ABSTRACT

THE FUTURE OF THE MEGACHURCH: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE PLACE FOR BABY BOOMERS

by Amber M. Cable

As Baby Boomers grow older in the innovative and youth-focused megachurches they largely helped build, questions arise regarding their futures and roles within megachurches. Using the sensitizing framework of age integration, this exploratory study sought to uncover the status of age integration in one megachurch and the implications thereof on the future of Boomers and the church. It is a first step toward addressing the lack of empirical research detailing the state of age integration or the success of age integration initiatives in various organizations. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews with nine participants were augmented by limited participant observation and analysis of documents, media, and quantitative secondary survey data. Analysis utilized a grounded theory approach to transforming data that yielded two approaches to community building: categorically and values based communities/environments. Values based approaches were shown to offer greater opportunity for age integration than categorical approaches, which tend to lead to age segregation.
THE FUTURE OF THE MEGACHURCH: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE PLACE FOR BABY BOOMERS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................................... IV
LIST OF FIGURES ..................................................................................................................... V
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... VI
CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM ..................................................................... 1
CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND ............................................................................................... 2
  I. History and Current Status ............................................................................................... 2
  II. Age Integration as a Sensitizing Framework .................................................................. 5
  III. Purpose/Research Questions ........................................................................................ 8
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS ................................................................................................. 9
  I. Methodological Approach ............................................................................................... 9
  II. Data Collection Methods .............................................................................................. 10
  III. Analytical Strategy ....................................................................................................... 13
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .................................................................................................. 15
  I. Megachurch Profile ....................................................................................................... 15
  II. Current Status and Anticipated Future .......................................................................... 19
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION ............................................................................................... 53
APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE ...................................................................................... 60
REFERENCES .......................................................................................................................... 61
LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. GUIDE TO INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS .................................................................12
LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1. LENGTH OF ATTENDANCE BY AGE GROUP .................................................. 16

FIGURE 2. FREQUENCY OF VOLUNTEERING BY AGE ............................................. 17

FIGURE 3. INVOLVEMENT IN SELECTED ENVIRONMENTS .................................... 18

FIGURE 4. THEMATIC CATEGORIES AND THEMES .................................................. 21

FIGURE 5. OUTCOMES OF CATEGORICALLY BASED COMMUNITIES/ENVIRONMENTS .................................................................................................................. 39

FIGURE 6. OUTCOMES OF VALUES BASED APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY ........ 46
Acknowledgements

To allow the reader to plow forward through the following pages, taking this project at face value for its contributions to both megachurches and gerontological knowledge would be a failure on my part as the author. Indeed, there are many to whom I am thoroughly indebted for what they have added to the completion of this project.

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Thank you all.
Chapter One: Statement of the Problem

By their very structure, churches in America have the capacity to serve an age integrative role in society: that is, to be a place where people of all ages can gather, interact, and relate to one another and where structural age barriers do not define participation in the group (Uhlenberg, 2000; Riley & Riley, 2000). Churches are organizations where individuals, couples, families, and friends come together primarily on the basis of a shared religious value, but they are also the setting for a vast array of community programs, social services, and educational and physical development (Thumma & Travis, 2007). There are few other institutions or organizations with the ability to integrate in this manner; historically, the family has been the site of ready-made age integration, but this reality has changed as households have become less multi-generational and more age homogenous in post-industrial Western society (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005). Indeed, societal structures and institutions, most aptly depicted in the tripartite life course of education, work, and leisure (Riley & Riley, 1994; Riley & Riley, 2000; Kohli, 2000) promote age segregation, or the use of chronological age as an eligibility criterion for participation in an institution, creating the absence of interaction across age groups (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005; Uhlenberg & de Jong Gierveld, 2004).

Over the past several decades, megachurches, defined as Protestant churches with over 2,000 attendees per week, have grown exponentially in the United States, from approximately 50 such churches in 1970 to 1,300 in 2009 (Thumma & Travis, 2007; Thumma & Bird, 2009). These churches stand in contrast to other Protestant churches in that their age demographic is significantly younger (Thumma & Bird, 2009). While there are several forms of megachurches that target varying audiences, they tend to be youth based or family oriented (Thumma & Travis, 2007). One form focuses on ways to connect with and engage people who have had very little recent involvement or exposure to a church (Thumma & Travis, 2007). This type, dubbed a “seeker” megachurch, grew rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s by primarily targeting Baby Boomers through a message that fit their suburban, middle-class, post-Christian culture (e.g. a culture that does not assume a basic knowledge of Christianity) (Thumma & Travis, 2007; Watson & Scalen, 2011). Boomers, defined as individuals born between 1946 and 1964, who were starting families and raising children at the time, swelled the rolls of these churches. However, one of the main characteristics of megachurches is that they almost always consist of more young people than older people; while they originally targeted Boomers, their innovation and a quick adoption of
new technologies is attractive to younger generations as well (Thumma & Travis, 2007). The age demographics of megachurches stand in contrast to traditional Protestant churches in that 62% of megachurch attendees are under age 45 whereas only 35% of traditional Protestant attendees are in this age group (Thumma & Bird, 2009).

There is a void in our knowledge regarding age integration and the future of Boomers in megachurches as they begin to enter old age. Social changes leading to greater age integration are starting to emerge (Riley & Riley, 2000) and megachurches have the potential to leverage their innovation in this regard as well. Researchers have yet to determine whether these churches that have attracted both Boomers and younger generations will develop a unique age integrated structure or follow the course of other institutions by segregating individuals based on chronological age. This study explored the phenomenon of age integration or segregation in megachurches by asking: (1) What is the status of age integration in one seeker megachurch? (2) What type of future might be anticipated based on the current state of age integration and the attitudes and expectations of church leaders and members in this megachurch? The findings of this study may help megachurch leaders as they assess and address aging and age integration within their churches and will certainly inform future gerontological research by laying the groundwork for other inquiry into the roles megachurches and other religious institutions may play in the future of age integration in America.

Chapter Two: Background

I. History and Current Status

A. Profile

Megachurches are not entirely new in America; in fact, very large churches with multiple programs have been identified as far back as 1900 (Thumma & Travis, 2007; Chaves, 2005). However, the growth of very large churches in the U.S. can be attributed to the Baby Boom generation that forced expansion of virtually every social institution (e.g. education, housing/suburbanization, recreation) (Watson & Scalen, 2011). Thus, the emergence of new churches geared toward Baby Boomers in the 1980s and 1990s is no surprise. From 1980 to 2000, the period during which many Boomers were in early- to mid-adulthood and raising families, the number of megachurches in America increased from 150 to 600 and has more than doubled since, with over 1,300 such churches to date (Thumma & Travis, 2007; Thumma &
There is currently more than one megachurch per every 250,000 people in America (Thumma & Travis, 2007).

The relatively arbitrary criterion of 2,000+ weekly attendees downplays the other defining characteristics of megachurches and masks some of the differentiation between them. However, the numbers are important: over half of all megachurches have between 2,000-2,999 attendees, approximately one-third have 3,000-4,999 attendees, twelve percent have 5,000-9,999 attendees, and just four percent have over 10,000 attendees (Thumma & Davis, 2007). Of the ten largest megachurches in America, the smallest had 15,000 weekend attendees and the largest had 43,500 (Watson & Scalen, 2011). Nearly twelve million people call a megachurch their ‘home church,’ thus encompassing about ten percent of all church-goers in America (Thumma & Davis, 2007).

Megachurches are overwhelmingly emphasized as being youth-centric with a focus on families, young adults, and children, and description of an older demographic is conspicuously missing (Thumma & Travis, 2007; Watson & Scalen, 2011). Thumma and Bird (2009), two of the most renowned megachurch researchers, even make a point to describe megachurches as “not just a Boomer phenomenon” and proceed to describe that nearly two-thirds of megachurch attendees are under 45 years old; their statement indeed upholds this persistent youth-focus, but their statistics also uphold the fact that Boomers (who are 48-67 years old today) make up one-third of megachurch attendees and older individuals represent seven percent of attendees.

Megachurches have a presence across the United States, but differences do exist in their regional distribution. Bird and Thumma (2011), conducted the most recent survey of America’s largest churches and reported that the majority of megachurches (47%) are found in the south. North-central states are home to 27% of megachurches, with the west and north-east claiming 21% and 5%, respectively.

B. Culture

Not all megachurches are alike, but megachurches often have more in common with one another geographically, demographically, architecturally, and in their organizational structure than they do with smaller churches in their own denominations (Watson & Scalen, 2011). In fact, even though over two-thirds are denominationally affiliated, many do not emphasize those affiliations (Thumma & Travis, 2007). Geographically, Karnes, McIntosh, Morris, & Pearson-
Merkowitz (2007) found that both population and urbanization are strongly, positively associated with megachurch location; approximately seventy-five percent of megachurches are located in the suburbs of large metropolitan areas (Thumma & Travis, 2007). Demographically, these churches are found in communities with highly educated, wealthy populations (Karnes, McIntosh, Morris, & Pearson-Merkowitz, 2007). The relationship between regional or suburban location of megachurches and age demographics is difficult to generalize about: the Urban Institute’s (2013) “Data Dashboard” that analyzes 2010 U.S. Decennial Census and 2007-2011 American Community Survey data show vast differences in population age dynamics across metropolitan communities. Architecturally, it has been suggested that megachurches embrace the modern consumerist ideology, reflected in their architectural designs complete with cafés, book stores, skate parks, etc. Regarding organizational structure, they have shifted from the traditional hierarchical church leadership structures to leadership teams, and they use media-based technology and marketing that include cellular applications, Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and podcasts (Watson & Scalen, 2011; Thumma & Travis, 2007).

It is not surprising that megachurches are viewed as innovators that largely mirror the consumer culture in which they exist. Choice is a central premise of American megachurches and several market themselves as offering ‘something for everyone’ (Watson & Scalen, 2011). Megachurches offer the choice of several service times and worship styles as well as the option of whether to attend one of multiple physical campuses or to simply participate online (Thumma & Travis, 2007; Watson & Scalen, 2011). These churches use a business model marketing approach that asks “What do people want? What do they like? What keeps them coming back?” in a manner that focuses on the ever-changing youth culture (Watson & Scalen, 2011, p. 2). As Baby Boomers age, the question as to whether megachurches will adapt their marketing to include what is culturally relevant to Boomers arises. We must also ask whether the absence of adaptation will cause Boomers to withdraw from megachurch participation or if adding such adaptations might attract new Boomers.

C. Resources and Influence

Size is also important because it has implications about resources. The largest one percent of churches in America contain over fifteen percent of church attendees, finances, and staff while the largest twenty percent of churches boast over sixty-five percent of all church resources
(Chaves, 2004). The technological savvy, consumer culture orientation, and sheer wealth of megachurches puts them in a unique position to influence all aspects—social, economic, and political—of the communities of which they are a part (Karnes, et al., 2007). They are highly likely to engage in and develop social justice initiatives such as starting transitional apartment complexes, developing learning centers, and providing health care services (Thumma & Travis, 2007). Additionally, the leaders of many of these megachurches are well-known with far reaching influence beyond their own congregations and religious affiliations (Watson & Scalen, 2011): Rick Warren, pastor of one of the largest churches in America, is also a widely recognizable popular speaker and a New York Times best selling author; he also hosted a forum with both presidential candidates during the 2008 campaign.

II. Age Integration as a Sensitizing Framework

At the end of the twentieth century, the ratio of children under age 18 to adults over age 65 was two-to-one, but as Boomers reach old age the ratio will be nearly equal, with 1.2 older adults per child (Uhlenberg, 2000). In *The Asymmetric Society*, Coleman (1982) advocates for “age balanced organizations” that reflect the greater society they are a part of; Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005) build on this by suggesting that age integration within any type of organization (e.g. church, school), location (e.g. household, neighborhood), or program (e.g. social welfare, protective services) will facilitate the development of this age balanced society. Hagestad’s and Uhlenberg’s (2005) renewed call for movement toward age integration is compelling because it counters age segregation, which “blocks opportunities for individuals to meet, interact, and move beyond ‘us versus them’ distinctions” (p. 349). Currently, not only is the tripartite lifecourse of education, work, and leisure age stratified, but many other facets of social life are age segregated as well, including nursing homes and retirement communities, youth recreation leagues, college dormitories, senior centers and tour groups, church programs, welfare policies and programs, specialized doctors and therapists, restricted social clubs, and entertainment, among others (Uhlenberg & de Jong Gierveld, 2004; Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005).

As organizations with a roughly two-to-one ratio of younger people to older adults, megachurches provide an environment ripe for age integrative innovation (Thumma & Bird, 2009); a shared value (i.e. religion) has brought individuals across the age spectrum together and sets the stage for age integrative opportunities. Much theorization and speculation regarding the
possible development of age integration in various societal environments and institutions has been done and will be outlined below. However, empirical research detailing the state of age integration or the success of age integration initiatives has not been undertaken; indeed, examples of age integrated environments are lacking as well. It can also be presumed that elements of age integration will differ across organizations and environments due to differences in mission, values, operating principles, etc., although this has not yet been explored. In megachurches, for example, the evangelical concept of spiritual maturity may interact with conceptions about age and, in turn, influence how or whether age integration develops in megachurch environments. The purpose of this study was to uncover the status of age integration in one megachurch and explore how age integrative initiatives (or the lack thereof) may influence the future of the organization and the individuals who take part in it.

