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Intergenerational Worship: Exploring Various Cultural Worship Environments and their Effects on the Church

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Intergenerational Worship:

Exploring Various Cultural Worship Environments and their Effects on the Church

TJ Bailey

Thesis: Until the most recent century, worship occurred in an intergenerational environment. Research indicates that today's Church may be making an effort fix this problem and to create a shared worship environment that reflects equally the many influences of the local church body.

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I. Personal Interest

Worship. Commonly seen as an act of attributing praise and honor to something or someone, this practice is fundamental to many of the world's greatest religions. Unfortunately, in some aspects of contemporary American Christianity the focus of worship seems to have moved from God to the worshiper. Many churches now advertise services catered to a particular preference in worship style and some individuals seem more likely to place their church membership based on this rather than the quality of teaching or other ministries of the church.

Why has this shift of focus happened in the American Church and what are some of the issues it has caused? How has worship developed with Christian belief and culture? Does the modern American model of worship adhere more closely to Biblical Christianity or the standards set by the society we live in?¹ What causes have contributed to these problems? What might be done to better glorify God in our worship? These are the questions that guided me in this study on intergenerational worship.

I first became interested in the concept of intergenerational worship when I noticed that in many American churches there seemed to be disagreement over worship styles. While this has been an issue since the Christian Church's origins as a sect of Judaism, in recent history there has been an increasing amount of arguments due to forms of worship that were not previously used congregationally. These arguments, often bitter and divisive, tended to split congregations by cultural preferences generally associated with age. With time and experience comes an affinity

¹ When I use the term "Biblical Christianity" I am referencing the model set forth by the early Church as described in the New Testament. Though the New Testament leaves plenty of room for a variety of different applications, there are still definite principles set forth that should be adhered to. For example, on the topic of tithing Paul wrote that "each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7, ESV). This passage commands giving but does not mandate a particular form or portion to be given, and the New Testament record provides several examples of appropriate and inappropriate ways to undertake this practice. Worship can be approached in the same manner, where principles are drawn from the New Testament model and then applied in a variety of different ways.

for the tried and true, in contrast with the energy and creativity that accompanies youth, and in the context of the Church this has led to the distilling of worship styles into either “traditional” or “contemporary” elements that accompany their appropriate generational groups.² In some towns, two churches across the street from each other might meet at the same time, on the same day, worshipping the same God, practicing the same sacraments and holding to the same beliefs, yet there are two distinctly different groups of people that attend these churches. For members of congregations that have split over worship styles, it seems that cultural preferences may have become more important to them than the relationships that they may have with other members of the congregation.

In a society that perpetuates false dichotomies the Church is a reflection of the people that compose it. Current American culture often presents people with “this or that” choices, where two mutually exclusive results are the only options available. When members passionately defend their preferred worship style (to the exclusion of any other) the Body is divided, or at least wounded. Some churches have managed to create resolution by crafting intergenerational or intercultural worship services, but they seem few in number compared to the amount of churches who have “solved the problem” by exclusively using a particular worship style; rejecting dissenters or justifying their actions by claiming focus on a “target audience.” Growing up, I was deeply saddened by stories of churches being split, relationships being broken and Christian witnesses ruined over the topic of worship, and I wanted to research why this was happening.

² I believe that the terms “traditional” and “contemporary” are too simplistic to describe the current variety of worship styles present in the church today, but these two terms are frequently used in discussions of worship by laypeople and scholars alike and as a result each person has formed their own opinion of what these words mean. For the purpose of this discussion, “traditional” worship refers to forms of worship originating from before the 21st century and in the realm of music are often based on a set of multiple stanzas repeated over the same tune, accompanied by an organ, piano or orchestra. “Contemporary” worship refers to forms of worship newly employed by the church during and after the 20th century and musically are based on phrases designed to be flexibly arranged for singing, often in a simple verse-chorus structure, accompanied by either a guitar, piano or band (including drums and guitars).

