ministry leadership that is responsive to this search can help shape efforts into approaches that are theoretically and theologically sound, while respecting the context and resources of the congregation.

Beyond this list of logical reasons, youth ministers are very often the ones who see the need for this kind of training. In our initial trials of intergenerational ministry components, students in youth ministry courses, most of whom were employed in the field, showed the most interest and did the best work on those intergenerational components. Comments from students currently taking the graduate class in intergenerational ministry support the need to teach this subject. John, a 50 year old youth minister at a Church of Christ, observes, “Intentional intergenerational ministry is very important considering what trends I see as a youth minister in my home congregation. . . . Many churches are ignorant of the need to implement strategies to nurture the church family relationships within the local congregation.” Others expressed concerns for developmental issues: “Our goal as Christians should not only be to bring lost souls into the body of Christ, but for us as the body to mature ‘to the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ,’ as it says in Ephesians 4:13,” notes Dana, a 25 year old youth minister at a non-denominational congregation. She continues: “We cannot do that if we are divided. We cannot do that if the arm ignores the leg or if the hand is disconnected from the arm. Unity of Spirit and maturity happens as we grow and relate to one another. It must be a priority because it is a necessity. We cannot reach spiritual maturity on our own.”

It is important to note that this course will benefit more than youth ministers; children’s ministers, education ministers, and pulpit ministers are also capable and positioned to make intergenerational ministry a viable possibility at a congregation. Yet it may be particularly important for youth ministers because their work delivers one cohort at a time to a place in the life cycle where the liberty to make individual faith decisions is so critical.

Testing Intergenerational Ministry Components

In 2012 we inserted trial intergenerational ministry components into two courses that we co-taught where such content was relevant: YTMN 5103, Contemporary Culture (Spring 2012) and YTMN 5163, Adolescent Physical and Spiritual Development (Fall 2012). The spring course required the students to conceive, execute, and evaluate a small ministerial intervention in which their congregation would work intergenerationally to address a contemporary cultural issue that was significant in their context (please see examples below). In the fall course, students participated in a qualitative research project with three generations of families which allowed them to observe lifelong spiritual developmental issues. This work (described below) contributed to their insight into the faith formation process and gave them new research tools that are useful for further graduate study and in ministerial practice. In addition, some lectures touched upon issues relevant to the course at hand and intergenerational ministry as well.

The intervention project – This assignment required students to design and implement an intergenerational “mini-intervention” in their ministry setting (or at the congregation at which they worshiped), based on the concepts, practices, and knowledge acquired in this class. The purpose was to apply sound principles of cultural interpretation and response in a ministry situation. Examples included: a series of classes for parents, a reading group, informational podcasts, a retreat in which ministry volunteers are trained to interpret and respond to the surrounding culture of their youth, etc. An example project was given to students on Blackboard. Students submitted a one-page proposal for their intervention early in the semester. After completion, students wrote a 12-15-page report explaining the project, its theological rationale, and an evaluation of the project’s results. Completed projects included:

an extended mission service project designed to develop intergenerational relationships among workers on assigned team, a spiritual direction project, and a retreat designed to facilitate intergenerational career mentoring. A summary of one intervention project follows.

Jake is the youth and family minister at an urban congregation that is highly conscious of its image in the community, both in reputation and appearance of its physical plant. Jake's intervention sought to focus on one very specific intergenerational issue in order to begin building a larger multigenerational dialogue. Working with an awareness of the six "disconnects" described by Kinnaman (2011, p. 92-93), Jake believed that one of the most problematic disconnects in his ministry context was the congregation's tendency to put on a good front and avoiding discussing difficult questions; the church puts on the appearance of being "doubtless." He designed an intervention to confront this issue directly.

Jake began his project by distributing a 12 question survey to congregation members present one Wednesday night. The survey contained several demographic questions and 6 statements about doubt with which respondents were asked to report their level of agreement on a Likert scale. At the end of the survey, participants were given space to identify the types of doubt they had experienced and to express ways that they felt that the church could better address doubt. Sixty responses were received, many with extensive written comments. Jake analyzed these surveys and found that there were some generational differences; not surprising was the discovery that older Christians were more experienced and adept at handling doubt. Because this had not been a pressing issue for them, Jake felt that teaching and preaching at this congregation may not have historically dealt adequately with the problem for younger age groups.