A. Why Age Integration Matters

Age integration offers an opportunity for institutions and organizations to adapt to changing societal age structures. Age integration scholars point to the potential for churches to become age balanced organizations (Uhlenberg, 2000). They recognize, however, that while many churches have a diverse representation of age groups, they often segregate based on those age groups through offerings of nursery, youth, young adult, and senior citizen programs (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005; Thumma & Travis, 2007). Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005) also suggest that an increase in age integration that helps individuals develop age-diverse social networks will help break down ageism—a belief or behavior evoked due to another’s (or group’s) chronological age—and create environments of mutual benefit from intergenerational interaction (Levy & Banaji, 2002). Here, ageism relates to individual, or micro level, interactions. Ageism is related to age segregation, with age segregation focusing on the macro level (e.g. larger social units, whole societies). Age segregation creates structural separation between individuals based on age and becomes institutionalized “when the principles and norms that define a social institution include chronological age as an eligibility criterion for participation” (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005, p. 346).

Although a plethora of age segregated environments can be quickly identified, a similar list of age integrated settings is much more difficult to generate. Even current examples of age integration and intergenerational programs—lifelong learning at universities, the Foster
Grandparent Program, the Adopt a Grandparent Program, Retired Seniors Volunteer Program, retired executives groups for counseling small businesses, etc.—retain an element of separateness in that interactions are specified around age: older adults attend courses separate from traditional students, groups of older adults volunteer together throughout the community, etc. (Riley & Riley, 2000; Uhlenberg, 2000). What is needed, then, are “spaces where young, middle-aged and older people from all walks of life can get to know each other enough to build mutual respect, develop cooperative relationships, and reignite the norm of human-heartedness” (Braithwaite, 2002, p. 332).

Current literature defines age integration in terms of its opposite: age segregation. Although these are helpful in understanding what age integration is not, such conceptualizations are clearly lacking. It appears that an attempt at defining age integration has not been undertaken. Thus, the working definition of age integration to be used in this study is that age integration goes beyond simply bringing individuals of different ages together in a common space, organization, or environment—in doing so, two there are two further requirements: (1) age is not disregarded as irrelevant but is acknowledged for its environment/relationship specific role and (2) relationship, community, or camaraderie (that includes a sense of knowing and being known) is formed between people of different ages.

**B. Benefits and Costs of Age Integration**

Age integration has the potential to increase productive engagement in society and promote civility (Uhlenberg, 2000). For older adults, breaking down barriers of age segregation and creating age norms that value their continued contributions may help them maintain community involvement while filling real societal needs (e.g. increased need for caregivers) (Uhlenberg, 1996). Similarly, increased interaction between youth and older adults may create opportunities for mutual learning and the exchange of information (such as giving advice or learning to use various technologies) (Riley & Riley, 2000; Uhlenberg, 2000; Uhlenberg & de Jong Gierveld, 2004).

Simply calling for an increase in interaction between generations may not always produce positive results. It is quite possible that social interactions may serve as negative reinforcements of ageist stereotypes (Uhlenberg, 2000). Riley and Riley (2000) also point to the fact that some people prefer social networks made up of age peers, and research on lifelong learning institutes
shows that older adults primarily engage in these environments for the camaraderie with fellow students, the ability to make new friends with shared interests, and to develop a support group when going through difficult transitions in one’s personal life (Manheimer, 2008; Formosa, 2009). Thus, changing norms that create the expectation for older adults to engage with younger people may negatively impact both groups, particularly through the potential loss of other valued relationships or environments.

Bringing individuals together based on shared interests to work toward a common goal or purpose may promote friendships and counter ageism (Uhlenberg, 2000). Riley (1998) highlights that relationship building across generations can encourage societal participation, develop shared responsibility, and protect heritage. Foner (2000) even suggests inequalities based on age segregation (e.g. policies, societal) are the basis of age conflicts and that integration will offset the potential for age conflicts. Although there is little empirical research on the outcomes of age integration, research regarding intergenerational programs and households including grandparents and grandchildren have shown benefits for both older and younger people; co-residing was associated with better adolescent well-being and intergenerational programs have been shown to benefit both the older adults and younger people involved in such programs (Uhlenberg, 2000). Additionally, it is posited that aging Baby Boomers will scorn programs and organizations explicitly identified for older people (e.g. lifelong learning institutes) and will prefer age integrated and age-neutral settings (Manheimer, 2009). Age integrated interactions between people of different ages appear to have the potential to create greater benefits to society than costs.

III. Purpose/Research Questions

Megachurches have grown to prominence as Baby Boomers have moved through the middle portion of life. As Boomers enter the later portions of life over the next ten to fifteen years, their relationships to megachurches are likely to change as well. The youth focus of these churches and their continual adaptation to youth culture has been established. Thus, many questions regarding Baby Boomers in megachurches remain; the future place for Baby Boomers in megachurches is unclear. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of Boomers’ experiences in relation to megachurches using the sensitizing framework of age integration. A multi-method approach was used to describe the current status and potential future
of Boomers in one megachurch that has historically been oriented toward Boomers who don’t come from a church background. Because little is known about this issue, this study also sought to explore a new realm of inquiry and identify salient characteristics to lay the groundwork for future projects.

The research focused on two central questions: (1) What is the status of age integration in this megachurch? (2) What type of future might be anticipated based on the current state of age integration in this megachurch? Sub-questions that guided the research include: (1) Is the megachurch thinking forward to the potential graying of the congregation? (2) How might (or does) the megachurch adapt its strategies in light of Boomer aging? (3) What is the impact of the church’s engagement with Baby Boomers on all generations of the church? (4) Does the megachurch plan to harness the skills and passions of Boomers to further engage other Boomers within their communities? (5) How are age segregation and/or integration evidenced in the megachurch culture?

Chapter Three: Methods

I. Methodological Approach

The exploratory objective of this study called for a qualitative approach, using multiple methods; this was augmented by limited quantitative data collected by the church on a bi-annual basis in the form of an all church survey of attendees on a given weekend. Qualitative methods were appropriate for answering the proposed research question because they concern study within a natural setting with the goal of interpreting phenomena through the experiences and meanings of individuals and groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This qualitative research was largely influenced by ethnographic approaches that explored a phenomenon and culture about which little is known (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Ethnography has often been used in other studies that examined meaning and context of a phenomenon from the point of view of those involved (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990). It provides the ability to uncover and describe the attitudes, language, and behaviors of culture-sharing organizations (Creswell, 2007). The study explored the experiences of a community or culture (the megachurch) but did not involve sustained researcher engagement in the community common to ethnographic studies. Semi-structured interviews comprised the central method of data gathering, augmented by
document and media analysis; analysis of secondary survey data; and limited participant observation.

As the purpose of this research was to intensively explore and describe the attitudes and expectations of several groups within the megachurch, the multi-method design was well suited to understanding the current and future relationship between Boomers and megachurches. The unit of analysis for this design was the megachurch, and I chose for my sample one megachurch oriented toward people who do not come from a church background; selecting a megachurch with this characteristic was due to the fact that this form of megachurch largely ‘grew up’ with the Boomer population. Data collection included semi-structured interviews with nine participants comprising of staff and attendees, including older adults born before 1946, Baby Boomers (b. 1946-64), Generation X (b. 1965-76), and Millennials (b. 1977-92); collection of print, web, and audio-visual media produced by the megachurch; and participant observation (Zickuhr, 2010; Creswell, 2007). These qualitative data were augmented with quantitative survey data from the most recent bi-annual survey of attendees conducted by the church.

II. Data Collection Methods

**Interviews.** This inquiry was focused on attitudes and expectations, and for this reason, data collection was interview focused. Entry into the research site was first made through pastoral staff; megachurches typically have several pastoral staff who lead and oversee specific areas (e.g. community, children, outreach). As such, initial contact was made through the administrative office to a few pastoral staff (and their assistants) with roles that might be pertinent to the study. The pastoral respondent who agreed to meet oversees discipleship at the church and also serves on a mid-level leadership team. He subsequently become the point person and gatekeeper for the project, helping shape initial interviewee contacts and ongoing recruitment needs.

In initial interviews with key staff, participants readily suggested members, attendees, or volunteers as appropriate interviewees. From that phase, a combination of snowball and theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was used to determine which staff and attendees to include as the study progressed. Among these groups (staff and attendees), I originally planned to obtain a sample that reflected the ratio of men to women in megachurches, with a sample that is 40% male and 60% female (Thumma & Bird, 2009); the final sample included
interviews with four men and five women. In the earliest interviews, participants were interviewed twice; this was done for one male and two female participants. As data collection proceeded, the majority of interviewees participated in a single interview made possible by a very open introductory question as well as data from a participant information form that provided a quick, direct point of entry to pertinent topics. The nature of the sampling process influenced the sample, primarily in that it yielded a respondent pool of highly involved individuals; none of the respondents simply “attended” worship services but all volunteered or worked with a church program in some capacity. Table 1 is a respondent reference guide (using pseudonyms) for interviewee responses and quotes throughout the text.
Table 1. Guide to Interview Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age/Generation</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Time at Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>24/Millennial</td>
<td>attendee; student ministry volunteer</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>30/Millennial</td>
<td>member; student ministry volunteer</td>
<td>7.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>56/Boomer</td>
<td>member; pastoral staff</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>53/Boomer</td>
<td>member; community building &amp; prayer staff</td>
<td>28 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>70/Older than Boomer</td>
<td>attendee; student ministry &amp; spiritual development volunteer</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>45/Generation X</td>
<td>member; social service center staff</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
<td>74/Older than Boomer</td>
<td>member; social service center volunteer</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>36/Generation X</td>
<td>member; student ministry staff</td>
<td>6.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>65/Boomer</td>
<td>attendee; social service center volunteer</td>
<td>12 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A semi-structured interview strategy, with the potential for utilizing a multiple interview sequence, was used, following traditional ethnographic methods (Wolcott, 2008). The rationale for this method is that it is used to distill those who are knowledgeable and experienced in the topic of inquiry from the site population as a whole. Interviews took place at the megachurch, another public venue where the informant felt comfortable, in the respondent’s home, or over the phone. Interviews generally lasted for 45 minutes to one hour, with the majority of interviewees eager to share about their experiences and answer questions in a forthright manner, although one interviewee was more reserved and a few sought to be judicious in their choice of words.

The first interview (See Appendix A: Interview Guide) with each informant followed the same basic semi-structured format regardless of informant category (staff/attendee and generation). Background demographic information and background information about the informant’s experience with the church were obtained. Among those interviewees who had
single interviews, additional questions emerged according to interviewee responses and roles at the church. Questions remained centrally focused on individuals’ current experiences and involvement, satisfaction with/barriers to their involvement, how the age demographics of the church influence their involvement, and what they imagine the church to be like in the future. The majority of interview questions did not explicitly mention age but rather focused on individuals’ relationships to and within the church. When interviewees talked specifically about age or generation, follow up questions did refer directly to age related concepts in order to thoroughly explore interviewee perspectives. In general, the format and types of follow up questions varied based on topics that arose throughout the interview (and during the first interview, for those interviewed twice); for example, a second interview with a staff person included “If this new program will roll out at all levels, through the fabric of the entire church, how will that be done? Who (if anyone) might be unintentionally excluded? How do you imagine this might play out generationally?”

**Other data collection methods.** Other methods included participant observation and documents and media. Participant observation was largely used as a means of orientation to the megachurch, events, and environments that might be pertinent to the research question. Participation in one Sunday service at the outset of the data collection process provided context for other media viewed online. Media documents (totaling 11 items) included a quarterly events booklet, a video announcement, and online advertisements/web content; these were collected when the researcher was on site at the church during services, at the social service center, and meeting with interviewees. They were comprised of documents meant to orient individuals to the church, services, or volunteer opportunities, as well as current events; thus, some were regularly available while others were time sensitive. Documents were also collected through periodic examination of the website and were similar to the printed material in nature. Additionally, exposure to weekday environments at the church’s social service center in the interview context provided experiential data collected through field notes and memoing, a process in which researchers write down notes during data collection and analysis about preliminary ideas and evolving theory (Creswell, 2007). Memos, field notes, and media were subsequently coded and analyzed for themes by applying the coding process used for interview analysis.

**III. Analytical Strategy**
As has previously been stated, this qualitative study relied heavily on semi-structured interviews. The overarching analytical strategy to be used in this study was Wolcott’s (1994) concept of transforming data, a process that includes description, analysis, and interpretation. Following Wolcott (1994), description is the process in which data speak for themselves, analysis refers to a process of systematic attention to key factors and relationships in the data that focuses on searching for themes and patterns, and interpretation is the process by which the researcher offers an interpretation of what is going on in the phenomenon under study. It is during the stage of interpretation that the researcher makes something of the factual data and cautious analysis engaged in earlier in the transformation process.