I now have a broader perspective on the subject than when I was younger but internally I am still asking many of the same questions. Why does our church do things the way we do? Why do all the old people go to that church? Why do only young adults go to that church? Where are the black people? Or in that regards, people of any sort of differing racial background? Is culture really important in worship? Why should I change the way I worship if I am comfortable with the way things are now? Why are we as the Church, the universal body of Christ, failing to represent in our corporate worship the glorious diversity modeled in the Triune Godhead?

II. Issues in the American Church

I believe that the greatest problem the American Church faces is something I will call pragmatic narcissism. This mindset, a focus on only that which is considered beneficial to the self, is present at both the individual and the organizational level in the modern Church. How does this concept affect the Church? It is easy to create a pattern where decisions in worship and the life of the Church are made based on personal preferences rather than Biblical guidelines. It is easy to use only the forms of worship that draw a particular audience. It is easy to preach only the Biblical truths that make people feel better and cause the Church to grow in numbers but not in health. While not every church has fallen prey to the depths of the issue caused by pragmatic narcissism, I do believe that every congregation (and believer) faces the temptation to do so. This way of thinking is prevalent in modern American society and can be attributed to the sin nature.

At the root of pragmatic narcissism is idolatry. Marva Dawn writes that “the greatest danger of choosing where or at which type of service we worship according to our musical taste is that we forget that worship is for God.”³ Any time the driving focus in worship has moved to

³ Marva J. Dawn, *How Shall We Worship?: Biblical Guidelines for the Worship Wars*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 19.

something other than God, the worshipers have committed this sin that has trapped countless others who have gone before. Who or what is being worshiped? If the answer to that question can ever be interpreted as anything other than God, then the devil has succeeded in his mission to take away glory from God.

The other issue, stemming from pragmatic narcissism, is simply that worship style has unnecessarily divided the Church. As I have already mentioned in my previous statement of personal interest, this does not seem to be an isolated incident. Throughout America congregations have been formed or re-formed, upholding a particular worship style as one of their main priorities. Not only does this pattern of disagreement followed by disconnection hurt relationships within a church body, but it also damages the Church's witness in the local community and the broader global context. Jesus taught that "all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."⁴ How well is the American Church doing at modeling this Christ-like love?

I believe that focusing on a singular worship style can cause two major internal problems in a congregation. First, if God created man in His image and the vast cultural diversity on the globe is simply a reflection of the many aspects of Him, then limiting congregational worship to a particular style or form has the potential to limit an individual's spiritual development. Each cultural background (influenced by factors like race, nationality, or age) has a unique and valid worldview that can help worshipers understand more about God and His creation.

Secondly, a focus on a singular worship style can potentially hurt relationships and discipleship within a congregation. When a congregation focuses on a worship style or practice to the exclusion of others it can alienate those who relate to or are ministered to by the use of these other forms and these worshipers are then faced with a choice to remain in the

⁴ John 13:35, ESV.

congregation or move on. When the majority of a church's demographic is comprised of a particular age group then it is difficult to develop internal, intergenerational relationships per the Biblical model. The Church is meant to be community; younger Christians and older Christians need each other.

III. The Development of Christian Worship

“Intergenerational worship” is a relatively modern term. Until the most recent century, communal worship services were generally intergenerational in nature without the need to specifically define them as such. With the advent of technology and individualism in America, new possibilities for congregations have been opened that previously were unavailable.

Christian religion and tradition originated from Judaism and developed its own practices in accordance with its new theology based on Christ as the Messiah. The early Church closely resembled Jewish practices as many of its first adherents and leaders were converted Jews. The book of Acts describes their meetings as being held in the temple complex and in converts' homes. It also notes that one of the important differences between Judaism and Christianity is the idea that all of humanity is welcome to participate in God's blessings (as opposed to the Jews being exclusively God's chosen people). As people from different cultural backgrounds (either by race or class) came together in Christ they began forming patterns of worship that are still followed today. Often conversion to Christianity would occur by families (as the head of the household believed, so would the rest of the group) and these families were involved in early Christian worship.

