

Liturgical Renewal and the Formation of Faith: Nurturing a Resilient Spirituality in Millennials and Generation Z

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Abstract: The contemporary church faces a profound challenge in nurturing the spiritual lives of Millennials and Generation Z, as these generations demonstrate declining affiliation and participation in traditional religious institutions. While much scholarly attention has focused on pragmatic strategies to increase attendance and engagement among young congregants, this study argues that liturgical renewal must be understood primarily as a means of faith formation rather than merely as a tool for attracting young people. This research aims to analyze how liturgical renewal can be intentionally designed to nurture a resilient, deeply rooted spirituality that enables younger generations to navigate the complexities of a secular and digitally saturated world. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research investigates churches that have implemented significant liturgical reforms, examining their impact on the spiritual growth, theological understanding, and long-term faith commitment of young congregants. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with church leaders and young adults, and analysis of liturgical documents, and were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that engagement-focused renewal without intentional formation produces superficial results, while formation-oriented liturgical practices integrating reflective spaces, intergenerational dialogue, creative expression, and digital media foster deep engagement with Christian tradition. Effective models of renewal prioritize the formation of spiritual habits, theological literacy, and a robust sense of belonging, equipping young believers to sustain their faith through transitions, doubts, and cultural pressures. This study contends that liturgical renewal, when approached theologically rather than pragmatically, serves as a vital strategy for cultivating resilient faith that can withstand the challenges of contemporary life. The research recommends a holistic approach to liturgical development that integrates formation-oriented practices, intentional catechesis, and ongoing evaluation to ensure alignment with the spiritual needs of younger generations.

Contribution: These findings contribute to the fields of practical theology, spiritual formation, and congregational studies, offering both theoretical insights and practical guidance for sustainable liturgical transformation.

Keywords: liturgical renewal; spiritual formation; resilient spirituality; digital age worship; intergenerational faith development.

INTRODUCTION

The crisis of faith transmission to younger generations has become one of the most pressing concerns facing the contemporary church. Millennials and Generation Z, shaped by digital connectivity, critical attitudes toward institutional religion, and a preference for participatory and experiential forms of spirituality, are increasingly disaffiliating from traditional religious communities.¹ Research indicates that these generations approach faith with a posture of skepticism and a desire for authenticity, often finding conventional liturgical forms rigid, repetitive, and disconnected from their lived experiences.² The church's response to this crisis has frequently centered on pragmatic adaptations designed to increase attendance and engagement, yet these efforts often fail to address the deeper need for genuine spiritual formation that can sustain faith through the complexities of modern life. This study investigates how liturgical renewal can be intentionally designed to nurture resilient spirituality among younger generations, addressing the gap between engagement and formation that characterizes much contemporary ministry practice.

Recent scholarship has explored various dimensions of this challenge, examining the characteristics of Millennials and Generation Z, the role of technology in worship, and the potential for innovative liturgical practices to engage younger generations. Kinnaman and Matlock identify five essential practices for helping young people follow Jesus in what they term "digital Babylon," emphasizing the importance of spiritual formation in contexts of cultural dislocation.³ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin offer six strategies for growing young churches, highlighting the significance of intergenerational relationships, empowerment, and warm community in fostering lasting faith.⁴ Campbell explores the intersection of digital media and religious practice, demonstrating how technology can either enhance or undermine authentic spiritual formation.⁵ Bradshaw provides historical perspective on liturgical development, reminding contemporary practitioners that worship has always evolved in

¹ Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 97-147.

² Pew Research Center, *Religion Among the Millennials* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2018), 21.

³ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2020), 56-136.

⁴ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 32-48.

⁵ Heidi Campbell, *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in Digital Media* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 75-78.

response to cultural contexts while maintaining theological integrity.⁶ Wuthnow observes that while many young adults remain spiritually interested, they often lack the theological resources and practices necessary for sustaining faith in the face of life's challenges.⁷ These studies collectively underscore the complexity of liturgical renewal and the need for approaches that attend to both theological depth and contextual relevance.