Consequently, Jake designed and executed a two session “doubt discussion” with all age groups of the congregation. In the first session he reviewed the findings about doubt described by Kinnaman and then reported the results of his own contextual research. During the second session, the pulpit minister, working with the examples of doubt from week one, led a discussion of doubt connected with the biblical text. This discussion included ideas about how the church might better respond to doubt in its midst. The two sessions resulted in a significant number of positive intergenerational conversations about doubt as intended in Jake’s initial project design.

The research project – Students in the fall class (Adolescent Physical and Spiritual Development) participated in an ongoing research project being conducted by their instructors, the Three Generations Project (Chancey & Bruner, 2012). Each student was responsible for recruiting two families, each of which had three generations of faithful participation in one faith family. For most members of this class, both families were from the Churches of Christ. For each family the student helped each generation complete a survey that included a set of demographic questions and a battery of questionnaires designed by other researchers. Students then worked with each family member to construct a genogram and a set of family annals (a chronological account of key events, spiritual and otherwise, within the family). Students led each respondent through a 15 question structured interview designed by the principal investigators; the students recorded and then transcribed these interviews.

Some of the student observations resulting from this phase of the study included: attendance at nearly all church functions is the most common practice from family to family. Although prayer at the table and individual study of Scripture are common, family devotionals

are not as frequent as one might expect. Observed practices, in which children see their parents praying or reading Scripture, for example, tend to have a fairly high impact on those younger generations. For these three generation faith families there is a strong connection between practice and identity: “this is who we are.” Finally, the sharing of faith or conversion stories between generations in this fellowship is not common. In fact, students usually asked two or more probing questions in the interview to extract that faith story.

The overall success of these modules, and the positive student reaction to them, led us to believe that they would be useful in future courses in intergenerational ministry.

Design of a Graduate Course in Intentional Intergenerational Ministry

In 2013 we began the course design for our first graduate course at OC focused completely on intergenerational ministry: YTMN 5033, Developing Intergenerational Ministry in Churches. This course was designed to meet in an intensive weekend format. On one weekend early in the semester, the class meets on Thursday from 5:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m., on Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 10 p.m., and on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Breaks and meal times are included in the schedule. The schedule is repeated toward the end of the semester. Before the first weekend, students are required to complete part of the readings; the remaining readings and most of the other assignments are completed in the span between the two classes.

Experience from modules in previous courses, investigation of extant literature, and conversations with ministers making efforts at intergenerational ministry informed this work. Since our initial concept for a graduate specialization included four different courses, we choose to construct a trial course that would include content from all four. These areas are:

1) Theology and Theory of Intergenerational Ministry – This area empowers students to develop a theology and philosophy of intergenerational ministry based on biblical texts (Allen & Ross, 2012; Rendle, 2002) and connected with various social science theoretical constructs (Bronfrenbrenner, 1979; Bandura, 1977; and Vygotsky, 1978), including developmental theory, ecological systems theory, and social learning theory.

2) Intergenerational Spiritual and Moral Formation – Students will engage the work of various theoreticians in spiritual and moral formation (Csinos, 2011; Fowler, 1981; Holmes, 1980; Erickson, 1993; Kohlberg, 1981; Peck, 1987; Westerhoff, 2000) and particular perspectives on the human life span, i.e., life cycle theory and life course theory. The value of different individual and corporate spiritual disciplines, and differing forms of spirituality will be considered in light of these theories.

3) Forming an Intergenerational Community – Having understood intergenerational theoretical concepts, students will study intergenerational communities to be able to describe how they work and diagnose how they fall short. Students will study different intergenerational communities and their context, specifically looking at America's Best Intergenerational Communities, Generations of Hope, and Temple University. Students will consider how these communities might inform the church as community.

4) Decision Making in Intergenerational Contexts – This part of the course equips students with group decision-making tools that empower intergenerational communities, including dwelling in the Word (Ellison & Keifert, n.d.), appreciative inquiry (Branson, 2004), communal discernment (Whitehead & Whitehead, 1995; Bruner, 2010), and covenant (Rendle, 1999). Students will experience these processes in classroom exercises and fieldwork.

Students and instructors in this course combine their efforts to become an intentional learning community. The instructors contribute to the community by providing exposure to information about practice and scholarship beyond the bounds of the required reading. They lead students through various exercises that allow students to gain experience with various practices useful in the practice of ministry: dwelling in the Word, appreciative inquiry, communal discernment, constructing covenants, research, and congregational analysis. Instructors also guide the students through their various learning tasks by providing clues as to available research or resources.