With the Edict of Milan in 313 C.E. that acknowledged Christianity as a legal religion in the Roman Empire, followed by the influence of Constantine, the amount of adherents grew and

it was during this general season in church history that many important theological and ritual elements of the faith were firmly established. The Church continued to develop and gradually evolved to what is generally recognized as the Roman Catholic Church. Until the Reformation, the Catholic Church was considered to be the only true form of Christianity (any dissenters were excommunicated) and the issue of worship style was simple: Christians worshiped together in the way that the Catholic Church said was appropriate.

When the Protestant Reformation occurred in the 16th century, variety in worship accompanied the new variety in doctrinal beliefs and practices. Some groups advocated elaboration and complexity in worship in order to better represent the magnitude and transcendental qualities of God. Other groups preferred simplicity in worship, choosing to emphasize the imminence of God's presence and wishing to remove earthly distractions.

Even with these new possibilities in worship, it was not until the 20th century that generational differences motivated major changes in the American Church. As culture changed, youth movements began trading in the forms of worship that had been practiced for generations in exchange for newer, "contemporary" worship practices. Gradually, guitars replaced organs, choruses replaced hymns, and casual clothing replaced "Sunday Best." Sadly, though these practices brought new life to the American Church they were often implemented in ways that caused tension among congregations as churches began to align themselves along generational differences.

IV. Causes of Issues in the American Church

One of the greatest changes in the American Church in the past century has been the increasing influence of individualism and consumerism. Modern western society has evolved to cater to and promote every imaginable desire and belief and in some cases the Church has

mirrored this. Some churches have specifically defined a “target audience” for their services and others have split services so that they can have multiple “targets.” In some cases this has been out of a “survival instinct” while in others it has been used as a tactic for church growth. The danger in individualism is that it takes away the focuses from God and Christian community and places it on personal preference. Unfortunately, almost all Christians raised in modern American society have been exposed to individualism and for many members of the younger generations it is all they have ever known, making it feel natural to adapt this worldview for the Church.

Humans are fundamentally more comfortable with what they know than what they do not. In many cases, the unfamiliar can be scary. Fear of the unfamiliar or the different often keeps people from trying to understand something outside of their experience or comfort zone. This is one of the reasons why there are many churches and many styles of worship, but that there are not many churches that individually practice many styles of worship. Once people have formed their preferences they often seek out other like-minded individuals and together they choose to remain in their cultural comfort zones. This has been described as the Homogenous Unit Principle, where a Homogenous Unit is defined as “a section of society in which all members have some characteristic in common.”⁵ For many churches, their members feel drawn together by their common appreciation for a specific worship style.

In his book, *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship*, C. Michael Hawn proposes a spectrum of approaches to culture and worship (Figure 1: Moving Toward Culturally Conscious Worship) that I found helpful in my research. He would classify a congregation that focuses on a singular form of worship as a church that practices Cultural

⁵ “LOP 1: Pasadena Consultation – Homogenous Unit Principle” (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978), Accessed April, 2014, <http://www.lausanne.org/en/documents/lops/71-lop-1.html>

Uniformity. What I was most interested in was Hawn's stage of Cultural Assimilation. Here, Hawn describes congregations where worship "assumes a dominant cultural perspective that will become the common currency for all participants, regardless of experience or background."⁶ In this type of church environment, worship reflects the preferences of a particular group of people that acknowledge cultural differences and may even welcome people from other cultural backgrounds but do little to encourage worship outside of a particular style. Hawn writes that a church can be classified as having Culturally Open Worship when it allows more influences from people of differing values and backgrounds, with the ultimate goal being Cultural Partnership, where "no clear majority dominates and culturally diverse members reflect the surrounding neighborhood and work together in a shared Christian community."⁷

Figure 1: Moving toward Culturally Conscious Worship⁸



I feel that the majority of American churches fall somewhere between Cultural Uniformity and Cultural Assimilation on Hawn's scale. Again, the more specific (or homogenous) the group that makes decisions regarding worship for the congregation, the less diverse the worship is likely to be. Interestingly, sometimes the dominant group in a situation

⁶ C. Michael Hawn, *One Bread, One Body: Exploring Cultural Diversity in Worship*, (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2003), 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

like this may not even represent the majority (for example, wealthy people tend to have a disproportionate amount of weight given to their opinions) though they are still in control.

