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What Is Happening with Intergenerational Learning in Christian Education?

Why three familiar voices deserve a fresh hearing

Mark Hillis

In the pages of this journal from 1996 and 2000, two particular articles captured my attention, despite the fact that they were not specifically addressing intergenerational learning. The first was written by Denham Grierson,¹ and the second by Peter Butler.² Grierson was addressing a perception gleaned from decades of experience as a Christian religious educator together with an examination of Uniting Church polity and information gathered from a series of consultations held across Australia in 1993.³ Butler was evaluating a national church document which was compiled to address concerns about the teaching ministry of the Uniting Church.⁴ Grierson expressed concern that the church had invested in regional and national education agencies but had failed to underline the teaching imperative at the heart of the church's commission from Christ, and the responsibility for teaching by those ordained and 'gifted to be teachers within each congregation'.⁵ As a result, Grierson argued,

Lay people in the church clearly do not feel that they are being instructed in the faith. Ministers of the Word do not feel laid upon them the task of edifying their people.⁶

Butler's article encouraged the Uniting Church to learn from the Roman Catholic church's revival of the catechumenate. He urged the Uniting Church to pay close attention to its commission to teach, and to locate teaching and learning at the heart of its life together: in liturgy and sacrament, where faith is nurtured and from which it is sent out on mission with the good news of Christ.⁷ Butler was advocating an approach to Christian education which is derived from the earliest practices of the Christian church: 'teaching for an active participation in worship', in the fullest sense imaginable.⁸ At the same time, Butler issued a warning not to blur the distinction between worship and learning:

The tendency [on the part of religious educators] to regard worship itself as a didactic occasion

¹ Denham Grierson, 'Why has the U.C.A. [Uniting Church in Australia] turned its back on the Teaching Ministry of the Church?', *Uniting Church Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 1996, pp. 36–41.

² Peter Butler, 'Teaching for Worship: relocating the teaching office of the church', *Uniting Church Studies*, Vol. 6, 2, July 2000, pp. 35–48.

³ Grierson, 'Why has the U.C.A. [Uniting Church in Australia] turned its back on the Teaching Ministry of the Church?', p. 40.

⁴ Uniting Church National Assembly, *Report of the Task Group on the Teaching Ministry and Mission of the Church*, 2000.

⁵ Grierson, 'Why has the U.C.A. [Uniting Church in Australia] turned its back on the Teaching Ministry of the Church?', p. 40.

⁶ Grierson, 'Why has the U.C.A. [Uniting Church in Australia] turned its back on the Teaching Ministry of the Church?', pp. 40–41.

⁷ Butler, 'Teaching for Worship: relocating the teaching office of the church', pp. 36, 39, 46, 48.

⁸ Butler, 'Teaching for Worship: relocating the teaching office of the church', p. 39.

must strongly be resisted.⁹

On another continent and from a different context, yet expressing similar concerns, Charles Foster¹⁰ (a sometime invited visitor amongst Uniting Church educators) was asking questions about the practice of Christian Education amongst ‘mainline’ Protestant churches.¹¹ Foster has long experience of working with Christian religious educators in the field as well as with denominational agencies. In addressing perceived lost opportunities for reviving the educational ministries of churches, he has nevertheless sought to ask questions which may lead to fresh, and what he terms ‘adaptive’ changes sponsored by ‘educational imagination’.¹² Amongst the lost opportunities which Foster identifies (and for which he offers insightful analysis) is a neglect of intergenerational mentoring.¹³ He, and other veteran Christian educators, as this article will reveal, have re-visited their earlier work in an attempt to address the challenges of the present. This article explores the value of their work in comparison with Christian educators and practitioners who seek to re-assert the fundamentally intergenerational nature of the Christian Church with reference to its educational vocation.