Wolcott (2008) has described ethnography as a way of experiencing, enquiring, and examining. The data collection methods used in this study (participant observation, interviewing, and analysis of documents and media) can be roughly correlated to the ‘three e’s’ of ethnography, respectively. Thus, the three forms of data collected in this study were analyzed using Wolcott’s transformation approach to develop representation of the phenomenon. Key informant interviewing relied on a few participants as major sources of information that were collected via an open-ended interview structure (Wolcott, 2008). Using the Wolcott (1994) transformation approach and Strauss and Corbin’s grounded theory approach (2008), analysis of transcribed interviews focused on coding for concepts, themes, and engaging in constant comparison across interview transcripts to uncover salient characteristics. Coding, here, means creating categories of analyzable units from the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). This process was also applied to field notes, memos, and documents and media.

All interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for appropriate themes. The analysis of the interview texts followed the layered and phased approach of Corbin and Strauss (2008) beginning with open coding and moving toward a selective coding process as the analysis progressed. The codes for interview analysis were constructed through a line by line coding process; the language used by interviewees, for example “go and do,” often so embodied a characteristic as to become the code itself. As subsequent interviews were coded, the codes were applied, adapted, combined, or added to in order to accommodate emerging ideas within the coding framework. Once several interviews had been coded, the need to divide codes based on their application arose. Each code appeared to apply to either individuals or the organization and to one of each of the following categories: organizational understanding, action,
demographic, attitudes/values, and dynamics/experience. The codes were divided into these groupings with some codes finding application in more than one category. As analysis continued, themes emerged as codes were combined and elaborated to express a broader idea.

Chapter Four: Findings

I. Megachurch Profile

Due to the fact that the broad definition of a megachurch is simply that it be a Protestant church with over 2,000 weekly attendees, some further description of the megachurch at the center of this study is warranted. City Focus Church (CFC) (this pseudonym will be used throughout the text) has nearly 6,000 weekly attendees across several sites in one city and its surrounding areas. The U.S. Census Bureau (2013) estimated that the population of this metropolitan area to be just over two million people in 2012. The main campus of the church is located in a suburb of the city on a vast tract of land surrounded by commercial developments and neighborhoods. This site includes the main church building, staff offices, a student ministry building, and the social service center. Additionally, the church uses a multi-site approach intended to attract individuals within their own communities. These additional sites currently are smaller gatherings in two suburban communities and one neighborhood within the city. Each site has a local pastor and worship team, but weekend messages are broadcast from the main campus.

CFC conducts a church-wide survey every other year to collect both demographic information as well as responses to areas of current interest to the church leadership. At all services on one weekend, everyone who attends is asked to participate in the optional survey; this method of data collection largely excludes those high school aged and younger, as they do not typically participate in the larger services but are involved in other environments (e.g. student ministry, children’s church) during weekend services. Although this method of data collection does not capture every individual, the October 2011 survey saw 2,795 respondents, with the following breakdown across age groups: 616 respondents (22%) were fifty-six and older, 766 (27.4%) were between 46-55 years old, and 1413 (50.5%) were forty-five and younger (City Focus Church, 2011). The profile represented here is based on data from this survey.

Ethnically, CFC is predominately white/Caucasian (83% of respondents), but is also 10.2% black/African American, 1.9% Asian, 1.9% dual ancestry, and 1.6% Hispanic/Latin American. As respondent age increases, the proportion of white/Caucasian respondents to each
of these other categories also increases, with a full ninety percent of respondents fifty-six and older choosing white/Caucasian as their race/ethnicity. CFC is also 60% female and nearly 40% male. Whereas a full two-thirds of respondents fifty-six and older report coming from a Protestant background, only half of those forty-five and under report the same. Among those forty-five and under, approximately 27% report coming from “no” or “other” religious background, meaning they are not from a Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Jewish, New Age, Islam, Hindu, or Buddhist background. Megachurches are known for their financial resources, and over fifty-five percent of CFC attendees report having a household income of over $60,000. Roughly four-fifths of attendees give to the church, with one-quarter giving ten-percent or more of their incomes.

CFC is a Boomer heavy church, with nearly fifty percent of survey respondents aged forty-six years and older. This appears to stand in contrast to megachurches on the whole in that approximately 62% of all megachurch attendees are under age forty-five (Thumma & Bird, 2009). However, the CFC survey results may skew age demographics older than they actually are due to the fact that the majority of students (middle and high school aged) and children are not included as survey respondents: youth and children typically do not participate in the weekend services but are involved in age segregated youth and children’s ministry settings that occur simultaneously with weekend services. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the percentage of attendees forty-five years old and younger is actually higher. In addition to age, Figure 1 shows a longevity of attendance at CFC by Boomers and individuals older than Boomers.
Among those fifty-six and older, a quarter have attended for more than 13 years and a third have attended for 6-12 years. In the 46-55 age group, nearly 20% have been around for at least 13 years and almost 30% have attended for 6-12 years. The vast majority of those forty-five and younger (66%) have attended CFC for less than 5 years. Although it is expected that more years of life lived potentially lead to more years in attendance, these demographics emphasize that older individuals tend to have a longer history of involvement at CFC than do younger individuals.

Older individuals are more likely to volunteer at CFC on a regular basis than younger individuals, as shown in Figure 2.
Percentages of individuals who report volunteering only occasionally or once per month are similar across age groups. However, there is a difference across age groups among individuals who volunteer two or more times per month; whether this difference is statistically significant is unknown, as only aggregate data, rather than raw data on which tests for significance can be carried out, were available. Over 30% of those fifty-six and older volunteer two or more times per month, compared with just over 20% of those aged 46-55 and 15% of those forty-five and younger. Highlighting this contrast even more, a full two-thirds of those forty-five and younger are not currently volunteering at all. The relationship between frequency of volunteering and age is likely to be influenced by other variables such as work force participation, but data for such variables was not collected as part of this survey.

Older individuals are also more likely to participate in other popular environments and ministries such as CFC’s social services center, growth and healing groups, and small groups, as shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 3. Involvement in Selected Environments](image)

Approximately one-third of those who are Boomers or older have participated at the social service center and growth and healing groups in some way, while one-fifth or less of those forty-five and under have participated in those environments. Small groups, which are emphasized as an entry point to becoming connected to others in the church, see over 40% of those forty-six and older participating, whereas only 30% of those forty-five and younger participate.
The data represented here generally indicate higher rates of involvement (in selected environments) by individuals who are Boomers or older than by younger individuals. However, other variables (e.g. workforce participation, race, class, marital status) may impact involvement as well. Due to limitations in the data set as well as the focus of this study on age, influence of other variables were not explored. With respect to age integration, these data suggest that younger adults are not as involved at CFC as their older counterparts but do not indicate whether or to what degree involvement in specific environments is age integrated. For insight into the status of age integration at CFC, I will explore the themes that emerged from interviews as well as the community building approaches evidenced by interviewee responses and other qualitative data collected for analysis.

II. Current Status and Anticipated Future

Interview and documents analysis revealed several salient themes regarding the status of age integration at and anticipated future of CFC. In this section, I will examine the thematic categories and themes that emerged and utilize those themes to explain the two approaches to community building that became evident during analysis: (1) categorically based communities/environments and (2) values based communities/environments. The central focus of this study is on Baby Boomers, their current roles and future within the megachurch, and age integration within this organization. Based on this focus and the emergent themes, how community and relationships with others are developed became the overarching paradigm for understanding age integration at CFC. Each community building approach will be discussed and supported with interview data in this chapter, and the implications of these approaches will be set within the context of the literature in chapter five.

A. Emergent Themes

Analysis of interviews yielded three distinct but intertwined thematic categories: (1) age, (2) operating means and values, and (3) organizational realities. Figure 4 lists the categories and the themes encompassed in each; the categories are also inter-related and build upon one another, designated by the arrows from each thematic category to the next. I will discuss each thematic category, its underpinnings in the literature, and provide examples of each theme to lay the groundwork for understanding CFC’s current age integration as well as implications for the future. Throughout this section and the remainder of the text, common evangelical language and
terms are used by interview respondents; I adopt them as appropriate and define them as necessary for the broader context of the study.
Figure 4. Thematic Categories and Themes

**THEMATIC CATEGORIES**

**AGE**
- Age consciousness
- Generational distinctions
- Generational expectations
- Bent toward homogeneity and comfort

**OPERATIONAL MEANS AND VALUES**
- Go and do
- Organic vs. programmatic
- Create, not just participate OR just participate, not create
- Personal initiative/leadership
- Mutual interests and missional focus
- Atmosphere and structure influence connection

**ORGANIZATIONAL REALITIES**
- Organizational rut
- Underdeveloped and unengaged people
- Importance of training/mentoring
- Little room for emerging leaders
- Passing the baton and stirring the pot
Age. Four age related themes emerged during interview analysis: ‘age consciousness,’ ‘generational distinctions,’ ‘generational expectations,’ and ‘bent toward homogeneity and comfort.’ Individuals expressed a consciousness of their own age and their age in relationship to the ages of others within the church. Karp (1988) suggested that “contextual events giving rise to distinctive consciousnesses are correlated with age, but not determined by age” (p. 728) and that as individuals get older, aging events, experiences, and reminders become more persistent and create an age consciousness. Among interviewees from CFC, age consciousness is present in talk about oneself and others. After describing a volunteer supervisor older than herself as an “older person” and herself as a Baby Boomer about to turn sixty-five, I asked Rebecca whether she would call herself an older person as well. Hesitating, she responded, “Oh, well, I guess since I’ve finally signed up for Social Security and Medicare…I guess I now feel like I’ve joined that group [older people]. But in my heart, I don’t feel old.” Similarly, when asked about how he became involved in a small group, Anthony said

…So he, [the guy who invited me] was in the same session that I was, and we had sat at the same table for most of the duration of the session. And we kind of went around and introduced ourselves and how old we were, and uh, I think I was the only other person who was kind of around his age at that table, and afterwards we just kind of walked out and he actually just approached me.

Individuals also perceive their age through generational distinctions, in that they describe themselves (and their perceived age peers) with a set of terms that differentiate them from other generations. One leading-edge Millennial respondent described himself specifically in generational terms:

I was in the generation of the latch key, but I was also in the generation where the parents were coming back to the ‘showering their kids with attention.’ So there was a trophy for everything, you know, when I was a kid, uh, everyone got a trophy, and uh, what’s interesting now is that, well, I used to say like five or six years ago that students [would say] ‘I came to church, where’s my trophy?’ You know, it was that idea. I, I don’t feel that as much anymore. I think there’s a shift now, from Millennial to where we’re at [with current students].
He goes on to say that even though he is among the first of the Millennial generation, he aligned himself with Millennials in interactions with some Generation X co-workers because they “thought very differently about income, and status, and um, those types of things that were like über-important to people who were a product of the eighties.”

Generational expectations are different than generational distinctions in that they include a “should” component; based on one’s generational affiliation, generally, individuals have a set of expectations for how interactions between individuals, groups, organizations, etc. should occur. For example, one respondent described her experience during a meeting as she witnessed the Boomer leading the meeting publicly reprimand a Millennial staff member for laying his head on the table. Afterward, she noticed people in the meeting reacted to the event along generational lines: older people almost unanimously used the word “disrespectful” about the younger person’s behavior, whereas “younger staff people, um, forty and under, tended to say, ‘Wow, that wasn’t very, you know. That was really harsh and that wasn’t very affirming or relational and there probably was a different, more personal way [to] handle that.’” It is important here to note that terms such as ‘affirming’ and ‘relational’ are common evangelical terms. For this respondent, these opposite responses seemed to stem from fundamental differences about how different generations understand personal interaction (and perhaps how they define the evangelical terms they used), with one group asserting respect for authority as of foremost importance and the other group asserting supportive, understanding relationships as of foremost importance.

Expectations are sometimes conflated with life stage as well. When talking about why he hasn’t developed relationships with any of the people he volunteers with who are slightly older than himself, Anthony said it did not have to do with whether they were in the same stage of spiritual development, but that the determining factor was life stage:

…but you have kids, and you have two kids who take up all your time. And so I know that on a Friday night, you’re probably not going to come with us down to the city or come over for game night, because you’ve got two kids. But most everyone in my small group doesn’t have kids, they may be married or dating someone, but that’s the kind of group we’re looking for.
Here, realities of life stage differences act as expectations that create an age barrier between individuals who may in fact be in the same generation.

The lines between distinctions and expectations may also be unclear. Ashley, herself a Millennial, does not want to be connected with the “laziness” and “entitlement” she associates with her generation. Instead, she speaks of herself and her husband as “in a fading generation:”

…the way we think seems to be more like what I would associate with a forty-five or fifty-year-old because I feel like we’re [a] fairly social and fiscally conservative family…but I feel like there’s a group of people in, I would say my generation, where you can see both ends of it. You can see some of them fall into that entitlement sort of persona and some of them still with, like, they were raised with ‘you worked really hard for what you have,’ that sort of thing.