V. Working Thesis Statement

Midway through this study when I felt that I had gathered enough information to better define the issue I was researching and its causes and effects, I drafted an *Explanation of Research Problem* with which to guide my research. This statement was submitted to the council directing my study:

The cultural influences that have shaped a person's life will be more comfortable for them than the influences of other cultures. This leads people to seek out others that are similar to themselves, and as the world has adapted to cater to increasing individualization the Church has done the same. In many American churches, a dominant cultural class makes the majority of the important decisions affecting the Body as a whole. One frequent cultural differentiation is age, which is becoming more apparent as churches target specific generations' cultural preferences. Segregation by age in the Church can weaken the Body of Christ, as some Christians are losing the opportunity to benefit from relationships with members of other generations.

It was with this perspective that I wrote my thesis statement. I wanted to do my research in a way that could be confirmed or disproven in the style of the typical scientific hypothesis, but I also wanted to direct my study so that regardless of what I learned my research could be beneficial to the Church. This is the direction I ultimately chose to pursue for my *Thesis*:

Christians nurtured in an environment of intergenerational worship will be more likely to embrace relationships with people who have different cultural backgrounds and to make an effort to create a shared environment that reflects equally the many influences of the local church.

Relationships and intentions are concepts that are difficult to quantifiably study and evaluate, but under the guidance of Dr. Rob Hewell and Dr. Jennifer Fayard I developed a survey that I felt would yield some useful information relating to my thesis. These advisors helped me

put my thoughts in to specific questions, and then word these questions in such a way that they would be easy to measure and analyze.

VI. Constructing the Survey

The survey I created focuses on a simple idea: create a set of questions that can be answered in measurable responses and then apply each set of questions to an individual's past, present and ideal environment of worship. The plan was to see if there was any correlation between past church experiences and what a person would consider to be their ideal church experience. Each set of questions also provides subjects with an opportunity to list the reasons why they chose (or would choose) to attend a specific congregation.

One of the things I wanted to make clear at the beginning of the survey is that worship can be practiced through many different ways. While music is one of the most common forms of worship, I intentionally asked participants about the use of other forms of art in worship and I included the following disclaimer at the beginning of the survey: "Note: for the purpose of this survey, *worship style* is defined as the collective worship expressions of the local church body, including but not limited to music, as presented during the primary weekly gathering of believers." One observation that I have made is that different generations make use of and place an emphasis on a variety of artistic forms in worship, with an explosion in creativity occurring relatively recently in the history of the Church.

Each of the three main sections of the survey consists of 15 questions. The first 14 questions can be answered on a scale of one to five and address the frequency of various events in worship. Though ordered randomly, these 14 questions can be divided into two groups: a

group that represents diversity in forms of worship, and a group that analyzes generational involvement in worship.

The final question in each of the sections asks participants to choose what factors have or would influence their involvement in a particular congregation. These factors can be categorized as either relational (e.g. family or co-workers) or cultural/stylistic (e.g. denomination or service times). This was so that in addition to researching correlations between past, present and future church attendance, I could also see what factors are most important to people when it comes to choosing a church home. In particular I wanted to see if relational factors or cultural factors would be the most influential on people.

VII. The Survey

The next four pages contain the survey that I created, in its entirety. The first page consists of an introduction to the survey and an informed consent form that I added in accordance with the guidelines set by the Institutional Review Board at Ouachita Baptist University. This was because I knew the first round of survey takers would be students at OBU and I wanted to do what was necessary to handle any gathered information in an ethical manner.