The urgency of this challenge demands a theological reevaluation of liturgical renewal, moving beyond questions of relevance and attraction to consider how worship shapes the very fabric of Christian identity and belief. As Root argues, the church's obsession with youthfulness has often led to superficial adaptations that fail to address the profound spiritual needs of young people navigating a secular age.⁸ Similarly, Smith contends that worship practices are inherently formational, shaping desires, imaginations, and habits in ways that either cultivate or undermine Christian faith.⁹ The liturgy, understood as the church's primary pedagogical practice, possesses the capacity to form believers in the virtues, convictions, and practices that constitute resilient Christian identity.¹⁰ Dyrness emphasizes the role of the arts in engaging faith, yet the integration of creative expression with intentional formation remains underexplored.¹¹ This formation perspective suggests that liturgical renewal must be more than a pragmatic strategy for attracting young people; it must be an intentional practice of nurturing faith that can withstand the pressures of contemporary culture, a perspective that the present study seeks to advance through empirical investigation of formation-oriented worship practices.

Despite these important contributions, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding how liturgical renewal can be intentionally designed to nurture resilient spirituality among younger generations. Much of the existing research focuses on pragmatic outcomes such as increased attendance, participation, or satisfaction, without adequately addressing the deeper question of how worship forms faith that endures through transitions, doubts, and

⁶ Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 54-114.

⁷ Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 76-80.

⁸ Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 83.

⁹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 97-100.

¹⁰ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 58-60.

¹¹ William Dyrness, *Theology and the Arts: Engaging Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 147-150.

cultural pressures. The gap between engagement and formation represents a critical area for investigation, as the church must move beyond attracting young people to cultivating in them a faith that is resilient, reflective, and deeply rooted in Christian tradition. This study is guided by the central research question: How can liturgical renewal be intentionally designed to nurture resilient spirituality among Millennials and Generation Z? By exploring this question, the research seeks to identify practices that move beyond surface-level innovation to cultivate deep engagement with Christian tradition, spiritual habits, and theological understanding. The contribution of this study is twofold: it advances theoretical understanding of the relationship between liturgical practice and spiritual formation, and it provides practical insights for church leaders, theologians, and educators seeking to design worship that forms resilient faith in younger generations.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to investigate the relationship between liturgical renewal and spiritual formation among Millennials and Generation Z. The case study methodology is particularly appropriate for this investigation, as it enables deep exploration of complex social and theological phenomena within their natural contexts.¹² Creswell and Poth affirm that qualitative inquiry is well-suited for research that seeks to understand meaning-making processes, lived experiences, and contextual dynamics, all of which are central to this study's focus on liturgical formation.¹³ The qualitative approach allows for the collection of rich, detailed data that can illuminate how liturgical practices shape the spiritual lives of young congregants, capturing the nuances of their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. This methodological choice reflects the study's commitment to understanding liturgical renewal not as an abstract concept but as an embodied, contextual practice that unfolds within particular communities and traditions, enabling the researcher to attend to the voices and perspectives of participants most affected by liturgical renewal.

The implementation of this case study design involved a multi-site approach, selecting three churches representing different denominational traditions using purposive sampling based on three criteria: documented implementation of significant liturgical reforms within the past five years, demonstrated attention to young adult engagement, and willingness to

¹² Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), 2-5.