Ashley’s struggle to define her generation is tied up in both her own perceived characteristics and the distinctions and expectations she does/does not want to align herself with.

Generally speaking, respondents expressed a bent toward homogeneity of age in their social spheres. Throughout the interview, Anthony continued to talk about his desire to be connected with “people who are new to the area, graduated, in their twenties, young” and contrasted that with his experience at the church, where he says “there’s a lot of families, there’s a lot of people in their thirties and above, who are raising kids or even older.” He said that if there was one thing he could change at CFC, it would be finding a way to connect with those who are like him, who he said are hard to identify and meet in the large weekend settings.

Respondents often did not explicitly mention their desire for age homogeneity but rather a desire to feel comfortable in their social environment. This was most often achieved through age homogeneity, but respondents sometimes expressed a desire for homogeneity that coexisted alongside a desire for age diversity in their social spheres. For example, in a discussion about a forming a missional community (the term ‘missional’ implies ‘with a purpose or goal’ or ‘to be focused on a specified mission’ for evangelicals) of 20-40 people, Mary said she felt strongly pulled in two directions:

I’m looking to engage with people who are like me, who are in similar life circumstances, who, you know, if I could pick fourteen new best friends that all were moms in their
forties with teenage kids who worked in a stressful, um, demanding career, I’d say, ‘Awesome!’ I also would say, ‘That is sort of boring and not very stretching.’ So I would equally say, ‘You know what I’d love…if I were picking two or three best friends, I might pick those people. But in a group of twenty to forty, what I really wanna see is some diversity. I, I wanna hang out with some people who are in their twenties, their thirties, forties, fifties, their sixties, their seventies, their eighties ‘cause everybody’s so different. And you get a different, you know, [if] you only connect with the people who are like you, you know, it’s being in a band with one instrument.

Margaret, when talking about her small group experience, said “my ideal small group would be a mixture of ages. Um, because we feel comfortable with people our own age and people younger as well” but then said she did not know how to connect with those younger people or whether younger people would want to be in a group with them. Currently, she says there is only one person she has a close relationship with in her small group and described that woman as “near our age.”

The thematic category ‘age’ centers around the four themes of age consciousness, generational distinctions, generational expectations, and a bent toward homogeneity and comfort. As respondents talked about age, they described themselves and their experiences with others at CFC by placing themselves on an internalized or perceived generational spectrum. This often included talk of ‘my’ generation, which was sometimes prompted by the participant information form/interview question “To which generation do you belong?” but was also imbedded in their talk about involvement in the church and their own ‘community’ within church environments. Respondents were cognizant of their age and the age related themes were imbedded in their descriptions of their interactions with others at the church. The relationship between these themes and age integration at CFC will be explored later in this section as well as in chapter five.

**Operational means and values.** Hall and Tolbert (2005) describe organizations as being collectivities with

- a normative order (rules), ranks of authority (hierarchy), communications systems, and membership coordinating systems (procedures)...[that engage] in activities that are usually related to a set of goals [and] have outcomes for organizational members, for the organization itself, and for society. (p. 4-5)
This definition focuses on organizational structure, and although it is fairly formal, the importance of CFC’s structure was evidenced in interviewee responses. Throughout the interview process, several recurrent themes arose regarding the organization, its functioning, and the impact thereof on individuals within the church. Thus, operational means and values became a thematic category, as shown in Figure 4. Operational means and values are primarily concerned with how individuals interact with or create programs and initiatives, the ways of ‘being’ that are valued in the church, and the implications of means and values on individuals’ connectedness with CFC. Six themes make up this thematic category: ‘go and do,’ ‘organic versus programmatic,’ ‘create, not just participate or just participate, not create,’ ‘personal initiative/leadership,’ ‘mutual interests and missional focus,’ and ‘atmosphere and structure influence connection.’ These interrelated themes are discussed in detail below, and their connections to age related themes will be evidenced as well.

As a theme, ‘go and do’ is rooted in part of the vision of the church, that “small things done with great love will change the world.” One staff member says that “the strength of this organization has been […] outward.” An emphasis on going and doing has been part of the church’s DNA, so to speak, and is evidenced from its inception with just a handful of people seeking to serve the poor in their city:

So, that was just something that we kept doing. That was a main, a main focus for us…[We would load up the cars] with groceries, and we would just go anywhere that people would have us and knock on people’s door[s]. That’s what we did every Saturday morning. All, all five of us, which started to go into ten to fifteen. Because that was captivating for people, it wasn’t um, one of our little phrases is it wasn’t a come and see church, it was a go and do church. And so that was really important. We became a ‘go and do’ church.

Go and do is also evident today:

[This event] is my favorite because we go as a family on Saturday morning, meet at ten o’clock. We worship—everybody who shows up—we worship together…you create baskets…We will buy an entire turkey dinner…we would go to this family, they would expect us, they would open the door, we would pray with them. I felt like my kids got to worship, hear Scripture of why we’re doing it, and then we got to walk it out together.
And we did it with other families. We could get together with other families and talk about our experiences and who did what.

Go and do can either be organic (developing naturally) or programmatic—it may be unofficial, spontaneous, loosely planned, and enacted by individuals or small groups of people, or, it may be an annual, all-church, culturally imbedded ‘event’ to which individuals have intense investments and emotional ties. Respondents described examples of organic going and doing as paying for the person behind them in the drive-thru, being willing to talk and pray with a neighbor when he asks for counsel, or responding to the Holy Spirit to give a set of inspirational DVDs she had in her car to a new acquaintance.

Most respondents participated in or talked about programed go and do during their interviews, with varying enthusiasm. When asked about their involvement in the church, nearly all described ‘going and doing’ through volunteer activities with official programs and events at CFC. Many in fact discussed their connections to the church primarily in regard to their programmatic go and do activities, as evidenced by Anthony’s comment that the student ministry building “is our main source of contact [with the church], because we have a service [for students] over there that we attend as well as we lead a high school small group every week.” Programmatic go and do also includes things like serving in the church’s food pantry by taking on a regular shift picking up donated bread from the local bakery, joining hundreds of other attendees in handing out beverages throughout the city on a hot summer day, or participating in a walk for a cause endorsed and promoted by the church.

Much go and do is neither fully organic nor fully programmatic but contains elements of both. In fact, the examples of delivering food to the poor show how a go and do activity may become more programmatic and institutionalized over time. Sometimes, the two overlap during larger conferences or events when time is set aside for either planned or open-ended opportunities to ‘go and do’ prayer and community service activities. As go and do has become institutionalized over the years, one respondent said “You know, handing out water and free car washes and those things…Now that feels like what Boomers do on the weekends.” She goes on to describe her kids’ quickly waning enthusiasm about such events, who she says are looking for new, fresh ways of ‘going and doing.’
The organic versus programmatic theme does not simply relate to go and do activities, but is also tied to the values-oriented themes of (1) create, not just participate OR just participate, not create and (2) personal initiative/leadership. These themes largely have to do with innovation and change; in their analyses of megachurches, Thumma and Travis (2007) point to innovation as a key component while Watson and Scalen (2011) describe an ever-evolving focus on consumer and youth culture. At CFC, the ties between create, not just participate and personal initiative or leadership are important and warrant an example. Lloyd, an older-than-Boomer volunteer leader of an ‘Alpha’ class approached a staff member with the idea of creating a follow-up class that would “be a next step into becoming more responsible to the following of Jesus rather than just learning and absorbing and taking it all in.” Seeing this as a void to fill, Lloyd personally initiated with the staff member who “gave me the go-ahead…giving me whatever support I needed” and then he personally led the group and got other leaders from the first class on board to help. Regarding the new discipleship initiatives at CFC and her desire for the church “to bring in more diversity” and “to get back to the root of being fresh,” Ashley responded with a willingness to create alongside the staff leaders:

…we’ve committed to at least two more years [here] as like, all right let’s see what they, let’s trust the leadership to try to work through all of these things…Like let’s try to be part of the solution…I feel like it means being on board with the work, trusting the leadership and actually throwing out a plan…I’m willing to do any of the work.

Create, not just participate and personal initiative are intertwined in this example, given by a staff member:

…if someone comes to us and if they say, ‘Gosh. You really should have a ministry for the senior citizens, and I am passionate. I am competent. Uh, I am called to do this.’ We would basically, based on how we assess the person’s readiness, we would vet them. And if we determine they have the appropriate, um, tools to pull this off, we would give them a certain amount of space and approval to do something.

He went on to imagine how this might pan out: if the person ran with the resources and support given and something started to really develop, that personal initiative would be further resourced. If the person “was just kind of complaining that no one’s taking care of this demographic” but was not willing to take the personal initiative to make it happen, he believed that would be
shown over time. This exemplifies both how the church leadership values individuals who ‘create’ to fill a need or void and also the personal initiative and leadership necessary for creating something new at CFC.

These examples coexist alongside the reality that many individuals are participators, rather than creators and that participation in existing events plays a significant role in the church. Just participate, not create is more of a posture or approach to involvement that some individuals have (to at least some aspect of their involvement); for CFC, this plays out in programmed events or volunteer opportunities where individuals who do not use the ‘create’ approach find a way to get involved. Margaret described her volunteer activity with a student conference not as an intentional decision made with purpose but rather more like ‘something to do.’ When asked about the decision, she said “I guess we enjoy participating in a big project like that…Uh, not much more to it than that.” Participating in existing, organized events seemed to be her approach to involvement at CFC in general. She later responded to a question about her satisfaction with her community at CFC by saying she was satisfied but “might be attracted to participate in a seniors’, um, activity of some kind.” Although this is primarily an individual value, it plays an important role at the church because individuals can support existing programs and events by participating in volunteer capacities. In fact, the church website has a page for individuals to explore, take a personal assessment to discover their interests and strengths, and find out what existing opportunities there might be for them to get involved at the church.

The first four themes of go and do, organic versus programmatic, create, not just participate or just participate, not create, and personal initiative/leadership are not explicitly age oriented. In fact, they are principles that describe the organizational environment and how individuals operate within it. Some respondent examples include mention of age (i.e. Margaret’s willingness to participate in a seniors’ activity if one were organized for her), but ‘age’ itself is not central to the themes. The final two themes of ‘mutual interests and missional focus’ and ‘atmosphere and structure influence connection’ are also not explicitly age oriented; however, ties to the thematic category ‘age’ are evidenced in interviewee responses and discussed appropriately.

A missional focus may be either organic or programmatic: its presence is intrinsic in organic go and do, creating, and leadership, but it may or may not be present in programmatic go
and do or participation. Again, the term ‘missional’ implies ‘with a purpose or goal’ or ‘to be focused on a specified mission’ and appears to be an evangelical value that is embraced across generational segments. Margaret and Ashley, the oldest and youngest women interviewed, both shared examples of having a missional focus in their volunteer activities at CFC. Margaret has been teaching English as a second language classes at CFC’s social service center for about ten years and said her involvement in that program

…came about, from uh, going on the mission trip to Mexico, and uh, feeling a tie, or a calling to, I guess I’ve always had an interest and attraction to people who were from other countries. And so I’m enjoying that now and using a little bit of Spanish…and helping other people learn English and adjust to the U.S.

In contrast to her other programmatic involvement in the student conference, here she describes her involvement as purposed, due to a ‘calling’, ‘tie’, or ‘interest.’ Similarly, Ashley, when speaking of her excitement over handing out the turkey dinner baskets with her kids, said

…it’s fun, it’s good for my kids to see, and then we get back together and we talk to other friends. She [my daughter] can talk to her friends and be like, ‘Where did you go and what happened?’ I wish those sorts of things were set up more often.

Creating and leading necessarily include a missional focus, as individuals typically do these things with a purpose or goal in mind. Lloyd, for example, spoke of creating the follow-up class to help people take “a next step into becoming more responsible to the following of Jesus rather than just learning and absorbing and taking it all in.” Each of these examples show how individuals of various ages embrace the idea of having a missional focus and that this theme is not simply an example of a generational distinction.

Mutual interests often bring individuals together to pursue a missional focus together. This is true of the leaders who partnered with Lloyd for his follow-up class and can be seen in other arenas as well. CFC packages this idea of ‘missional focus’ in 3DM, a widely adopted evangelical model that “puts both discipleship and mission” at the center of the church (“weare3dm.com,” 2013). Dennis said the goal of 3DM is to create missional communities made up of people who share mutual interests or a common passion for a certain demographic, for example: orphans, widows, or the homeless. A missional community could be a group of individuals who are passionate about “letting the gay and lesbian population know we don’t hate
them” and come together to say “How do we best pool our resources of time, talents, treasure to invest together to do what God wants to be done?” or “Ok, Lord, what is it? What, what have you placed within our reach that we could do?” Then they might come up with something they could do or pursue as a group and see what happens. Based on a mutual interest, the group comes together for a missional focus, but they are also creating and taking leadership as individuals and a group toward their goal. Generational distinctions and expectations may also play out in mutual interests and missional foci, as Dennis generally expects that some interests and foci will fall along generational lines: “with something that’s, you know, kind of edgy and daring and risky there’s a good chance that we can attract twenty-somethings into” the group. Something like this would also be an example of organic go and do, with a small group of individuals initiating an activity on their own accord.