Students contribute to the learning community by describing their unique and varied perspectives in community discussions about issues and practices. By engaging in classroom communal discernment exercises, students will teach each other the benefits (and hazards) of making decisions in community. Students also participate in this community by completing the following assignments outlined in the syllabus: (1) studying required readings, (2) composing a written faith narrative to share with the class, (3) conducting intergenerational faith research as a part of an instructor-led research project, (4) writing an academic book review of a book in the intergenerational literature to share with community members (and to potentially publish), (5) online (Blackboard) critical discussions of course readings, and (6) completion of their choice of either a research paper or a ministry intervention. Details of each assignment follow.

Readings – At the core of the required readings for the course are three books. *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship*, by Holly Allen and Christine Ross (2012) is an affordable macro-analysis of the field that provides readers with the why and how of intergenerational ministry.

Faithful Generations: Effective Ministry across Generational Lines, by John Mabry (2013); and *Scripture and Discernment: Decision-making in the Church*, by Luke Timothy Johnson (1996).

The instructors provide an extensive bibliography of other useful resources to the class.

Faith Narrative – The composition of a written faith narrative (800-1200 words, with a 400-600 word intergenerational analysis) is connected to the initial outcomes found by students in the Three Generations Project (see above). Because people in Churches of Christ, and potentially other faith fellowships as well, experience difficulty in telling their own faith narrative, it was hoped that this task might help students overcome their reluctance to do this, prepare them to probe deeper into the faith stories of the people they interview in their research assignment, and help them understand the communal value in sharing those stories (Bryce, 2010). In fact, the telling of faith stories in the first sessions of class helps build the learning community and aids in further open conversation about ministry.

Academic Book Review – In addition to the assigned readings, each student selects a book from the intergenerational bibliography, reads it, and prepares a 1,000-1,200 word book review in an established journal format. Students can petition the instructors to add a book to the list. Since each student reviews a different work, they are able to share their work with the community midway through the course so that, if any other students wonder if that particular work might prove useful, they will learn enough about it from the reviews to determine whether to access it or not. The reviews will continue to be of value after the course is complete.

Three Generations Study – Each student will interview three members of one family; that is, three generations where the youngest and third generation person must be college age or higher (able to make their own decision as to where or whether they are a part of a church). The

purpose of this project is to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences among at least three generations of Christians from a spiritual perspective. The interviewer will acquire insight into areas such as conflict, interpretations of concepts (doctrines/traditions), and use of spiritual tools (e.g., prayer, Bible study, and church attendance) among the generations. Insight into developing programs/activities for intergenerational ministry will be acquired from this project. Students will discuss their findings with other students in a later class session.

Research paper or ministry intervention – For their major written assignment, students had their choice between a research paper on specific topics chosen by the instructors or a small intergenerational ministry intervention. Details of each follow.

Research Paper Option – Students will conduct a scholarly examination of a significant intergenerational topic. The paper will be 20 pages of text, foot-noted, double-spaced, in Turabian style. The works cited section should make use of at least 20 scholarly sources. Students opting for the research paper option will communally discern together how they will be able to select their topics. Topics from which they can choose are: Intergenerational preaching for an intergenerational church, Making worship intergenerational, Intergenerational biblical education, Discernment and the intergenerational Christian community, Negotiating intergenerational cultural differences, Intergenerational sharing of story, Imagining a sustainable intergenerational ecclesiology, An intergenerational Lord's table, or Intergenerational ministry in megachurches. Students pursuing these topics should approach these topics from the perspective of their particular faith family.

Intervention Project Option – Students will design and implement a “mini-intervention” in their ministry setting (or at the congregation at which they worship), based on the concepts,

practices, and knowledge acquired in this class. The purpose is to apply sound principles of intergenerational ministry and respond in their particular context. An example project is posted on Blackboard (the report on Jake's project, described above). Students are to follow the following steps for this project: Step 1: One week after the initial class, students must submit a one-page proposal for their intervention by email to both instructors. Step 2: The instructors will respond with suggestions and/or approval within three working days. Step 3: The student will execute the project. The project should include the following elements: (1) intergenerational communal discernment, (2) intergenerational sharing of time, space, and work (liturgy), (3) The project should actually meet some existing contextual need. Step 4: After completion of the intervention, students must write a 12-15 page report, explaining the context, the project, its theological rationale, and an evaluation of the project's results. The paper will be done in Turabian style, with footnotes as required, making use of at least 12 scholarly sources, but requiring no separate bibliography. The paper is due via email to both instructors before the final class session. Students will report on their projects to their peers. It should be obvious that the requirements of the two choices were attempt to get most of the students to choose a project intervention.