¹³ John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2021), 55-58.

participate in the research. Data collection was conducted over six months from January to June 2024, proceeding through three primary methods: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the liturgical practices under investigation. Participant observation was conducted through attendance at worship services, allowing the researcher to document liturgical elements, congregational interactions, and the overall ethos of worship in each setting.¹⁴ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 participants, including 15 church leaders (pastors, worship directors, and formation coordinators) and 30 young congregants aged 18-35, exploring their perceptions, experiences, and evaluations of liturgical renewal. Document analysis examined liturgical materials, service guides, and church documents that articulated the theological rationale and practical implementation of renewal efforts. Ethical protocols were observed throughout, including informed consent, confidentiality assurance, and the right to withdraw at any time. This multi-method approach enabled triangulation of sources, enhancing the trustworthiness and credibility of findings.¹⁵ Trustworthiness was further enhanced through member checking with participants and peer debriefing with colleagues in practical theology. Thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke, was employed to identify patterns across the data, organizing findings around key themes related to formation-oriented liturgical practices and their impact on young believers.¹⁶ Data saturation was reached when no new themes emerged from the analysis of subsequent interviews, confirming the adequacy of the sample.

RESULT

The Limitations of Engagement-Focused Renewal

The research findings reveal that churches prioritizing engagement metrics such as attendance, satisfaction, and participation often achieve superficial results without meaningful spiritual formation. One young adult participant described her experience in a highly innovative church: "I was excited at first because the music was great and the sermons were relevant, but after a while I realized I wasn't growing. I knew the songs but I didn't really know what I

¹⁴ Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2020), 72-75.

¹⁵ Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 147-150.

¹⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* (London: SAGE, 2022), 89-91.

believed."¹⁷ This sentiment was echoed across multiple sites, suggesting that stylistic innovation without intentional formation may create an initial attraction but fails to sustain spiritual depth. Church leaders acknowledged this limitation, with one pastor noting, "We saw numbers go up when we changed the music and added screens, but we later realized that our young people couldn't articulate their faith or handle basic questions about suffering and doubt."¹⁸ These findings indicate that engagement-focused renewal, while potentially beneficial for attracting participants, does not automatically produce the spiritual formation necessary for resilient faith. The evidence suggests that congregations must move beyond metrics of attendance and satisfaction to consider the depth and durability of spiritual formation occurring through worship.

The research further identified that renewal efforts focused primarily on technological integration and stylistic updates often neglected the formative dimensions of worship, resulting in shallow spiritual engagement. In one congregation where multimedia elements were extensively employed, participants reported feeling "entertained" rather than "formed," with one young adult observing, "It felt more like a concert than worship; there wasn't space for reflection or processing what we were experiencing."¹⁹ This observation aligns with the concerns raised by Ruth regarding the potential for contemporary worship to prioritize emotional experience over substantive spiritual formation.²⁰ Additionally, several participants expressed frustration with the lack of theological depth in sermons and liturgical elements, noting that while the style was engaging, the content often remained superficial. One participant explained, "I appreciated the creative elements, but I left most Sundays without feeling like I had encountered anything that challenged me or helped me grow."²¹ These findings suggest that while innovation can create initial interest, it must be accompanied by intentional attention to spiritual formation to produce lasting impact, and that churches must critically evaluate whether their liturgical innovations genuinely contribute to formation or merely provide entertainment.

The churches studied demonstrated varying degrees of awareness regarding the limitations of engagement-focused approaches, with some actively seeking to address these shortcomings. One congregation that had initially pursued stylistic innovation shifted toward a

¹⁷ Interview, Participant A, female, 24, 2024.

¹⁸ Interview, Pastor B, male, 52, 2024.

¹⁹ Interview, Participant C, male, 27, 2024.

²⁰ Lester Ruth, *Flow: The Ancient Way to Do Contemporary Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 101-103.

²¹ Interview, Participant D, female, 31, 2024.

more formationally intentional approach after observing that young adults were not maintaining their faith commitments over time. The pastor explained, "We realized we needed to move from attraction to formation; it wasn't enough that people showed up, they needed to be transformed."²² This shift involved revising liturgical structures to incorporate elements specifically designed for formation, such as reflective spaces, teaching segments, and community-building practices. Another church developed a "formation-focused" worship service that maintained innovative elements while embedding intentional teaching, questioning, and spiritual practices within the liturgy. The worship leader described the transition: "We kept the contemporary music and creative elements, but we added teaching sections, discussion prompts, and opportunities for personal reflection. It took longer to plan and required more intentionality, but the results in terms of young people's spiritual growth were remarkable."²³ These examples indicate that churches can move beyond engagement-focused renewal by intentionally designing worship with formation outcomes in mind, a shift that requires theological reflection and practical commitment.