Finally, several individuals spoke of the atmosphere of an environment or the structure of an activity or program as having impact on their connectedness to the church and others. This theme, too, is seen across generational segments. Mary expressed optimism that the new 3DM initiative allows you to

develop these [groups]…that are more intentional discipling kinds of, uh, relationships that are ideally, um, an outgrowth of getting to know each other in this loosely structured, medium-sized group setting. And that appeals to me. Um, I think, just more, more room for the organic to happen.

She then contrasted that structure with small groups, about which she says “that format doesn’t connect with [me].” Mary attributes this to

the artificial nature of how small groups are currently done in most churches that is not appealing, not the idea of having a group of friends who can provide relational support and spiritual influence. I (and most of my friends) are simply not that motivated to join a group just because the church suggests it. If I can’t see an immediate benefit/value to me personally, I won’t likely make the time to do it.

Here, it is clear that she values ‘relational support’ and ‘spiritual influence’ but wants to connect in a less structured manner. Rebecca briefly joined a group at CFC for those fifty-five and older because she wanted to get to know more people at the church, but she described it as not being well organized, that there were not as many people as she expected, and that they were more
social than anything else. When asked what it would take to make a group like that successful at CFC, Rebecca emphasized that

there needs to be a real strong…mission for what the group’s gonna do…Because if it’s just social, it’s not, I don’t think it’s gonna stay together…I mean I didn’t even feel that there was […] care and support that was built into the group.

Here, she ties her disconnectedness with the group, which she attributes to the structure, to a purpose or goal that would draw people together, highlighting that mutual interests and a missional focus to the group would appeal to her and perhaps help her become more connected to others.

Other structural elements influence connectedness within the church as well. Two individuals spoke of wanting to grow their small groups, and when asked how they might do that, both had a programmatic rather than organic approach. Margaret said there is a “program, and currently if someone is looking for a small group, they can go to the…website and find groups advertised according to when they meet and who they’re comprised of and email the group contact.” She said she wants to add people to the group and that she would like more age diversity within the group, but rather than taking an organic, individual leadership approach to making that happen, she falls back on the existing programmatic structure that allows individuals to find the group. Generational distinctions influence structure, too, and this can have an impact on individuals’ connectedness as well. Of the weekend services, Mary, an older Generation-Xer, said, “there’s a disconnect for me. I feel like that’s not my generation. That’s not my scene. The examples that are used, the songs that are sung, some of the just like…specific wording…” and went on to say “It’s almost like it’s trying too hard to be cool but the definition of cool has changed” from what the Boomers think is cool.

Operational means and values themes highlight how CFC functions as an organization. Although age is not explicit in these means and values, age related themes are evidenced in interviewee responses. More importantly, the themes in this category begin to reveal the centrality of ‘community building’ to the church’s identity. The implications of the concept of community building on age integration at CFC will be discussed later in this chapter and in chapter five.
**Organizational realities.** Organizational realities refer to the current state of the church, from the perspective of interviewees, and their relationship to it. Several interviewees described an organizational rut in which the church is stuck. Mary said that when she attends weekend services, she feels “like saying, ‘Wow. I bet this was cool twenty years ago.’” Ashley said the rut is

…an identity crisis. The [CFC] I go to now is not the same as the [CFC] I went to seven and a half years ago. It’s not as bold, it’s not as…it’s just soft. It’s a very soft, like, very seeker-friendly, which we appreciate. That’s what draw, drew us in. We love that about that. But I, I still want boldness and it’s been evident…Like it’s a feeling we’ve been there, like, it’s something is off.

She said the services are ‘insincere’ and ‘forced’ and that she and her husband have “realized that we have to get fed most of the time, spoken into outside of the weekend [services]…[and] a lot of our friends have started to feel that, too.” Ashley is attributing a lack of personal development, a theme in this category that I will explore shortly, in part to this organizational rut.

A few interviewees contrasted the current rut with their past experience of CFC being ‘fresh’ and coming up with new ideas; now, however, when asked to describe what CFC is like to someone who has never been to the church, one interviewee said “But now everybody has that. Like everybody has coffee and laid back worship and preaches in jeans. Like everybody has that so I mean I don’t really know what I would say” to differentiate it. Lloyd voiced frustration that

when [an event is] successful, then they adopt it as an annual thing that has to be done every year unless the budget sometimes gets in the way. And I don’t know that’s how God moves…[that] because it worked once it’s always gonna work.

The organizational rut theme will be further evidenced as I explore the subsequent organizational realities themes.

Universally, both staff and non-staff interviewees spoke of underdeveloped and unengaged people within CFC, referring both to themselves and others. Dennis, a staff member, described growth and healing focused groups (e.g. divorce care) as a strength with
high control, trained people, [where individuals] actually have a chance to be in a safe place to hear instruction…[from a] very directive leader that’s gonna ensure that your pain, because of what you’ve gone through is not gonna erupt in the group and further exacerbate [another’s] pain.

He contrasted these “controlled community relationship[s]” with the general population of the church, where

we’ve not really figured out how to get challenge really working in community. So how do we go beyond just having a shared [volunteer] job that we do, or having a shared small group curriculum that we do…to actually build the strength of our relationship where we say, “I really am going to stay with you in such a way that you get better, and better, and better, and better.” And we actually kind of even define what ‘better’ is.

Dennis readily admits that while they are very good at helping people through dire circumstances, “we’ve not developed people” within the general church population and the structure for doing so is “really broken.” Others attest to this as well. Ashley laments that “for people who have been strong believers and disciples for a long time, I know for them…in conversations with them, being pushed is definitely missing. There’s not a real challenge from the stage on the weekends.” Although CFC encourages people further along in their faith to ‘get fed’ spiritually in their small groups, Ashley says church leaders no longer equip small group leaders:

Like nobody even touched base with them…from the main stage they’ll say, ‘Oh, these small group leaders are, you know, you are their pastor, you are these people’s pastor. We want you doing community together and we want you to be the church in your small group’…but who’s training these people to be small group leaders?

This example touches on another theme, the importance of training, which I will explore shortly.

The ‘unengaged’ part of the underdeveloped and unengaged people theme is that individuals spoke of there being programming for other people, but not for themselves. Several individuals of various ages specifically mentioned programming or environments they perceived as geared toward others but struggled to identify similar environments geared toward or attractive to them. Anthony, in his mid-twenties and fairly new to the church, said
I think the big thing right now that [CFC] is lacking, from my perspective, is…just the connection of people in my age group, how to get connected…programs involving just specifically people who are in their twenties or just fresh on the job market. There’s not a lot of ways to get connected to people like [my wife] and I…Cuz right now, there’s a lot of programs and opportunities for the older generation, a lot of small groups like that, but there’s not a lot of programs or small groups for like my age group.

On the other hand, Margaret said she was surprised to hear that the aging of the church was a concern for the church leadership because she thinks there is such “a focus on youth” with the student center and summer conference for students and says the only focus she has seen on older adults like herself is the waning social group for those fifty-five and older. Mary said her family decided to join CFC because her kids were very excited about and engaged in the student ministry but that CFC “is too old for me…as a forty-four-year old…I feel too young for this church” and later said “there isn’t a venue that engages me at a personal level that makes me want to be a part of a small group here.”

As a young mom of two children under ten years old, Ashley, however, keenly felt a lack of opportunity at CFC for her kids:

…I feel like I can’t get my kids anything because there’s nothing. You know, Wednesday nights, what do they have for kids this year? My daughter could’ve taken a crochet class. Really? Because I don’t need her to go. So my kids…go to [another church’s] Awanas. [They’re] a church of probably 1500. We have a church of…four-, five-, six thousand depending on which weekend and how well, what study we’re on. You know what I mean? And it’s like there’s nothing for my kids there.

Ashley attributes the lack of opportunities for her children to CFC’s laissez-faire sort of attitude that is oriented to “seekers” and softly says “’We’d love for you to join the mission’” or “’Oh come do this because it’s fun’” rather than holding people “accountable to step up to the plate.” She longs for accountability (an evangelical term I will adopt at face value here) where someone might say “’Listen, here’s what the Bible says about this, not just because we think it’s good for you. Like I’m not really asking. You need to find something to do’” and to get involved in serving some way.
Interviewees largely attributed their lack of engagement in specific environments or the church in general to having a sense that few programs existed that were geared toward them. Some individuals organized their thoughts regarding the perceived lack of appropriate environments (for themselves) around the concept of age, mentioning the focus on youth via the student center or, as Anthony said, “the older generation” in most small groups. However, they shared other reasons as well. Ashley’s dissatisfaction with children’s programming was due to quality and content. Mary’s lack of attraction to small group environments fits well within the tenets of the ‘atmosphere and structure influence connection’ theme. The common thread in all of the examples shared by respondents is that they were each looking for existing programming to participate in. Although many of them actively look for opportunities to create, not just participate, they also wanted to have/find existing programming that fit their needs and desires.

The final three themes, (1) importance of training and mentoring, (2) little room for emerging leaders, and (3) passing the baton and stirring the pot are interrelated and are also linked to the themes that have already been discussed in this section. Mike, a member of Generation X, said that as a staff member he has “been very unimpressed with the action of mentoring and the action of developing.” He modeled the church value of taking personal initiative to find a mentor, but determined that

There’s a lot of talk about…investing in young leaders, um, but in my experience…I have gone to three different people in this organization that are older, wiser, further ahead, that I respect [and asked to be mentored by]…I got one person to respond, and it was just because I pressed them…I was just, kinda let down…I don’t think they practically know how to do that…they’ve had to learn what they’ve learned from life experiences….But I don’t think they know how to pass that on because I don’t know that they had people investing in them.

Mary, a staff member, addresses ‘making room’ when she said she wants to create “space for, for Gen X, for Millennials to, to come alongside and work with” current leaders, and that

…we ought to be proactively inviting people who are younger into leadership with us…to leverage all of the passion and skill and experience that Boomers have, while at the same time encouraging them to make space—not, not just for the younger generation, but to make space for people who may think about it differently or do it differently.
Her desire is to stir the pot by adding something new to the skills and competencies CFC leaders already possess. Ashley, a young leader who has “taken on so much more responsibility at the church as a volunteer,” openly wondered about current leaders passing the baton: “it makes me think, like, where’s this gonna go? Who are they training up…what’s happening to train up the next generation, per se, to fill those shoes?” She refers back to the innovation Boomers brought when they started the church and says it was ‘fresh’ but asks how, “now that everybody does [similar things], how are we as a church gonna lead, be a leader that’s gonna draw a [new] generation in?” Her concern is for her children’s spiritual growth and excitement about their church, and she said that “the Baby Boomers have done it the same way for so long, like, bring some younger people in. I feel like we need younger ideas…I don’t know what it looks like but I know that it can happen.”

Dennis is hopeful that the 3DM initiative currently being launched with a small group of staff and volunteers will create a structure to address some of the concerns raised here by Mike, Mary, and Ashley. He says that as people go through this leader training, a new culture will be created in the church, where leaders invite and challenge others to “come with me and I’ll show you how to do it. Watch how it changes my life,” creating relationships of challenge and development. Diane, a Boomer staff member, described passing the baton and stirring the pot aptly when she said “if you teach principles instead of practices and let them form the practices out of what they’ve learned about principles, then it can look different and you can still stay true to your values.”

As a Boomer himself, Dennis is quite self-aware and talks about passing the baton of his role off to a new leader:

My own personal exit strategy is more around ‘what is the length of my viability in terms of what do I have to offer the current structure as it relates to [my role]? Is there somebody who is, is better, better suited, you know, all those kinds of things, to deliver the goods?’ So that’s always in my mind. ‘Who, who gets this better than I do, and how do I enlist them to help me, then at some point…It would be like how do I get them in my seat?’ …as I look at the landscape around here and knowing what I still have in me, I’m still thinking at least five more, um, energetic, cutting-edge helpful years because I can’t,
I don’t see anybody around me… time will tell if somebody gets this better than I do and can actually run with it better…

Mike, a younger leader, said he’s “less about the younger talent and more about the competency,” that there would be competency and innovation among the staff and that puts “the right people in the right seats on the bus.” Dennis’s and Mike’s comments suggest they are more focused on finding and training individuals who are best matched for moving the organization forward rather than simply focused on age as a qualification. Thus, these final three themes (importance of training/mentoring, little room for emerging leaders, and passing the baton and stirring the pot) help identify organizational realities. Some of these realities are specifically age related: younger leaders express a desire to be trained and opportunities to step into leadership roles and older leaders consider how they might transition out of their roles. Perhaps most interestingly, individuals of various ages expressed a desire to pass the baton or stir the pot in a way that brings in individuals with new skills and competencies while at the same time staying central to the organization’s values and drawing on the strengths of the current leadership. This type of talk was not explicitly age oriented, but respondents categorized such a focus as having the potential to positively influence the organization for the future.