Worship Environments:

Examining the Past, Present and Future

If you have any questions about this survey,
Please contact Dr. Rob Hewell at
hewellr@obu.edu

This survey is a part of research conducted by a student at Ouachita Baptist University for an Honors Thesis. The survey creator has no affiliation with your church, and any information provided will be handled in an anonymous and confidential manner. The survey should only take about five minutes to complete and hopefully the information gathered will be beneficial for practical application to many churches. Thank you for taking the time to participate!

The survey consists of three sections asking you to describe the environments of the church you attended while you were a child, the church you attend now, and your ideal church. Please give your answers using the following scale:

1	2	3	4	5
never	rarely	sometimes	frequently	always

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and you are not obligated to submit your information. Should you have any questions about the survey or wish to know of the results, please contact Dr. Hewell.

I have read and understand this document and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered. I agree to participate in the study described above.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Age: _____

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

Race/Ethnicity: ___ African-American/Black ___ Asian ___ Caucasian/White ___ Hispanic/Latino/a

___ Native American ___ Bi-Racial or Multi-Racial ___ Other

Note: for the purpose of this survey, *worship style* is defined as the collective worship expressions of the local church body, including but not limited to music, as presented during the primary weekly gathering of believers.

Childhood Church Environment

Circle Best Answer

Describe the church(s) you attended as a child. If you did not grow up attending church regularly, you may leave this section blank.

never rarely sometimes frequently always

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How often was worship expressed in your preferred worship style? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. How often was worship expressed in multiple worship styles? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. How often was worship style targeted at a specific generational group? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. How often were painted/crafted works used in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. How often were images, other than text, projected onto a wall or screen during a service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. How often was dance employed in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. How often was drama employed in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. How often were multiple generations of people involved in the preparation for worship services? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. How often were multiple generations of people involved in the leadership of worship services? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. How often did children/youth attend the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. How often were children/youth involved in the planning the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. How often were children/youth involved in leading the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. How often were adults of retirement age or older involved in children's/youth ministry? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. How often were programs to support spiritual growth targeted at specific generational groups? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

15. Which of these factors influenced your decision to attend this church? Circle all that apply:

- family friends co-workers neighbors website invitation advertisement*
worship style(s) service times location cultural background(s) denomination staff
children's ministries youth ministries community ministries discipleship

Current Church Environment

Circle Best Answer

Describe the church that you currently attend.

never rarely sometimes frequently always

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 16. How often is worship expressed in your preferred worship style? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. How often is worship expressed in multiple worship styles? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. How often is worship style targeted at a specific generational group? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. How often are painted/crafted works used in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. How often are images, other than text, projected onto a wall or screen during a service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. How often is dance employed in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. How often is drama employed in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. How often are multiple generations of people involved in the preparation for worship services? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. How often are multiple generations of people involved in the leadership of worship services? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. How often do children/youth attend the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. How often are children/youth involved in planning the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. How often are children/youth involved in leading the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. How often are adults of retirement age or older involved in children's/youth ministry? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. How often are programs to support spiritual growth targeted at specific generational groups? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

30. Which of these factors have influenced your decision to attend this church? Circle all that apply:

- family friends co-workers neighbors website invitation advertisement*
worship style(s) service times location cultural background(s) denomination staff
children's ministries youth ministries community ministries discipleship

Ideal Church Environment

Circle Best Answer

If you were in leadership, or if you could pick a church that had all of the ideal characteristics that you look for in a body of believers, what would church be like?

never rarely sometimes frequently always

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31. How often would worship be expressed in your preferred worship style? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. How often would worship be expressed in multiple worship styles? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. How often would worship style be targeted at a specific generational group? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. How often would painted/crafted works be used in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. How often would images, other than text, be projected onto a wall or screen during a service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. How often would dance be employed in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. How often would drama be employed in worship? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. How often would multiple generations of people be involved in the preparation for worship services? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. How often would multiple generations of people be involved in the leadership of worship services? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 40. How often would children/youth attend the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 41. How often would children/youth be involved in planning the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 42. How often would children/youth be involved in leading the main service? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 43. How often would adults of retirement age or older be involved in children's/youth ministry? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 44. How often would programs to support spiritual growth be targeted at specific generational groups? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

45. Which factors might influence others people's decisions to attend this church? Circle all that apply:

- family friends co-workers neighbors website invitation advertisement*
worship style(s) service times location cultural background(s) denomination staff
children's ministries youth ministries community ministries discipleship

Thank you for your participation!