A new generation of Christian educators

As one who endeavours to help equip and encourage ministry practitioners in Christian education study and practice, I have come to appreciate a recent burgeoning of discussion, action, reflection and publishing in the field of intergenerational approaches to Christian religious education. For this study, the work of Holly C. Allen and Christine L. Ross,¹⁴ Lucy Moore and the ‘Messy Church’ movement,¹⁵ John Roberto and the ‘Lifelong Faith’ project,¹⁶ and Joyce Mercer¹⁷ are prominent. At the same time I endeavour to compare the reflections of these authors with those of veteran theologian-educators who have recently re-visited their earlier works. Those authors are Charles Foster,¹⁸ Thomas Groome¹⁹ and

⁹ Butler, ‘Teaching for Worship: relocating the teaching office of the church’, p. 46.

¹⁰ Charles R. Foster, *Educating Congregations: the future of Christian education*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994; and *From Generation to Generation: the adaptive challenge of mainline Protestant education in forming faith*, Eugene, OR, Cascade Books, 2012.

¹¹ ‘Mainline’ is the term Foster uses throughout his 2012 book to refer to traditional Protestant denominations of Christian faith. These churches are usually contrasted with conservative evangelical, fundamentalist or neo-Pentecostal denominations. Examples of the ‘mainline’ in the USA would be the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian, the Evangelical Lutheran, some Episcopal churches and the United Church of Christ.

¹² Foster, *From Generation to Generation*, chs 2 and 5.

¹³ Foster, *From Generation to Generation*, p. 50.

¹⁴ Holly C. Allen and Christine L. Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: bringing the whole Church together in ministry, community and worship*, Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, 2012.

¹⁵ Lucy Moore, *Messy Church: fresh ideas for building a Christ-centred community*, Oxford, Abingdon, 2006. Paul Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church: growing faith in an all-age community*, Oxford, Abingdon, 2013.

¹⁶ John Roberto, ‘Best Practices in Intergenerational Faith Formation’, *Lifelong Faith*, Vol. 1.3, Fall/Winter, 2007, pp. 5–20.

¹⁷ Joyce A. Mercer, *Welcoming Children: a practical theology of childhood*, St. Louis, MI, Chalice Press, 2005.

¹⁸ Foster, *Educating Congregations* and *From Generation to Generation*.

¹⁹ Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: sharing our story and vision*, Melbourne, Dove Communications, 1980; *Sharing Faith: a comprehensive approach to religious education and pastoral ministry*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1991; and *Will there be Faith? A new vision for educating and growing disciples*, New York, HarperOne, 2011.

John Westerhoff.²⁰

As comprehensively explored in the work of James White²¹ and of John Roberto,²² intergenerational religious education or intergenerational faith formation may be defined as occurring when two or more generations or age groups enter into a learning and teaching process where all who are involved mutually benefit from the encounter. All writers on this subject whom I have consulted recognise that both Jewish and Christian faiths provide warrant for intergenerational teaching and learning in their Scriptures.²³

Allen and Ross²⁴ have evangelical Protestant roots and are keen advocates for approaches to learning and discipleship formation. In their writing, Allen and Ross carefully explain the adoption of the term ‘intergenerational Christian formation’.²⁵ Their work is broad and eclectic in its reach. They employ stories, theories, models and ideas from a vast array of biblical, psycho-social, ecological, gerontological, pedagogical and multicultural sources, movements and contexts.

In addressing the many problem areas for congregations which seek to embrace intergenerational approaches to their life, a theological perspective on God as Trinity is important.²⁶ In this emphasis, Allen and Ross discern the inner diversity of the Godhead as the primary example of unity in diversity and therefore as a model for human unity and collaboration in the formation of Christian faith. Their insight is based upon the Christian understanding of human beings made in the ‘image of God’.