B. Community Building

This study posits that churches, as organizations involving individuals of all ages in a broad spectrum of community programs, social services, and educational, physical, social and spiritual development, provide structures in which age integration might take place. At CFC, these types of activities can broadly be described as community building initiatives. Currently, two approaches to community building exist within the church: (1) categorically based communities and environments and (2) values based approaches to community. Age integration and segregation are evidenced in both approaches; however, the values based approaches offer greater opportunity for age integration to develop naturally than do the categorically based ones. Thus, values based approaches, though somewhat evidenced currently, relate more to future operating possibilities for CFC based on the realities of today. Figures 5 and 6 outline each of these approaches and show how age segregated or integrated communities are/might be the outcome of each approach. The implications of these approaches for CFC and perhaps the greater megachurch community will be further discussed in the next chapter.
**Categorically based communities/environments.** Figure 5 describes CFC’s current categorically based approach to community building. An individual’s possibility for inclusion in one or more of these categorical communities or environments is based on at least one criterion (e.g. age, gender). At the top of Figure 5, Box A shows environments most likely to be age segregated; the likelihood of the listed environments to result in age segregation progressively decreases as the figure proceeds downward through Boxes B, C, and D. Arrows are used from each box to point to the outcomes of age segregation or integration, with bold arrows indicating instances in which one outcome is more likely than the other. Examples illustrating the likelihood of age segregation or integration will be detailed in this section.

**Figure 5. Outcomes of Categorically based Communities/Environments**

Box A, ‘Segregation Most Likely,’ shows environments segregated primarily based on age and/or life stage. The simplest categorical divisions are based solely on age, with children’s and students’ ministries. Slightly more complex, yet largely age/life stage based categories include family life and moms’ ministries, as these environments tend to be geared toward a younger demographic and generally exclude those beyond normative childrearing age. Both of these types of divisions are in line with the previously described life course perspective, in which
individuals move through societal structures based on their chronological age (Riley & Riley, 1994; Riley & Riley, 2000; Kohli, 2000). As the arrows in Figure 5, Box A suggest, children’s and students’ environments are the most likely to promote age segregation because of their age criterion for inclusion; however, they may provide some opportunity for age integration in that these environments require supervision and leadership from adults. Anthony, a mid-twenties leader of an all-male freshmen small group describes his role in relationship to his students:

…we’re just there to encourage them…to be mentors and friends, and be someone there to talk if they’re having problems, or questions…I want to encourage all my guys to, um, just to stay connected, and uh, what’s the word I’m looking for? To challenge each other in their faith to grow spiritually and become independent.

When asked about the composition of the volunteer base that act as leaders for the student ministry, the student ministry director, Mike, describes them as college-aged, parents of students, some who would be Boomers, with “really [nobody] over 50-55 that are in roles of small group leadership. But there are some people that are older that are involved in hospitality and the [student] café and stuff like that.” As such, while interaction across age groups is evident, interaction across a wide spectrum of age groups is minimal. Indeed, two female respondents 65 and older described their involvement with youth environments in more hands-off roles such as monitoring rooms during an event and serving food. The older-than-Boomer male respondent, Lloyd, proved unique in that he is directly involved in prayer and community service environments with students by volunteering as a group leader for summer student programs, something he has done for several years. Lloyd describes his desire to work with students:

I’m a God junkie. I want them to feel something major when they come [here]…Experiences that I’ve had over the past three years, you couldn’t buy, you couldn’t even imagine that have happened. Healings, being at the right place where people were really broken and God shows up with these kids and heals them totally. Just, they’ve just been amazing and watching the kids over the years, too. How they’ve grown.

Yet, Lloyd goes on to say he nicknamed himself “Geezer” and “Balding Beast” on separate occasions “so that they [the kids] could be okay with me being an old geezer taking them around, try and help them out, hear from God.” He also admits to some uncertainty about the role:
I’m not sure that I can even still relate to those kids even though it keeps working, I don’t know why, because I feel like I may be cheating them out of a younger spiritual guide for their program that day…There has to come a time when we’re not relevant anymore at all.

These comments exemplify a sense of age consciousness, whether self-imposed or in response to felt separation from others based on age.

Mike describes such “opportunities for multi-generational worship” as severely limited due to their decision to schedule student environments simultaneously with weekend worship services. A byproduct of this structural, categorically based design is that upon graduating from high school, he says, “students aren’t transitioning well to college…like then engaging in a regular church experience that’s not…student ministry programming” partly because they don’t have cross-generational relationships where they “see older people involved in worship and reaching out to them. Every tribe needs grandparents. And um, I don’t think we’ve done a good job at that.” As a mother of two children, Ashley laments the effects of such age segregation on her children and, subsequently, her family. When asked what one thing would make her very excited about being a part of CFC with her family, she said

I don’t have an exact thing or else I would take it to someone, but I would say that it would look something like family. Like, where everybody’s together—not where everybody divides off into their own little areas—where it doesn’t have to be every weekend, but there would be more family things to do.

The bold arrow from Box A indicates that age segregation is the most likely outcome of each of the environments in this section; children’s and students’ environments are most likely to promote age segregation, with effects reaching beyond students’ tenure in such age segregated environments, partly related to the absence of interaction across age groups (Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005; Uhlenberg & de Jong Gierveld, 2004). It is anticipated that moms’ and family life environments are segregated much in the same manner as children’s and students’ environments; family life events included in the quarterly events booklet were age segregated, with offerings such as an Old Testament survey class for students and a book club for parents about praying for their kids. One event, described as ‘fun for the whole family’ was completely age segregated into a comedy show for parents, a game and movie night for children in
kindergarten through fifth grade, and games and activities in the nursery area for kids ages three
to five.

Box B, ‘Segregation Highly Likely,’ includes women’s and men’s environments and
small groups as additional areas that are more likely to be age segregated, although opportunities
for age integration do exist. These environments are differentiated from those in Box A because
they are not overtly age or life stage based categories, and experiences within these environments
are more nuanced. For instance, Ashley, in her early thirties, described her experience in the
women’s Bible studies as “there we are, the two thirty year olds at the table with everybody else
that’s fifty and up. Everyone else. So it’s us and a bunch of fifty year olds. Which not that that’s
a big deal, except for, like, what do we do to get more thirty-year-olds?” She explained that her
concern is not about the ages of the other women, because “I feel like I can get along with people
that are outside of my age range really well. I feel like a lot of times my friends tend to be older
than I am…plus I feel like I want people further ahead of me leading me,” but rather about the
future of the church and training up new leaders. Many of the themes related to age and
organizational realities are evidenced in her experience, and we see that women’s environments
are largely age segregated.

It is important to address Moms’ groups again here, due to the fact that they are
technically a form of women’s group. Ashley, the only interviewee who had participated in a
moms’ group, spoke primarily about the structure of the moms’ group(s) and women’s groups
and how that influenced her connection with other women. When she initially became involved
at CFC, an every-other-Thursday moms’ group drew fifty to sixty women and boasted
curriculum, small groups with leaders and a study. On the off-weeks, the women would gather
for play dates based on which area of town they lived in. At that time, CFC did not offer
women’s Bible studies, and when they began to do so, “the moms’ group totally dropped off,”
because, Ashley said, “maybe people wanted to be more intentional about the way they spent
their time, rather than being, just being with other moms.” This implies one could expect to find
age integration at the women’s Bible studies, as women chose to invest their time in those
environments; however, Ashley’s experience in a women’s study suggests these environments
are more age segregated and are not drawing younger women. More exploration would be
necessary to identify why this is the case.
Small group environments also tend to be age homogenous, promoting age segregation, even if individuals express a desire for diversity. In talking about her small group, Margaret said that although she would like more age integration in her small group, she “can understand that younger people, even people in their thirties with small children, might not feel connected, or might want to be more connected with people their own age and circumstance.” Here, the age related themes of age consciousness and generational expectations can be seen. Anthony expressed this type of bent toward homogeneity as he repeatedly said he wants to be connected with “people who are new to the area, graduated, in their twenties, young.” Even when individuals desire more diversity, as Margaret did, they tend to use a more programmatic approach, such as relying on the existing website or small group director structures, which may or may not yield the desired results.

Box C, ‘Equally Likely,’ shows environments that might lend themselves equally to age integration or age segregation, such as volunteer environments and marriage and dating courses. Margaret volunteers as an English as a second language (ESL) teacher with a couple women in their twenties and a woman in her sixties, and she herself is in her seventies. Of their relationships with one another, she said “we have a time of talking usually after class. And we share things, it’s rather informal, like ‘How’s your week been?’ So I’d consider them friends although we don’t have any contact beyond our teaching roles.” Of volunteers at CFC’s social service center, Mary says

…we are an organization that…proactively…looks for diversity…in our volunteers. We, we have diversity in our guest population; we want to reflect that to some extent in our staff and volunteer roles and [we] have people truly from sixteen to eighty-six volunteering together.

CFC’s social service center certainly has racial/ethnic and age diversity among their volunteers, but, as Mary went on to point out, the majority of volunteers are Boomers and “that’s reflective of the fact that that’s the primary generation that [CFC] appeals to.” She also said she seeks to understand the generational distinctions of volunteers so that she can understand “how at some level, their interactions are shaped by” those distinctions; whether this implies some conflict or age segregation among volunteers is unknown.
Volunteering produced age integration among participants to lesser and greater degrees. Margaret’s experience as an ESL teacher provided some contact with those of other ages, and Anthony spoke of being acquainted with other leaders at the student center who were older and perhaps had kids, although he largely set such life stage differences up as barriers between himself and them. Ashley says that her volunteer roles mean “I end up at the church on more sort of like group teams and things like that more often than not. And so I feel like I’ve just become a person [Diane, an older staff woman] can rely on” to get things done. As a result of getting to know Diane and working with her, Ashley said that whenever she has questions about something going on in the church, she can call Diane and share what she is thinking with, knowing that …I can trust that she is someone who is so spirit-led. You know, she’ll just put you right at your place. You never get off the phone with [Diane] and not feel convicted. Like if you want an opinion, she will give you a very sound, simple opinion.

Age integration in this example includes an element of training or mentoring of emerging leaders, although Ashley distinguished that the two women do not have a defined mentorship relationship.

Marriage and dating classes and studies are promoted via the quarterly events booklet that is both in print and online. The primary image that accompanies this edition is of a trendy couple in their early twenties holding hands while they stand together on a snowy day. This image alone shows a perception that marriage and dating issues are for the young. Here, it appears that implicit age norms, or informal expectations of what behaviors are appropriate or inappropriate at specific ages, are at work (Settersten, 1997). However, in none of the four course descriptions is youth assumed at all. In fact, the materials simply advertise opportunities to “explore the underlying dynamics of male and female relationships and…solutions to common relationship woes,” “get to the heart of the issues dating raises for many singles,” or look at “destructive forces—guilt, anger, greed, and jealousy—and how they infiltrate your life and damage your relationships.” Even the premarital class description does not mention age. Media images may attract younger individuals, but course descriptions may attract individuals of all ages. Therefore, although media images may point to age segregation via age norms, these environments may be equally likely to be age integrated, depending on the individuals they draw.
Box D, ‘Integration Likely,’ includes environments that are not overtly age segregated, providing opportunities for age integration to emerge. These include personal growth and healing, academic, financial, and life skills and education environments, each of which are promoted via the quarterly events booklet. Based on the descriptions of these environments in the most recent quarterly events booklet, personal growth and healing groups and courses may be the most age integrative environments currently at CFC. They include topics such as divorce care, creating healthy boundaries, men’s healthy sexuality, overcoming adversity, ministry skills training, struggling with an addiction, grief and loss through death, healing for women victims of childhood sex abuse, freedom in the face of stress, and anxiety free living. Not a single group uses age as a criterion for participation, but each is very pointedly focused on a specific area in which individuals of diverse ages may be seeking help.

Similarly, CFC offers academic opportunities through a leadership institute and theology classes simply open to those with interest. Financial classes include a program through which “you’ll be empowered with the practical skills and confidence needed to achieve your financial goals” and a financial planning seminar at which individuals can learn about estate planning. Estate planning may attract primarily older individuals, but the course description does not mention age and is again open to all based on interest. Finally, life skills and education includes courses on computer literacy (basics, using software programs, email tutorials, online job searches), ESL, citizenship, job searches, and tutoring for reading and earning a high school diploma. As previously discussed, ESL courses united women spanning their twenties to seventies as volunteer teachers. Settings like computer literacy likely encourage age integration among volunteers and between volunteers and participants as well; due to the fact that I did not observe these environments, these conclusions are based solely on promotional materials produced by CFC.

