

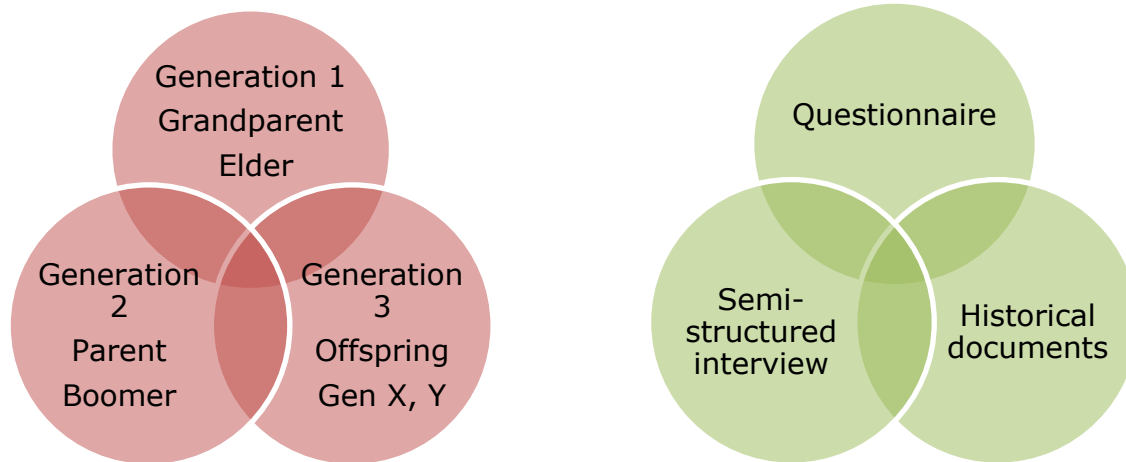
A Qualitative Search for Common Faith Factors in Three Generation Families

Principal Investigators: Dudley Chancey, PhD and Ron Bruner, DMin

dudley.chancey@oc.edu - ron.bruner@oc.edu – www.oc.edu/ifc

Abstract: This project seeks to understand common intergenerational factors in faith transmission within Churches of Christ by interviewing individuals within families that have remained in that fellowship for three or more generations. Using a triangulation of perspectives and methods, the researchers seek insights from families from different geographic, ethnic, family forms, and educational backgrounds.

The Method: The researchers will help the participants describe faith conversations in their families by helping them through three separate processes. The three methods they will use are questionnaires, documents, and interviews. The questionnaires are a battery of measures that produce information describing each participant's unique faith. The researchers will evaluate two historical documents produced by the families participating in the study: (1) a genogram that describes relationships within the family and (2) an annal of the family's spiritual and church life. Among other facts, the annals will be a record which congregations in what physical locations that respondents have attended during their lifetime, as well as significant community roles, spiritual events, and mentoring relationships that have coincided with those locations. Central to the project are semi-structured interviews with at least one member of each of three generations of faith within the family. The interview process is structured around a set of questions designed to help the respondent describe their experience of their spiritual formation.



Sample selection: As a purposive, intensive sample, faithfulness to the tradition of Churches of Christ is a strong trait of these families without their faith practices having become unique or exceptional. This study requires that all participants, regardless of which generation, (1) are willing to participate in this study, (2) are adults with the liberty to choose where and whether to pursue faith and (3) have adequate possession of their faculties of recall and communication. Since each family requires the consent of at least three persons, it is necessary to limit this research to those families where this is possible. Although multi-generational faith-resilient families are not uncommon, families that meet these more stringent requirements are rarer. Purposeful sampling helps achieve the desired diversity in socio-economic status, geographic location, and ethnicity. For the purpose of contrast and locating confirming and disconfirming cases, the researchers will include some families having experienced a later generation (or part thereof) leaving this fellowship.

Sample semi-structured interview questions:

What are the earliest memories you have of prayer in your family?

What are the most important things your parents did to help shape your faith?

What are the things you do that keep you close to God?

What was the most important thing you did (are doing, will do) to help your children find their own faith?

What are some times in your family's history where faith made the biggest difference?

Think about a time when your family dealt with change and conflict. How did your family handle that?

If your grandchild asked you to tell them the story of your walk with God, how would you tell that story?