Allen and Ross do not always oppose the use of age-specific groupings or educational interactions in the approaches which they advocate. Their concern is to provide a corrective for persistently segregated Christian education. They acknowledge that in Christian education settings there will be thoughtful planning to allow different forms of interaction between and amongst generational groupings, as well as through individual activities. They propose intergenerational Christian formation as an approach which offers a strong core of relationship and sharing of content across age groups, in the midst of church community practices. For Allen and Ross, the term ‘intergenerational’ is broadly understood. Far from a simplistic delineation of children, youth and adults,²⁷ their work acknowledges diversity and

²⁰ John H. Westerhoff, *Will our Children have Faith?*, East Malvern, Vic., Dove Communications, 1976 and *Will our Children have Faith?* 3rd ed., New York, Morehouse Publishing, 2012.

²¹ James W. White, *Intergenerational Religious Education: models, theory, and prescription for interage life and learning in the faith community*, Birmingham, AL, Religious Education Press, 1988.

²² ‘Best Practices in Intergenerational Faith Formation’, *Lifelong Faith*, Vol. 1. No. 3, Fall/Winter, 2007, pp. 5–20.

²³ Deut 6:1–9; Ex 12:25–28; Matt 19: 13ff & 28:19–20; 1 Tim 4:12–16; 2 Tim 3:14–17 and many others. See, especially the Appendix C in Allen & Ross (2012) which cites scores of biblical passages which they attest to reflecting an ‘intergenerational outlook’.

²⁴ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*.

²⁵ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, chs 1–4.

²⁶ Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, chs 8, 19.

²⁷ The categories ‘Children; Youth; and Adults’ are reflected in some commercial Christian Education curriculum resources such as *Seasons of the Spirit* and *Roots on the Web*, trusting that church communities will discern local and contextual realities. Similarly, some church denominations have departments which use such delineations. Usually, however, the practitioners associated with Christian education strive to understand the diversity within and across such broad descriptors.

difference within supposed age groupings and generations.²⁸

The writings of Lucy Moore²⁹ George Lings³⁰ and Paul Moore³¹ form part of the movement known as Messy Church, which, with its roots in the United Kingdom is now more widely known and adopted. Their publications trace the emerging nature of this movement which arises from a dynamic ‘fresh expression’ of Christian faith and ministry. Lucy Moore’s work reflects a movement which adheres to firm theological convictions about the nature of the people of God as worshipping together, creating intentional community, enjoying mutual hospitality and learning to be disciples of Jesus Christ. As I perceive it, Messy Church groups (including a growing number within the Uniting Church) are striving to re-invent the very inclusive nature of Christian church, without being ‘churchy’, or wedded to one particular expression of church or style of Christian piety.³² More recent Messy Church publications display the growing breadth and depth of reflection upon learning in the midst of this expanding movement.

Of particular interest is how quickly sacramental concerns arose for Messy Church, as indicated by Lucy Moore’s³³ energetic discussion of Baptism and Holy Communion in chapter 5 of her second volume. ‘Is the “messy meal” sacramental?’ is one question which Moore raises in response to queries and critical comments from others. Paul Moore’s work³⁴ amplifies the vigorous discourse concerning discipleship and Christian formation amongst Messy Church participants, and also links with questions about baptism and confirmation. However, the key to the movement is the intergenerational orientation. One poignant anecdote in this regard is Moore’s comment that adults ‘sitting and chatting’ while children go to a craft activity or story ‘is not messy church!’³⁵ The implication of her example is that the apparently casual informality of the parent’s behaviour, for the uninitiated, could lead to a perception that a Messy Church gathering might be mistaken for a play group. Advocates for Messy Church are clearly committed to the engagement of multiple generations with one another for Christian worship and for formation in the faith. As the experiences of this movement accumulate, it will be important to assess how well its intergenerational goals are achieved.

Joyce Mercer’s book³⁶ bears the subtitle, *A practical theology of childhood*. It would, however, be a mistake to think that Moore is an advocate for separating the nurture of children from the rest of the congregation as a specialist adjunct activity. Written from the perspective of parenthood, Mercer’s work is more fully about the whole life of faith communities. Her focus upon the needs and contributions of

²⁸ Particular attention should be drawn to chapter 7 of *Intergenerational Christian Formation* (‘Midwives, Tailors and Communities of Practice’) and the discussion of learning in ‘authentic, complex environments’.