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” – Colossians 3:15-17

VIII. Survey Data and Analysis

The survey data that I analyzed is made of 137 individual responses from college students ages 18-27 (the majority were 18-22) enrolled at Ouachita Baptist University, in Arkadelphia Arkansas. Of these students, 72 were male and 65 were female so I felt like I had a pretty even balance between the two potentially different perspectives. Due to the fact that 95% of the group I was surveying self-identified as “Caucasian/White” my data only reflects the views of Arkansan college students from that particular cultural background.

Before conducting the survey analysis I had two questions I desired to find answers to: 1) Is the church environment a person was raised in a predictor for the church environment they will prefer as an adult? 2) Which is more likely to influence an adult Christian’s choice in churches, cultural preferences or relationships? As an academic researcher it is important to stay impartial to your questions and do your best to avoid biasing your evidence, so I prepared myself to accept and learn from the results I had received.

The answer to my first question surprised me. According to the survey data (Table 1: Correlations Between Worship Environments), an individual’s church ideals correlated more closely to their current church environment than to the one they were raised in. Acknowledging that this data comes from relatively young adults, some of whom have only recently been given the freedom to make their own choices, this result raises other questions that may require further research to answer. The two possible explanations that I can provide for this result are that either a) the church environment an individual is currently in has an equal effect on their ideals as previous environments or b) these subjects had formed their ideals while they were still in their childhood churches and simply acted upon them when the time came to choose a current church home. My data is insufficient to draw further conclusions in regards to this question.

Table 1: Correlations Between Worship Environments

		ChildhoodEnv	CurrentEnv	Ideal
ChildhoodEnv	Pearson Correlation	1	.195*	.256**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.025	.003
	N	132	131	131
CurrentEnv	Pearson Correlation	.195*	1	.379**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.025		.000
	N	131	136	135
Ideal	Pearson Correlation	.256**	.379**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.000	
	N	131	135	136

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In order to evaluate the importance of relational and cultural factors, I had provided subjects with the opportunity to select from a list of factors that either had or would influence their church attendance. I then chose to only focus on factors from the Current and Ideal portions of the survey because the overwhelming majority of my responders that attended a church as a child indicated that they went with their family (approximately 95%). Of the remaining factors for analysis there were many that did not seem to be important to my survey takers when it came to choosing a church home. The two factors I was most interested in were Friends and Worship Style and I used the data from these two variables as well as the other two variables that received a positive response of more than 80% to evaluate whether relationships or cultural preferences were more important to Christians (Table 2: Comparison of Significant Factors Between Worship Environments). According to those surveyed, in both current and ideal church situations Friends were at least 20% more likely than Worship Style to influence an individual's decision to attend a church. After finding that the other two high frequency results were relationally based (Family and Discipleship), I believe that these results are sufficient enough to support my theory that relationships are more important to Christians than cultural preferences in worship.