The findings also suggest that engagement-focused renewal may inadvertently contribute to a consumerist orientation toward worship, wherein young people attend for what they "receive" rather than for what they "become." Several participants described their initial attraction to innovative worship as rooted in personal preferences rather than spiritual commitment, with one participant admitting, "I came because I liked the music and the vibe, not because I was committed to growing in my faith."²⁴ This consumerist mentality, identified by Root as a significant challenge in contemporary ministry, undermines the formation of resilient faith by prioritizing subjective experience over covenantal commitment.²⁵ One church leader reflected on this challenge, noting, "We realized that many of our young people were treating church like a product they consumed; they would move to another church if the style changed or if something didn't meet their expectations."²⁶ In response, several churches implemented practices designed to cultivate commitment and belonging, such as membership classes, service requirements, and community groups that fostered deeper investment. These findings underscore the need for liturgical renewal that moves beyond accommodating

²² Interview, Pastor E, male, 48, 2024.

²³ Interview, Worship Leader F, female, 39, 2024.

²⁴ Interview, Participant G, female, 22, 2024.

²⁵ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 83.

²⁶ Interview, Pastor H, male, 55, 2024.

preferences to forming disciples committed to the Christian community and its tradition, addressing the consumerist orientation as a significant barrier to formation.

Formation-Oriented Liturgical Practices

The research identified specific formation-oriented liturgical practices that effectively nurture resilient spirituality in young congregants, with reflective spaces emerging as particularly significant. Churches that intentionally incorporated periods of silence, journaling, prayer stations, and guided meditation reported that young adults valued these opportunities for personal engagement with spiritual content. One participant described the impact of such practices: "The silence and reflection time gave me space to process what I was hearing and connect it to my own life. I felt like I was actually encountering God, not just listening to someone talk about God."²⁷ These reflective practices align with the emphasis on liturgical formation articulated by Smith, who argues that worship shapes desire through embodied practices that cultivate particular orientations and dispositions.²⁸ Another church leader explained, "We introduced a 'response time' after the sermon where people could journal, pray, or talk with someone about what they were experiencing. We found that young people really appreciated this space to process, and it helped them take ownership of their faith."²⁹ These findings suggest that reflective spaces within worship contribute to formation by fostering personal engagement with spiritual content and enabling young people to integrate faith with their lived experiences, transforming worship from a passive experience into an active process of formation.

Intergenerational dialogue and mentorship emerged as another crucial formation-oriented practice, with churches that intentionally facilitated interaction between generations reporting stronger spiritual formation outcomes. Young participants consistently expressed appreciation for opportunities to learn from older believers, with one participant observing, "Hearing the faith stories of older adults gave me hope that my faith could last; they had been through hard things and their faith had survived."³⁰ This intergenerational dimension aligns with the recommendations of Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, who emphasize the importance of older generations investing in the spiritual development of young people.³¹ Churches that

²⁷ Interview, Participant I, male, 29, 2024.

²⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58-60.

²⁹ Interview, Pastor J, female, 44, 2024.

³⁰ Interview, Participant K, female, 26, 2024.

³¹ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 32-48.

successfully integrated intergenerational elements reported that young adults felt more connected to the broader community and more confident in their faith. One church implemented a "faith mentors" program that paired young adults with older congregants for regular conversations about spiritual life, with the pastor observing, "The mentorship program transformed our young adults' faith; they had someone to process doubts with, someone who had faced similar struggles and remained faithful."³² These findings indicate that intergenerational engagement within liturgical contexts contributes significantly to the formation of resilient spirituality, providing young people with models of enduring faith and supportive relationships across generational boundaries.