²⁹ *Messy Church* and *Messy Church 2*, Oxford, Abingdon, 2008.

³⁰ George Lings, ed., *Messy Church Theology: exploring the significance of Messy Church for the wider church*, Oxford, Abingdon, 2013.

³¹ Paul Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church: growing faith in an all-age community*, Oxford, Abingdon The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2013.

³² See Lucy Moore’s first outline of ‘messy theology’ in *Messy Church*, ch. 1.

³³ See Lucy Moore, *Messy Church 2*.

³⁴ See Paul Moore, *Making Disciples in Messy Church*, ch. 8.

³⁵ Lucy Moore, *Messy Church 2*, ch. 8.

³⁶ Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, 2005

children in churches opens up questions of justice, values, character and lifestyle. The trajectory of her work carries those who read it and act on it into passionate advocacy for inclusive church community life. Mercer is unafraid to confront many accepted practices in Christian churches which serve to marginalise children and, as a consequence, to lose the rich and important learning which they need to be formed in Christian faith. Even seemingly laudable goals such as the ‘inculcation of good values’, the ‘development of biblical literacy’, or ‘learning about God’, often advanced to justify certain kinds of Christian instruction, are insufficient in Mercer’s understanding:

The rationale for Christian education with children is its ability to prepare them to participate in the church’s mission and ministry.³⁷

My appreciative perception of the work of practitioners such as Allen and Ross, the Messy Church movement and Mercer, leads me into a further discussion of their immediate forebears in the field: Charles Foster, Thomas Groome and John Westerhoff (who, respectively, have their roots in Protestant, Roman Catholic and Anglican Christian church traditions).

Three familiar voices revisited: Foster, Groome and Westerhoff

Charles Foster

In his 1994 work, *Educating Congregations*, Charles Foster wrote about four tasks essential to building church communities in ‘a pluralistic world’.³⁸ These were (1) transmitting a mutually understood Christian faith vocabulary; (2) sharing the stories of faith (and thereby ‘rekindling intimacy’ through shared story between the generations); (3) nurturing interdependent relationships; and (4) practicing the lifestyle of Christian community (which incorporates mutual ‘caregiving’). For Foster, storytelling must be sustained over time, not merely used as a tool for communication or moral instruction. Time spent is so important if children, for example, are to grow to recognise the great Scriptural stories and to experience adult Christian respect for them and contextually applied interpretations of them.

For Foster in the United States, as for Grierson³⁹ and Butler⁴⁰ in Australia, the nature of Christian formation in the Protestant ‘mainline’ churches changed since the late 20th Century. Four significant points in Foster’s retrospective analysis prompted my own memory of the concerns expressed by Grierson and Butler in the introduction to this article. Foster describes ‘four challenges’ which have hindered the educational efforts of leaders in congregations of the Protestant mainline:⁴¹

- i. The decline of reinforcing structures within denominations (similar to the lament expressed by Grierson);

³⁷ Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, p.197.

³⁸ Charles Foster, *Educating Congregations*, Nashville, Abingdon, 1994, pp. 68–79.

³⁹ Grierson, ‘Why has the U.C.A. turned its back on the Teaching Ministry of the Church?’

⁴⁰ Butler, ‘Teaching for Worship’.

⁴¹ Foster, *From Generation to Generation: the adaptive challenge of mainline Protestant education in forming faith*, p. 50.

- ii. The lack of a catechetical culture of faith formation in congregations (as also expressed by Butler);
- iii. The loss of a compelling narrative about God in the crosscurrents of theological, religious and cultural diversity (possibly more evident in Australia than in the United States); and
- iv. The neglect of intergenerational connection in mentoring faith formation.