**Values based approaches to community.** The values based approaches depicted in Figure 6 are all evidenced in some manner at CFC today and draw on the thematic categories outlined in Figure 4. These values based approaches offer greater opportunity for age integration to develop naturally than do the categorically based approaches depicted in Figure 5; however, values based approaches can lead to age segregation as well. The five values based approaches, outlined in Figure 6, are a focus on missional communities, messaging and program structure, create and initiate, go and do, and leadership. Each of these has already been discussed at length,
as they can roughly be equated to the operational means and values thematic category depicted in Figure 4. However, the reorientation of these concepts in Figure 6 provides a new opportunity to conceptualize how, and by what avenues, each of these values might lead to age segregation or integration at CFC. Thus, I largely refer back to previous examples of each in the following discussion; the implications of these values based approaches for the future of community building at CFC will be discussed in chapter five.

**Figure 6. Outcomes of Values based Approaches to Community**

The focus on missional communities at CFC is fairly new. Although it will not replace the current small group structure, CFC leaders expect these communities will be a next-step beyond small groups, with higher levels of commitment, activity, and accountability. Missional communities are described by Dennis as groups of twenty to fifty people that “have both a feel of family and they have a common mission, common, agreed-upon mission” or an agreed-upon purpose for gathering, approximately once a month. These groups have leaders who complete an extensive leader training program, and the sense of family within the group develops as individuals build relationships based on challenging one another to grow personally and relationally. As these communities develop, individuals will join based on the goal and/or the people that are becoming this ‘family.’
The structure of missional communities will likely influence whether these communities lead to age segregation or age integration: individuals’ natural bent toward homogeneity of social groups will likely lead to age segregation whereas the focus on a particular mission or goal will likely lead to age integration. It is expected that there will be examples of both outcomes as groups are developed. Whether a desire for homogeneity or the draw of a mission will predominate in individual groups is unknown, and thus their respective outcomes of age segregation or integration are also unknown.

Currently, small groups provide the primary venue for community building at CFC; these groups tend to be demographically homogenous (e.g. age, life stage) as this homogeneity provides some type of comfort within the social environment. Mary described gathering a group of women “who are like me, who are in similar life circumstances…if I could pick fourteen new best friends that all were moms in their forties with teenage kids who worked in a stressful, um, demanding career, I’d say, ‘Awesome!’” Missional communities are expected to reflect a new type of community building at CFC, forming organically, with the leader personally inviting people to join him/her and those people subsequently asking others to join them. As Anthony described his current connections and continued desire for connection with “people who are new to the area, graduated, in their twenties, young,” it might be likely that these would be the people he would invite to his missional community. For these reasons, it is expected that some missional communities will develop as age homogenous, and therefore segregated, groups where individuals have a sense of comfort.

Age integration is also a possible outcome of missional communities, in that the organizing principle of the groups is a goal or mission. As previously described, the groups are made up of people who share mutual interests or a common passion for a certain demographic, cause, or purpose, for example orphans and widows, the homeless, prayer, or access to education. If individuals are attracted to or invited to join a group primarily based on this mutual interest, the opportunity for age integration opens up as the shared commonality among individuals is something other than age.

The likelihood of age segregation or integration based on these structural realities of missional communities has been demonstrated. However, it is important to recognize that this is not a uniform, formulaic process. Rather, an age homogenous group of individuals who have
already developed a sense of ‘family’ may choose to start a missional community together, only then addressing the goal or purpose of their community. The goal may be something they find other individuals are very passionate or knowledgeable about, and the group may evolve into a much more age integrated community as it grows. Conversely, Dennis believes in missional communities focusing on social justice issues or something that is “kind of edgy and daring and risky, there’s a good chance that…twenty-somethings” might be the primary group of people who make up the group. Whether his prediction pans out in actuality has yet to be seen. Regardless, there will certainly be exceptions to these conceptualizations of the manner in which missional communities may produce age segregation and integration.

The second values based approach is messaging and program structure. The manner in which missional communities are structured, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs, shows how the means of organizing and decided upon goals might lead primarily to age segregation or age integration. However, age segregation or integration is an outcome of program structure(s) as it relates to messaging. By program structure, here, I mean anything from small groups, to classes one might take, to children’s or women’s ministries, or volunteer opportunities. Messaging refers to how the church communicates about such programs with individuals or groups.

A single approach to messaging (e.g. social media only) about a program is more likely to lead to age segregation, whereas utilization of multiple means of messaging (e.g. print, video, in person, person-to-person, or online content) is likely to reach a more broad audience and lead to age integration. An example of a narrow, single approach to messaging was evidenced in Margaret’s response about how to add more people to her small group: “currently if someone is looking for a small group, they can go to the…website and find groups advertised according to when they meet and who they’re comprised of and email the group contact.” When asked to brainstorm some other ways the group might be able to attract new individuals, Margaret said she did not have any other ideas about how to do that. She went on to admit that she had never actually visited the small group website herself. As a result, her desire to grow the size of her small group may be limited by her reliance on the single approach of online recruitment; at minimum, it has pigeon-holed her ability to recognize other means (e.g. personal invitation) of creating the diversity of age in her group that she said she desires and has left her with a small small-group of age homogenous and segregated individuals. Similarly, only announcing an event
via print materials sent via postal mail or handed out during weekend services could potentially exclude a significant population from the opportunity to participate; those who do not attend services that weekend or individuals who have not shared their mailing addresses with the church would be two such groups.

Multiple means of messaging would certainly have provided more avenues for recruitment to Margaret’s small group, and perhaps would lead to the age integration she desired. An example of multiple means of messaging that has been a success is the GROW booklet Mike described. The content of the booklet is broad (i.e. includes various ministries, classes, and opportunities) and is available both in print and on CFC’s website. Additionally, as Mike mentioned, the booklet is a resource that helps individuals know about many events in the church, giving them knowledge they might share person-to-person to invite or recommend events to others. Finally, several of these events are advertised on the website via the events calendar as well or are announced in various large group settings (e.g. weekend services or student ministry services). Currently, to the extent that programs are open to various age groups, this use of multiple means of messaging is more likely to lead to age integrated participation simply because of the wider exposure to events multiple avenues produce.

The create and initiate values based approach is based on the themes create, not just participate and personal initiative/leadership. This values based approach may produce either age segregation or age integration, and no mean/avenue has been identified that would more likely lead to a particular result. The examples explored in the discussion of the two themes comprising this value were (1) an individual sensing a need for an older adults’ ministry or group and taking the initiative to create one and (2) Lloyd creating a follow-up class to help people further develop their faith and initiating with others to make it happen (see p.27). In the first example, creating and initiating works to create an age segregated environment specifically for older adults. In the second example, Lloyd partnered with individuals of various ages to create and help lead the class that is open to all individuals, which likely leads to age integration both among the leadership of and participants in the class.

Go and do has been extensively explored as a theme, and the programmatic or organic means by which go and do is enacted were briefly discussed (see page 25). However, programmatic go and do tends to produce more age segregated environments whereas organic go
and do produces or creates the opportunity for more age integrated environments to develop. The most telling example of the effects of programmatic go and do is one respondent’s comment that “You know, handing out water and free car washes and those things…Now that feels like what Boomers do on the weekends.” Whether these types of programmatic go and do produce the age segregation the respondent described is uncertain; however, her emphatic response made it clear that neither she (a member of Generation X) nor her teenage children were interested in participating in this go and do. Additionally, when go and do is incorporated into a larger event, such as a student conference, the students participating in the go and do activity are almost completely segregated based on age (or role as students) from other individuals who might share a passion for the go and do activity they are participating in. Again, exceptions to these classifications do exist: Lloyd, an older than Boomer, volunteered during a conference to lead students in their go and do activities, which included visiting a nursing home (producing a momentary age integrated environment).

Organic go and do creates opportunities for the development of age integrated environments. Dennis dreams of a future in which CFC will remove the holiday doughnut outreach event and encourage “group[s] of people who love each other, know each other really well [to] dial in to the Father and find out [if there is] something different at the holidays that the group is called to do that’s different.” Such an organic approach allows for a wide variety of groups of people to meet a similarly wide variety of sensed needs within the community, with no stipulations as to who is participating in the “go and do” activity or whom they are benefiting.

Leadership, as it pertains to development of individuals and the emergence of new leaders, was discussed as part of the organizational realities thematic category. However, two distinct approaches are likely to lead to distinctly different outcomes: a total succession or retention of leaders is likely to produce age segregation, whereas an approach focused on developing staff competencies is likely to lead to age integration.

First, I will examine the retention or succession approach. CFC is currently staffed primarily by Boomers, and this is certainly true of the senior leadership team. CFC is not a church that is seeking to retain or maintain a Boomer-centric staff: during the course of this inquiry, the church has entered into a senior pastor succession that began with what the pastor described as a “nudging of the Spirit.” However, considering the potential results of a focus on
retention or succession is instructive. In a meeting with church members, CFC’s senior pastor announced the search for his successor by first setting up the demographic reality of the church: “[we’re] a fairly intergenerational church, but it’s clear that our largest demographic skews older.” He then went on to say:

My concern with the graying of [CFC] really isn’t about being the hippest church, or the coolest church or the next big thing. God never called us to be trend setters, he called us to be faithful, that’s what we’ve been called to do, be faithful. Big difference. And it’s not about just dismissing us old Boomers in this youth obsessed culture that we all live in…I’m sorry, but it is. And, after all, there are more Boomers than there are Gen-Xers or Millennials, or Generation Z, coming up. But here’s the, here’s the reality: Churches that don’t reach succeeding [sic] generations eventually die. They just do.

One respondent echoed this sentiment and made the case for incorporating new, younger leaders, rather than simply maintaining the status quo, because she believes

…no church can thrive if it just takes a cohort and follows it from its twenties to the grave. You know, that’s the, the church just dies. And the church will be dead long before that group is buried…I think that it is the, the fresh perspective, the energy, the newness that the next generation always brings. They stir the pot. You know, if there’s nobody who stirs the pot, you don’t have a very good stew…you’ve gotta have an ability to attract the next generation. And, and for longevity of the church, if you don’t attract the next generation, you’re dead long before you die.

A full leadership succession would likely result in age segregation as well. Such a succession would entail all Boomer leaders transitioning out of their roles and replacing them with younger leaders, again yielding the bland “stew” the previous respondent described. Another respondent shared her views this way: “the Baby Boomers have done it the same way for so long, like, bring some younger people in. I feel like we need younger ideas…I don’t know what it looks like but I know that it can happen.” A leadership consultant who recently worked with CFC recommended a “generational leadership change,” incorporation of a post-modern model, and attention to social justice issues; although the pastor did not call for a complete leadership succession, he did say CFC “must develop and empower next generation leaders…in order to reach the next generation…this should be obvious to us, shouldn’t it?” Each of these
perspectives may conflate age and competencies, but the underlying belief is that a simple retention of Boomer leaders will inhibit the long-term viability of the church and that bringing in younger leaders will enhance it.

A competency approach removes the focus on age and instead puts it on skills, which is likely to create an age integrated leadership structure. When Dennis spoke of his own transition out of his position, he simply described it in terms of competencies: “Who, who gets this better than I do, and how do I enlist them to help me, then at some point…It would be like how do I get them in my seat?” Similarly, Diane, a Boomer staff member, did not mention age at all. Instead, she spoke of competencies as instilling principles in others: “if you teach principles instead of practices and let them form the practices out of what they’ve learned about principles, then it can look different and you can still stay true to your values.” These perspectives are competency driven (e.g. understanding of a program/mission/goal or ownership of organizational values) and are therefore likely to yield a more age integrated staff than a “retain Boomers with experience” approach or a “succeed current leadership with younger people” approach.

The sentiments expressed by respondents and the senior pastor show that, at CFC, age and competencies are perceived as being intertwined. The pastor said he focuses on his own cultural and theological competencies “just to stay relevant to where people are.” He then related his concern and his reasoning behind the transition directly to three things: (1) the median age of the church, (2) the opportunity “for younger leaders here to be empowered and to be set free to lead,” and (3) the culturally and critically different type of thinking younger leaders will bring to reach the next generation. It seems that separating age and competencies is very difficult for individuals at CFC and that some mix of retention/succession and a focus on competencies is employed at the ground level, producing neither a fully age segregated nor fully age integrated leadership team.

It is important to note that some values based approaches described in this section and outlined in Figure 6 can exist within the categorically based system that currently dominates community building at CFC. One example is the quarterly print and online booklet compiling classes and programs across several church venues and ministries. Mike described the evolution from a “postcard wall” with cards for various programs someone might want information on to expanding the GROW booklet that contains
descriptions of current events, but then when the parents ask for information about the student [building], we give them the GROW booklet, we open [it] up…and they see all the student ministry stuff, but they take that with them and they have a booklet that gives them information about everything that’s going on in the church.