Discussion Board and Class Discussion – Finally, a significant part of the grade was connected to student participation in class discussions and in online Blackboard discussions held between class sessions.

Intergenerational Ministry as Practical Theology

In 2008 Chap Clark sought to bring youth ministry formally into the realm of practical theology (2008a). Although there was significant discussion about how exactly one might do that without becoming too rigid and logical, the consensus among peers seemed to be that this was the most suitable connection of youth ministry with theology (Dean, 2008; Parrett, 2008; White, 2008; Clark, 2008b). By analogy we will extend this thinking to intergenerational ministry.

Because of the context of the University in which this course originates, the need for this course to be rooted in a practical theology closely connected with the biblical text is highly important. Mark Hamilton has asserted that Scripture operates in four basic modalities: narrative, liturgy, wisdom, and prophetic (2007). Bruner connected these four modalities of Scripture with four elements of practical theology: perspective, praxis, process, and prophecy (2010).

Perspective (theology) is an attempt to construct a coherent narrative about God, God's nature, actions, and interactions with the creation and people of God. Perspective guides the interpretation of situations, which are individual frames of a narrative, and provides clues as to potential denouements of the story resulting from prospective responses in praxis. Praxis connects with liturgy. The purpose of the activity of God's people is to glorify God, whether literally engaging in worship, teaching Bible, preparing lunch for a grieving family, or raising children in a Christian way. Process is the exercise of wisdom, a discernment of the connection between virtuous thinking and acting, and thus is consistent with the purpose of wisdom literature and its values and virtues. Most clearly, prophecy connects with the prophetic mode as it challenges the narrative, the liturgy, and the wisdom of the community. These four elements of

practical theology correspond moderately well with the functional aspects of Richard Osmer's practical theology (2008), even though there is some conflict in nomenclature; please see table 2 for a comparison. Since intergenerational ministry is an exercise in practical theology, pedagogy in this area should cover all four modalities of practice.

Table 2	
Comparison of Osmer's and Bruner's Rubrics of Practical Theology	
Osmer	Bruner
Descriptive Empirical – Priestly Listening	Perspective – Theology
Interpretive – Sagely Wisdom	Process – Discernment
Narrative – Prophetic Discernment	Prophecy – Challenge
Pragmatic – Servant Leader	Praxis - Liturgy

The classroom components and individual assignments designed for this course develop proficiencies in each of these areas of practical theology; see table 3. Depending upon the situation and the context, each of the components can function in one or more categories of

Table 3				
Fit of Course Modules in Practical Theological Categories				
Osmer's Practical Theology	Descriptive Empirical	Interpretive	Narrative	Pragmatic
Lectures	X		X	
Readings	X		X	
Faith Story	X			
Book Review	X		X	
Research Project	X			
Intervention				X
Discussion		X		
Dwelling in the Word		X	X	X
Appreciative Inquiry	X			X
Communal discernment		X		X
Covenant	X	X		
Congregational analysis	X			
Bruner's Practical Theology	Perspective	Process	Prophecy	Praxis

practical theology. One of the significant features of this course is the amount of class time spent in helping students experience and not merely discuss different kinds of spiritual processes. During different learning modules, students experience dwelling in the Word, appreciative inquiry, communal discernment, and covenant. This work engages students in the process area of practical theology, an often neglected aspect of ministry, even though the brief history of youth ministry given above demonstrates the critical nature of it. It is also worthy of note that Osmer emphasizes the importance of process in his practical theology (2008).

Future Work

As the program in Intergeneration Ministry continues to develop at OC, the four course components in this original course will become separate courses. Although the original intention was to have four separate courses, the realities of academic life will restrict this to three courses. The first two components will become courses on their own: Theory and Theology of Intergenerational Ministry and Intergenerational Spiritual Formation. The third component, Formation of Intergenerational Communities, and the fourth component, Decision Making in Intergenerational Contexts, will become one course: Intergenerational Communities: Formation and Decision Making. The ongoing research projects of the Intergenerational Faith Center at Oklahoma Christian should affect the content and methodology of these courses as well.

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