Subsequently, local congregations came to find less and less structural support for their Christian religious education work amongst children, youth and adults. Whereas once ministers and teachers were provided with in-service training, connections between denominational agencies and congregations were broken by various circumstances. These circumstances may well have included the decline of funding to those denominational education agencies, combined with the development of increasingly generic curriculum materials which aligned more with denominational policy than perceived congregational needs. On their part, congregations were seen to be more frequently accessing the services of various para-church agencies, which tend to promote age-specific resources and styles of ministry. Teaching materials used by congregations were often obtained from independent or seemingly non-aligned, private retail organisations. Whether these trends were causally related is a matter for debate and research. In Australia, as one who has served in ministry leadership with denominational agencies as well as with congregations, it would be similarly difficult to answer the question Foster asks: ‘What happened?’⁴² What happened? Many different manifestations of Christian education and formation (for those who sought it) were being offered beyond local congregations in Australia, including the growing number of Christian and independent schools and all that they can offer and demand of their student and parent communities.

In Australia, denominational ‘publishing houses’ have not survived as some in the USA have done. In many respects, Australian ‘mainline’ congregations have learned to live without significant educational services provided by their denominations. Yet many of the same questions the churches in the USA have asked are also prevalent in Australia: ‘Why don’t we have more children and youth in our church?’ ‘Why don’t more of the children we do have remain active during adolescence and after they graduate from high school?’ ‘Why haven’t those who left as young adults returned to our churches after they married and had children of their own?’ An additional question has also been asked: ‘Would a different kind of pastoral leadership have made any difference?’⁴³ With reference to this last question, it is impossible to ignore the likely impact of ever-increasing revelations concerning the institutional abuse of young people through the decades Foster is writing about. Still awakening to this reality, it may yet be too early for churches to assess the enormity of this issue upon the question Foster asks about leadership.⁴⁴

One should also acknowledge that Foster’s work includes research into the whole life of diverse

⁴² Foster, *From Generation to Generation*, p. 2.

⁴³ Foster, *From Generation to Generation*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ In Australia, at the time of writing, a ‘Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse’ is continuing. See <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/> See also Patrick Parkinson, *Child Sexual Abuse and the Churches: a story of moral failure?* ABC Religion and Ethics 25 October 2013, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2013/10/25/3877103.htm>

congregations and the ways they pursue their educational tasks, not specifically with reference to younger generations.⁴⁵ In *From Generation to Generation*, he does not simply pursue socio-historical questions, he also attempts to suggest alternative pathways for the Christian formation of younger generations in mainline churches. One key to understanding Foster's contribution to intergenerational faith formation is the way he addresses the need for 'theologically grounded adaptive change'.⁴⁶ This entails the hard work of forming faith and mentoring young people, which he thoughtfully contrasts with 'technical change' (the quick fix).⁴⁷ Theologically grounded adaptive change is, in Foster's view, the only appropriate response to adaptive challenges, and that can only be achieved by drawing upon the deep resources of church tradition in new and contextually suitable ways. For Foster, the intergenerational Christian learning is multi-linear, multicultural and mutual. Foster's Christian education contemporaries, Thomas Groome and John Westerhoff, hold out complementary approaches in their most recent work.

Thomas Groome

Thomas Groome⁴⁸ encourages a 'community of faith' approach to education in faith. 'Total community catechesis gradually becomes a community *habitus*.'⁴⁹ For Groome, faith formation is the work of a whole community as well as by particular families. Families, also, indicate 'all sustaining networks of domestic life', and are by no means required to be 'perfect' or even exemplary to 'raise and sustain people in faith'.⁵⁰ Groome eschews the idea (which he nevertheless believes became axiomatic for many Catholic families) that denominational schools or Confraternities of Christian Doctrine (CCD) can educate better than parents and families.⁵¹ Groome asserts (with the Vatican II 'Declaration on Christian Education', n.3), that parents are the 'first and foremost educators of their children'. Families are essentially intergenerational. Groome re-casts his earlier outlines of a praxis approach to Christian Religious Education⁵² in terms of what he calls a 'life to faith to life approach'.⁵³ In doing so, Groome also incorporates his well-known five movements of the praxis approach, outlined in each of the earlier volumes cited. At the same time he asserts that people, equipped by their own stories and visions, may learn the 'Story and Vision of Christian faith' in authentic conversation with others who are part of their community.⁵⁴