The value evidenced here is that people would have access to knowing about all the programs and events going on at the church, regardless of whether they were initially seeking to get involved in them, and that this knowledge might lead them to explore new programs for themselves or recommend them to others. Thus, categorically based environments do not necessarily lead to age segregation and values based environments do not necessarily lead to age integration; both approaches can result in outcomes of age segregation and integration, although the values based approaches create greater opportunities for age integration to develop.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The recommendations and implications put forth in this section begin with the assertion that a non-generational approach to the future of Baby Boomers in megachurches is the best approach for all generations. This means that the most age integrated, or generationally inclusive, future is best for everyone at CFC. Removing the focus on generations or age groups through categorically based environments, and shifting to the values based approaches to community described in chapter four opens up greater opportunities for age integration by drawing on and developing strengths and skills across generational segments. Such an approach is likely to address the desires and needs expressed by participants in this study and help position CFC to pursue the future growth the senior pastor described.

Theoretical underpinnings. Both the categorical and values based community building initiatives discussed in chapter four deal with two intertwined areas: the lives of people and their social structures. As such, the aging and society paradigm (A&S), developed by Riley, Johnson, Foner, and Riley, beginning in the late 1960s and refined throughout the latter portion of the century, provides an ideal framework for understanding the current megachurch environment at CFC. The paradigm derives its name from the fact that it “treats age as a component of both human lives and social structures” and seeks to uncover how age functions in both lives and social structures (Riley, 1995, p. 42; Riley, Foner & Riley, 1999). I will briefly outline the paradigm before discussing its application for age integration at CFC.
The major tenets of the aging and society paradigm are built upon the theory of *age stratification*, which posits that age is used in all societies to organize people’s lives and their social structures into strata (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999), most notably in the tripartite life course of education, work, and leisure (Riley & Riley, 1994; Riley & Riley, 2000; Kohli, 2000). However, A&S develops these ideas further, suggesting there is an intricate interplay of “people and structures and the systemic relationship between them” (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999, p. 329). The paradigm is meant to be applied in ways that are *age-inclusive*, meaning that “old age relates to all ages; aging takes place from conception to death, and changes at one age affect all ages,” and *dynamic*, recognizing that “while people are growing older, society is changing around them” (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999, p. 330).

A&S centers around *changing lives* and *changing structures*, suggesting these are distinct processes that work interdependently (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999). Changing lives focuses on people’s lives as cohorts: that cohorts of individuals are born, grow older, and are eventually replaced by new cohorts; each cohort has its own differences in standards of living, attitudes toward other people, views of the world, etc. because society changes around them as they grow older (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999). These *cohort differences* point to a relationship with changing structures, or the concept that age interacts with structures as a criterion to “curtail (or in other instances enlarge) opportunities, not only for income and power, but also for affection, respect from others, self-esteem, and life experiences” (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999, p. 334). Thus, the *interdependence* of changing lives and changing structures is a cyclical process, in that as people’s lives change, institutions around them change, and vice versa (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999). These changes most often happen as the result of *imbalances* in which either people’s lives lag behind structures or, more likely, structures lag behind people’s lives (Kohli & Rein, 1991). Such imbalances act as built-in pressures urging “new changes that might improve the mesh between lives and structures” (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999, p. 337).

Riley, Foner, and Riley (1999) suggest the future of A&S will move toward *age integration* and *cohort norm formation*. They imagine “a shift toward age integration would challenge not only the place of age in the familiar rigid structures but also the age-related norms institutionalized in those structures and incorporated into people's lives” (p. 339). Age integration will be the result of a removal of age barriers in a way that brings people of different ages together (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999). Cohort norm formation is described as “a continuing
process, in which behaviors and attitudes that develop within a cohort in response to social change become crystallized as new norms” (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999, p. 339). The recommendations and implications discussed below are framed around the major tenets of this paradigm.

**Recommendations.** Based on the qualitative data collected and analyzed in this investigation, background literature, and the theoretical frameworks of age integration and the aging and society paradigm, the overarching recommendation resulting from this study is that a generationally inclusive, or age integrated, approach to community building at CFC will pose the best future for Baby Boomers, everyone else in the megachurch, and the church as an organization. As the church shifts its focus toward values and away from categories of people, greater opportunities for age integration will be exposed.

The focus of A&S on the interdependence of changing lives and changing structures makes the approach uniquely suited for application in an American society that has largely turned issues of aging into a responsibility for “individual states,…commercial organizations, or…‘the people’” (Riley, Foner, & Riley, 1999, p. 328). CFC, though not a commercial organization, has a long history of taking responsibility for individuals’ and the community’s needs. The church’s hallmark social service center began as a food pantry and has expanded to provide a host of services ranging from food assistance to education and employment resources, car repair, and spiritual care. Thus, they have embraced the dynamic nature of A&S by recognizing that there have been changes in societal/community needs and have responded by expanding services as their organization has grown. Values based approaches to community building offer an opportunity for CFC to capitalize on these historical strengths by applying a similar approach as they recognize the dynamic reality that individuals in their community are changing (namely, growing older); here, values based approaches offer the opportunity for community building initiatives to become *age-inclusive* as well.

The genesis of A&S in age stratification provides a container for making sense of the age related themes of age consciousness, generational distinctions and expectations, and a bent toward homogeneity; placing these themes within the contextual reality that age has been a primary social/societal organizing mechanism for individuals within the CFC community can help their leaders as they seek to develop age integrated communities and environments.
Identifying and acknowledging these age stratifying mechanisms as they pose challenges to age integration efforts will likely go a long way toward helping CFC leaders overcome such barriers. CFC leaders seem to be on their way in this area already by valuing the distinct skills and experiences individuals of varying ages can bring to their organization: the senior pastor said he wants “younger leaders here to be empowered and set free to lead…[utilizing their] different kind of thinking both culturally and critically…in order to reach the next generation” while himself retaining a role of influence in the future of the church as what he referred to as a “cheerleader,” “confidant,” “mentor,” or “on call teaching pastor.”

Whereas age stratification recognizes that as individuals age and participate in social structures (e.g. CFC), “they participate in groups of people whose background and experience may differ from theirs” (Riley, Foner, and Riley, 1999, p. 331), age integration would challenge the place and role of age in the organization as well as the norms traditionally associated with age (Riley, Foner, and Riley, 1999). Overtly seeking to become age integrated, both in program and leadership environments, will help CFC embrace these values at an institutional level that can have much greater impact on the future of the church than individual sentiments or initiatives can alone. In fact, it is specifically the interdependence between structures (e.g. the church) and lives (e.g. individuals, groups) that enables CFC to pursue age integration now to make changes that will impact their future.

A&S specifies that the interdependence between lives and structures is one of cyclical nature: as lives change, they change the structures around them, and the structures in turn change lives. If CFC pursues age integration as an organization, embracing values based approaches to community and modeling age integrative practices, specifically in regard to leadership and go and do initiatives, individuals will potentially embrace and internalize age integration as a value as well. Such an adoption of this value may lead individuals to pursue age integration in their spheres of influence, whether they be missional communities or creating something entirely new through personal initiative.

As they relate to aging and age integration, the experiences and perspectives shared by participants in this study largely have to do with three aspects of A&S: cohort differences, imbalances, and cohort norm formation. Changing lives are primarily reflected or understood in terms of cohort differences, which were amply referred to by interviewees as they talked about
age consciousness, generational distinctions, and generational expectations. Combined, these themes can be roughly equated to mean cohort differences here. For instance, respondents assigned terms such as ‘lazy,’ ‘entitled,’ ‘trophy-generation,’ ‘hard workers,’ or ‘income and status oriented’ to their own generation or to other generations. In describing a cohort difference, one interviewee mentioned examples used on stage, the way pastors dress, and what is (organizationally) thought to be cool, saying, “that’s not my generation.” Interviewees regularly described themselves and their experiences with others at CFC through this lens of cohort differences and generation.

Cohort differences are instructive in the discussion of age integration as they relate to imbalances. Imbalances are instances where lives lag behind structures or structures lag behind lives. At CFC, structural lag is reflected in what interviewees pointed to as an ‘organizational rut.’ Interviewees cited CFC’s history of being ‘fresh’ and innovative (e.g. free carwashes, preaching in jeans, and offering gourmet coffee on site) as having stagnated to a point where one said “Wow. I bet this was cool twenty years ago.” Such imbalances in the church’s fit with individuals’ lives can be addressed through age integration as well. If the church embraces a values based approaches to community through goal based missional communities, multiple approaches to messaging and program structure, opportunities for new and fresh types of go and do, and a competency approach to leadership transition and development, then age integration will likely spread through the fabric of the organization. This would begin address the issue of fit between the organization and individuals’ lives, described by some as a sense that “the Baby Boomers have done it the same way for so long” and that new ideas and innovation may come if CFC “bring[s] some younger people in…we need younger ideas…[and] it can happen.” A shift toward age integration would move the interdependent relationship between lives and structures forward in a way that would address these “built-in pressures” and potentially bring about “new changes that might improve the mesh” (Riley, Foner, and Riley, 1999, p. 337) between the lives of individuals and the church.

Cohort norm formation, in regard to CFC, presents an opportunity to redefine what it means to be a part of a group. Developing new norms could potentially alter generational distinctions and expectations within the church and dethrone age/generation from its central role in what it means to be a part of a ‘cohort.’ Riley, Foner, and Riley (1999) submit that “behaviors and attitudes that develop within a cohort in response to social change become crystallized as
new norms or ideologies—new meanings—that then pervade and influence all age strata and social structures” (p. 339). For example, if CFC adopts age integration through values based approaches to community building, they may see individuals developing a new sense of identity as missional community cohorts in which individual identities are thoroughly enmeshed with the values of the group. This points to an opportunity for CFC, and other megachurches, to be on the front edge of influencing a new generation of individuals to rise up expecting and desiring age integration in their social environments, potentially spreading outward through other societal structures.

**Implications.** As organizations with a roughly two-to-one ratio of younger people to older adults, megachurches provide an environment ripe for age integrative innovation (Thumma & Bird, 2009); a shared value (i.e. religion) has brought individuals across the age spectrum together and sets the stage for age integrative opportunities. As Baby Boomers are expected to turn away from programs and organizations explicitly identified for older people (e.g. lifelong learning institutes, senior centers) and prefer age integrated and age-neutral settings (Manheimer, 2009), age integrative innovation in megachurches that finds success in uniting individuals across the age spectrum around shared interests and common goals has a likelihood to spread to other institutions as well. One interviewee’s belief that

…we ought to be proactively inviting people who are younger into leadership with us…to leverage all of the passion and skill and experience that Boomers have, while at the same time encouraging them to make space—not, not just for the younger generation, but to make space for people who may think about it differently or do it differently can be aptly applied in other organizational settings as well. Riley (1998) expects such relationship building across generations to encourage societal participation, develop shared responsibility, and protect heritage.

Thus, the knowledge resulting from this exploratory study will certainly contribute to future research regarding age integration, megachurches, and other organizations. Additionally, application of these findings extends beyond simply answering the research questions posited here. An awareness of age in the form of age consciousness, generational distinctions and expectations, and a bent toward homogeneity of social environments all have translatable applications to other organizations or institutional settings such as workplaces, community
organizations, and recreation environments; these age related themes are likely to emerge in various environments in unique and nuanced ways. Identifying the operational means and values at work in an organization that may contribute to either age integration or age segregation is, of course, an undertaking to be done within each individual organization. Moreover, successes and setbacks in age integration in megachurches will be instructive to these other organizations as they seek to become age integrated as well. Finally, as age integrative innovation is attempted in megachurches (and other environments) and empirically evaluated, the aging and society paradigm may be further developed theoretically, contributing to our understanding of the interplay of lives and social structures as they relate to aging and age integration.

This exploratory, qualitative study begins to address the void in our knowledge about age integration at work within organizations and social structures. It is a starting point from which future inquiry might move outward, addressing aspects of age integration, specifically in churches and megachurches, that were not feasible in this study. For instance, a future study might examine how age integration manifests itself in a megachurch with a different demographic makeup (e.g. predominately African American). Also, as this study focused on highly involved individuals in the church, an inquiry into how less involved or new individuals perceive community building in the church and their roles within it may yield new insights into age integration in social environments. Thus, there is yet much work to be done in regard to examining age integrative innovation in social institutions that will hopefully be taken on by researchers as organizations seek to address their changing environments and demographics.
Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. Can you take a few minutes to tell me about your history with the church? How you first came to the church, how long you’ve been here, where you “fit” now, etc.
2. What’s your main point of contact with the church, say on a weekly basis? Please describe your experience in that environment.
3. Can you describe your community here?
   a. What groups are you in, who are your friends, do you have any mentoring relationships?
   b. Are you happy with your community here?
   c. Do you desire more diversity in your community? How might you achieve that?
4. What’s it like to be someone like you at this church?
   a. Nearly half of all adults at this church are Boomers or older. What does that mean for your experience here?
5. Looking toward the future of the church, what do you imagine this church will be like in 10-15 years? Specifically thinking about weekend services, small group settings, community involvement, and leadership, what do you think might change, what might not?
6. What hopes do you have for the future of the church?
   a. If you could make one big change here, what would it be?
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