The integration of creative expression within worship also emerged as a formation-oriented practice, particularly when linked to theological reflection and content rather than merely aesthetic enhancement. Churches that employed visual arts, drama, poetry, and music as vehicles for exploring theological themes reported deeper engagement from young congregants. One participant described the impact of creative elements: "The drama pieces and visual art helped me understand the sermon message in a deeper way; it was like the ideas became tangible and I could connect with them emotionally and intellectually."³³ Ruth similarly argues that the arts can function as a "flow" that moves worshipers toward deeper participation and understanding.³⁴ Churches that effectively integrated creative expression emphasized the importance of theological content and reflection, ensuring that artistic elements served formation rather than mere entertainment. One worship leader explained, "We never do creative elements just for the sake of being creative; everything has to connect to the theological content and help people encounter God in a meaningful way."³⁵ This intentional integration of creativity and theology distinguishes formation-oriented approaches from more superficial stylistic innovations, demonstrating that creative expression serves formation when it functions as a vehicle for theological engagement rather than as an end in itself.

Catechetical and teaching elements embedded within worship represented a fourth formation-oriented practice, with churches that intentionally taught theological content through liturgical structures reporting stronger understanding and commitment among young adults. These churches incorporated teaching segments, question-and-answer sessions, and interactive sermon elements that actively engaged congregants with theological content. One participant

³² Interview, Pastor L, male, 58, 2024.

³³ Interview, Participant M, male, 33, 2024.

³⁴ Ruth, Flow, 101-103.

³⁵ Interview, Worship Leader N, female, 37, 2024.

described the impact of these practices: "The interactive sermons where we could ask questions and discuss things helped me actually understand and own what I believed; it wasn't just a lecture, it was a conversation."³⁶ This catechetical approach aligns with the historical emphasis on liturgy as a school of faith, as highlighted by Bradshaw in his exploration of the formative character of worship.³⁷ Churches implementing such practices reported that young adults developed greater theological literacy and confidence in articulating their faith. The pastor of one congregation observed, "Our young people have gone from being passive consumers of worship to active participants who can articulate their beliefs and engage with challenging questions; that's the kind of formation we're after."³⁸ These findings underscore the importance of intentional teaching within worship as a means of forming resilient faith, equipping young believers with the theological resources necessary for sustained commitment and deeper understanding.

Building Resilience Through Liturgical Practice

The research findings indicate that liturgical practices designed to address doubt, suffering, and cultural challenges contribute significantly to building resilience in young believers. Churches that incorporated explicit attention to difficult questions within worship created environments where young people could process struggles without abandoning their faith. One participant described the importance of this approach: "I grew up in a church where you couldn't express doubt or ask hard questions, but here they actually create space for that. It's made a huge difference in my faith."³⁹ This finding aligns with the research of Kinnaman and Matlock, who identify the importance of creating environments where young people can navigate doubt and engage with challenging questions.⁴⁰ Churches that effectively addressed doubt within worship reported that young adults demonstrated greater resilience when facing life difficulties. A church leader explained, "When young people know they can bring their doubts and struggles into worship, they don't feel like they have to choose between faith and honesty; that kind of honesty actually strengthens their faith."⁴¹ These findings suggest that liturgical practices that normalize and address doubt contribute to the formation of resilient

³⁶ Interview, Participant O, female, 25, 2024.

³⁷ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 54-114.

³⁸ Interview, Pastor P, male, 50, 2024.

³⁹ Interview, Participant Q, male, 28, 2024.

⁴⁰ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 56-136.

⁴¹ Interview, Pastor R, female, 46, 2024.

spirituality by creating space for authentic engagement with faith challenges, enabling young believers to maintain their faith while honestly confronting their questions.