Although Groome does not employ specifically intergenerational language, it is implicit in his focus upon families and faith communities. Also, individuals have real agency in their learning and knowledge as part of a community. Groome's approach should provide a helpful basis for deeper conversations

⁴⁵ Examples include *Educating Congregations*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994 and *Leadership in Multicultural Congregations: embracing diversity*, Alban Institute, 1997.

⁴⁶ Foster, *From Generation to Generation*, ch. 5.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Foster, *From Generation to Generation*, p. 77.

⁴⁸ *Will there be Faith? A new vision for educating and growing disciples*.

⁴⁹ *Will there be Faith?*, p. 165.

⁵⁰ *Will there be Faith?*, p. 202.

⁵¹ *Will there be Faith?*, p. 203.

⁵² *Christian Religious Education*, 1980; *Sharing Faith*, 1991

⁵³ Groome, *Will there be Faith?*

⁵⁴ Groome, *Will there be Faith*, pp. 296–297.

with new movements such as Messy Church. His shared praxis approach to learning through critical discernment strives to connect a faith community's identity with its vocation and mission.

John Westerhoff

John Westerhoff declared in 1976 that 'the church can no longer surrender to the illusion that child nurture, in and of itself, can or will rekindle the fire of Christian faith in persons or in the church'.⁵⁵ In saying this, Westerhoff was contrasting what he saw as an evident need for the church to emphasise conversion to faith in each generation. He warned families and congregations that they should not complacently trust what he disparagingly called the 'schooling-instructional paradigm' to nurture vital faith.⁵⁶ Westerhoff's understanding of conversion was not a private, personal faith commitment made within institutional walls. Instead, vital faith implies a willingness to accept a share of 'responsibility for the total character of society'.

For Westerhoff, there is an urgent need for churches to express their faith in the world and to behave as thoughtful, reflective, counter-cultural communities of faith. This can only be achieved if the generations find opportunities to practice the faith together. I find it intriguing that in his earlier writing Westerhoff integrated (what was then) the emerging faith development research of James Fowler.⁵⁷ Westerhoff adapted and simplified Fowler's stage development theory to portray what he designated 'experienced', 'affiliative', 'searching', and 'owned' faith, which he referred to as 'styles' of faith.⁵⁸ Through this adaptation of Fowler, Westerhoff avoided surrendering his whole investigation to stage theory. Instead, he adapted a few of its categories to pursue the imperative of responsible faith-sharing across the generations. Westerhoff outlined 'enculturation' (versus 'socialisation'), via interaction amongst the generations, as his preferred approach to Christian education:

While much socialisation literature has a tendency to emphasise how the environment, experiences, and actions of others influence us, enculturation emphasises the process of interaction between and among persons of all ages.⁵⁹

Intrigued as one may be with Westerhoff's handling of human development stage theory, it is interesting to learn from his 2012 edition of *Will Our Children Have Faith?* In one of his 'update' sections for 2012, Westerhoff uses the metaphor of 'pilgrimage'.⁶⁰ In writing this way about faith development he reinforces the intergenerational integrity of the Christian church as faith community, on a journey together which encompasses childhood experience, adolescent questioning and adult integration.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Westerhoff, *Will our Children have Faith?*, p. 38

⁵⁶ Westerhoff, *Will our Children have Faith?*, ch. 4.

⁵⁷ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: the psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*, Blackburn, Vic., Collins Dove, 1981.

⁵⁸ *Will our Children have Faith?*, pp. 89–103.

⁵⁹ Westerhoff, *Will our Children have Faith?*, p. 80.