Table 2: Comparison of Significant Factors Between Worship Environments

Current Church Environment

Ideal Church Environment

Family

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no	99	72.8
	yes	37	27.2
	Total	136	100.0

Family

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no	25	18.4
	yes	111	81.6
	Total	136	100.0

Friends

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no	26	19.1
	yes	110	80.9
	Total	136	100.0

Friends

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no	16	11.8
	yes	120	88.2
	Total	136	100.0

Worship Style

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no	55	40.4
	yes	81	59.6
	Total	136	100.0

Worship Style

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no	44	32.4
	yes	92	67.6
	Total	136	100.0

Discipleship

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no	86	63.2
	yes	50	36.8
	Total	136	100.0

Discipleship

		Frequency	Valid Percent
Valid	no	22	16.2
	yes	114	83.8
	Total	136	100.0

IX. Suggestions for the Church

While some of the results of my survey contradicted my original thoughts, they are still useful in formulating ideas for the health of the Church. While I would prefer to conduct the survey again with a more diverse and broader sample size, I must work with what I have. Given the information that I have gathered from these 137 college students (in addition to what I learned about the subject while preparing the survey) I have formed some further thoughts concerning intergenerational worship environments.

First, the survey data indicates that just because someone was raised in a particular environment it does not indicate that they will perpetuate it. The positive implication for this is that people can embrace change, if they are convinced that it is for the better. Applied to intergenerational worship, this means that someone raised in an environment that is **limited in its** approach to worship can accept and promote a broader view of worship, given an **appropriate** opportunity to learn and become accustomed to cultural differences. In light of this, **my first** suggestion to the Church would be to *intentionally promote and explore biblical worship as a community*. If the majority of a congregation is seeking together to better understand **worship** and in the process they discover ways in which their worship can become more biblical, **then I** believe that they will be more likely to embrace changes in worship than if they are **simply told** to blindly accept what their leaders are doing.

The survey data also indicates that relational factors were more important to **the young** Christians surveyed than cultural ones. This is a good sign as it may indicate a **reform in an** American Church that has been suffering from individualism and consumerism. **However, it is** important to remember that healthy relationships and cultural balance are both **qualities of a** well-functioning Church body and an over-emphasis on either characteristic (to the **neglect of the**

other) could have potentially disastrous effects. We need each other. A congregation without discipleship and supporting/mentoring relationships could have wonderfully culturally conscious and theologically solid worship services and still fall short of growing its members. The same would happen for a congregation that has a strong internal network of relationships but fails to be biblically accurate in its services. *Healthy community, theological quality and cultural diversity need to be equally celebrated and pursued* as a part of a healthy congregation. While these are not the only qualities visible in the Church, they are undoubtedly important.

I would also like to mention that the presence of multiple generations in worship does not mean that the worship can be considered intergenerational. Just as people from various nationalities may worship together in the same church, but under the practices preferred by a dominant cultural group, the same thing happens generationally. As I interpret the writings of C. Michael Hawn, *intergenerational worship occurs when Christians from every generation have an equal amount of influence and involvement in service planning*. Howard Vanderwell says that “when a worshipping congregation considers all ages equally important, listens to the needs of all, engages all, and brings them all into an encounter with God, it will be successfully intergenerational.”⁹

Finally, I think many of the problems seen in the Church related to intergenerational worship can be traced back to the idea that humans are fundamentally comfortable with what they know and afraid of what they do not. When a local body of believers moves beyond its congregational comfort zone and expands its cultural perspective in worship (based on factors such as age, race, or geographical location), it gains a new way of looking at the Christian life and ideally that church’s witness will expand in the eyes of the world as it may be able to display

⁹ Howard Vanderwell, ed, *The Church of All Ages: Generations Worshipping Together*, (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008), 12.

more aspects of God in its worship. **How can this be done?** I believe that **change starts at a personal level** before affecting an **organization**, and that **Christians must make an effort to understand the perspectives of other people**, particularly those from different cultural backgrounds.

This does not mean that an individual **must abandon** their preferences or traditions to become someone that they are not. That **would defeat the entire purpose of diversity**; **God made each person and people group different for a reason**. **Instead**, I propose that each Christian **ask** these questions when they are worshipping **communally**: ***How does this form of worship glorify and reflect God? How does this form of worship grow and encourage my brother or sister in Christ?*** When someone can find the **answers to these questions** in a form of worship that they formerly were uncomfortable with, then **they are on their way** towards worshipping intergenerationally.

X. Bibliography

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