If you could change the church in positive ways to be more like the church described by the Bible, what would you change?

A Study in Progress - Observations thus far:

Attitudes and Beliefs

The general trend of individuals is a view of God that changes over time to see deity as more gracious

The data from the Christian Orthodoxy Scale (COS) reveals that this particular sample tends to have fairly orthodox doctrinal beliefs within a fairly narrow range

The eldest generation tends to have the lowest (least orthodox) COS scores; this may be the result of doctrinal stances particular to the Churches of Christ

Although older generations tend to be the most conservative doctrinally, some G1 respondents are aware that overly conservative stances could negatively affect their grandchildren, and consequently take more inclusive doctrinal stances

Behavior

It may be that transient behavior has a negative relationship to faith fellowship loyalty

The physical distance separating generations will have an inverse effect on doctrinal coherence, faith fellowship loyalty, and possibly on faith resiliency

Practices

Although prayer at the table and individual study of Scripture are common, family devotionals are not; attendance at nearly all church functions is common

Observed practices (praying, reading Scripture) tend to have a fairly high impact on younger generations

For these families there is a strong connection between practice and identity: "this is who we are"

The sharing of faith or conversion stories between generations in this fellowship is not common

Roles

There is a tendency for matriarchs and patriarchs to exert a multi-generational influence over family faith; thus far, matriarchs are more common

Positive same-gender models have a strong positive correlation with faith fellowship loyalty, especially parents or grandparents as role models

Ecclesiology

Smaller congregations tend to better facilitate formation of life-long intergenerational relationships; larger congregations tend to provide more possibilities for numerous peer relationships

It may be that the number of congregations one has attended in one's life (within limits) tends to describe the number of degrees of freedom one allows the church to have in shaping its identity and practice

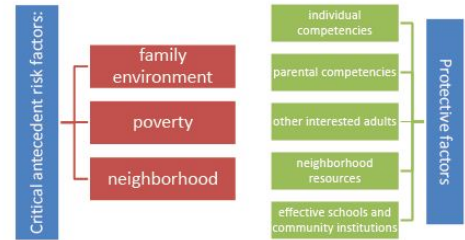
Although youth growing up in a congregation tend to see the church like a loving family, many discover (as they mature into youth) that the church is flawed, forcing them to reframe their view of the church as a collection of humans that make mistakes, while preserving a positive attitude toward God

Conclusions

There is no one factor that solely empowers resiliency of faith, but clusters of positive and negative factors in tension

At any given point in time, regression, stasis, or progress are a function of the current balance of forces

Youth At-Risk Model

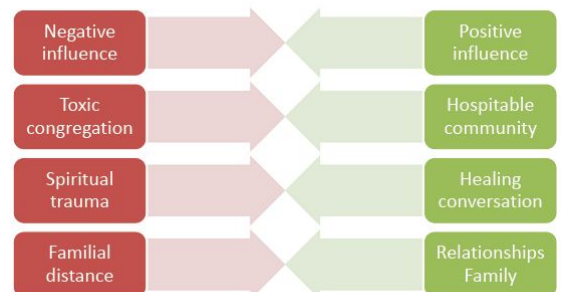


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Faith At-Risk Model

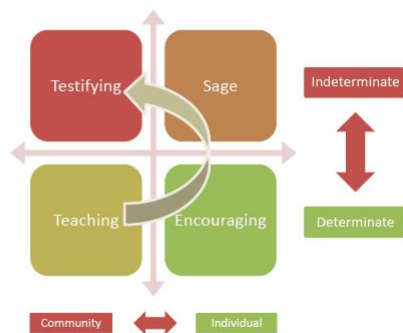


Lewin's Force Field Analysis



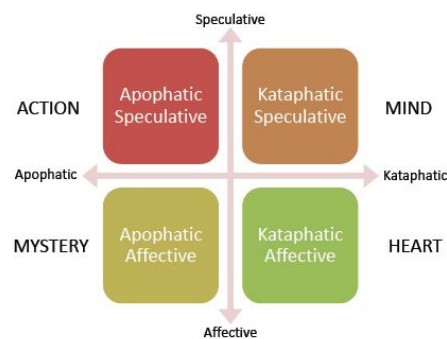
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