⁶⁰ Westerhoff, *Will our Children have Faith?*, ch. 2.

⁶¹ Westerhoff, *Will our Children have Faith?*, ch. 4.

For Foster, Groome and Westerhoff, although quite different from one another in their starting points and analysis, there is a unity in their pursuit of Christian learning which nurtures faith in communities where mutually respectful relationships are developed across the generations.⁶² They each address questions of education and catechesis from intergenerational communitarian ground and resist institutionally driven outcomes-focussed approaches. Re-visiting their work in the midst of the newly emerging discourse invites endorsement of their original projects. Research into the impact which they may have engendered amongst ministers and Christian educators at the time of their visits to Australia might also prove to be a fruitful source for understanding and meeting the challenges of the present. The resonance and continuity with current concerns and themes in Christian religious education is, for me, a reason to listen to their voices again.

An exploration of intergenerational learning

Each of the authors discussed in this study have compelling things to say to churches which have, for whatever reasons, found it more convenient to segregate children and young people during designated times of Christian community worship and Christian learning events or recreational activities. As these authors have observed, the Protestant churches have frequently, and relatively uncritically, mirrored the lifestyles and activities prevalent throughout the rest of society.

What guidelines might there be for a renewed practice of intergenerational learning, incorporating the insights of the authors discussed in this paper? Here are some emerging signposts. *Churches which embrace the imperative to engage in Christian formation across the generations will:*

- i. Draw upon Scripture and tradition as their foundational resources;
- ii. Engage in serious theological reflection upon the nature and purpose of Christian education practices;
- iii. Advocate for a mixture of generations as the norm for worshipping together and learning to be disciples together, whilst allowing that there will be times for age-based activities and groupings;
- iv. Recognise and articulate the distinctive yet complementary relationship between Christian worship and Christian education.
- v. Appropriate human development theory and generational analysis with critical awareness; and also with an eye for interpretation in terms of intergenerational relevance;
- vi. Encourage genuine intergenerational dialogue about faith—conversation, testimony, mutual story sharing and witness; conducted with respectful alertness to age and capacity for comprehension;
- vii. Encourage storytelling from Scripture, expecting the discovery of multiple concrete

⁶² All three authors have been invited lecturers for denominational and ecumenical education events which have included the Uniting Church in Australia as co-sponsors, through the Joint Board of Christian Education (Westerhoff in the 1980s; Foster in 1992 and Groome in 1994).

- connections with human experience across the generations and across cultures;
- viii. Practise their faith in a manner which anticipates the inter-connection of worshipping communities, voluntary personal discipleship, society, work and the domestic sphere or home;
 - ix. Seek to engage with local communities beyond the gathered congregation, through well planned service and cooperative activities;
 - x. Advocate for global awareness and, where possible, international partnerships.

In an ongoing study of Christian education practice within the Uniting Church in Australia, one is confronted with frequently expressed anxieties about faith formation with younger generations. Perhaps such anxiety was the impetus for the widespread exploration through the Uniting Church of Westerhoff's *Will Our Children Have Faith?* more than three decades ago. Westerhoff's approach, however, included a thoughtful critique of Christian Education practice which still holds out a profound challenge to Christian churches. It is important that anxieties about younger generations do not blind churches to the complexity and potential of intergenerational relationship building. As mentioned with reference to Foster's work, intergenerational Christian learning is multi-layered and multicultural. It needs to recognise the mutuality of relationships, not presuming that the role of one generation is solely to instruct another. Each of the contemporary volumes re-focussing on intergenerational themes mention the names of Westerhoff, Groome and Foster amongst their references because their work has profound implications for Christian nurture and formation in faith.

As a new generation of Christian educators and practitioners return to the ancient theme of faith formation for the whole people of God, and seek to implement intergenerational approaches to Christian education, worship and mission, congregations may find welcome support from contemporary and veteran scholars who have never lost their enthusiasm.