The formation of Christian identity in contrast to secular alternatives emerged as another crucial dimension of resilience-building liturgy. Churches that intentionally shaped distinctive Christian identity through worship practices reported that young adults developed a clearer sense of their faith commitments in a culturally pluralistic context. One participant described the formative impact of these practices: "The worship practices here have shaped my identity as a Christian in a way that feels distinctive and meaningful. I understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus in a way that I didn't before."⁴² Smith argues that worship functions as a "cultural liturgy" that shapes identity through the formation of imagination and desire, a perspective that was evident in the churches studied.⁴³ Churches that successfully cultivated Christian identity incorporated practices such as testimonies, confession, and liturgical prayers that reinforced distinctive Christian commitments. One pastor observed, "We don't just talk about following Jesus; the liturgy itself embodies what that looks like and shapes our people into that identity."⁴⁴ These findings indicate that intentionally forming Christian identity within worship contributes to resilience by providing a clear alternative to secular cultural narratives, equipping young people to navigate cultural challenges with confidence and clarity about their faith commitments.

The development of spiritual habits through repeated liturgical practice emerged as a foundational element of resilience-building worship. Churches that structured worship to cultivate habits such as prayer, scripture engagement, confession, and gratitude reported that young adults integrated these practices into their daily lives. One participant described the impact of liturgical habits: "The repeated practices of confession, thanksgiving, and scripture reading in worship have become habits for me; I find myself doing them during the week, and it keeps me grounded in my faith."⁴⁵ This observation aligns with Smith's argument that worship practices are "formative" in the sense that they shape habitual orientations of desire and perception.⁴⁶ Churches that intentionally attended to habit formation within worship emphasized the importance of repetition and embodiment, recognizing that resilience is cultivated through consistent practice. A worship leader explained, "We don't change things

⁴² Interview, Participant S, female, 30, 2024.

⁴³ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 97-100.

⁴⁴ Interview, Pastor T, male, 56, 2024.

⁴⁵ Interview, Participant U, male, 32, 2024.

⁴⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58-60.

just for the sake of novelty; we want to create practices that people can internalize and carry with them into their daily lives."⁴⁷ These findings suggest that the cultivation of spiritual habits through liturgical practice is essential for building resilience that can be sustained beyond the worship gathering, providing young believers with practices that sustain faith in daily life.

The role of community in supporting resilience emerged as a final dimension of formation-oriented liturgy, with churches that emphasized relational connection within worship reporting stronger resilience outcomes. Young participants consistently highlighted the importance of feeling known, valued, and supported by their faith community, with one participant observing, "I went through a really hard time last year, and it was the people in this church who carried me through. I knew they would be there for me because we had built those relationships through worship and community life."⁴⁸ This finding supports the emphasis of Powell, Mulder, and Griffin on the significance of warm community in sustaining faith.⁴⁹ Churches that effectively built community through worship incorporated elements such as greeting times, prayer for one another, and opportunities for sharing within the service. One church leader noted, "We intentionally design our worship to create connection; it's not just about singing songs and listening to a sermon, it's about building relationships that can support people through difficult times."⁵⁰ These findings indicate that resilience is not merely an individual achievement but is nurtured within communities of faith that provide support, accountability, and belonging, equipping young believers to face challenges with the support of a faithful community.

The Role of Digital Media in Formation

The research findings reveal that digital media can function as a tool for spiritual formation when employed intentionally, moving beyond mere communication to facilitate genuine engagement with faith. Churches that used digital media to extend formation beyond the worship gathering reported that young adults continued to engage with spiritual content throughout the week. One participant described the impact of digital resources: "The daily scripture readings and reflection videos that the church sends out help me stay connected and growing even when I'm not at church."⁵¹ Campbell similarly notes that digital media can extend

⁴⁷ Interview, Worship Leader V, female, 41, 2024.

⁴⁸ Interview, Participant W, female, 27, 2024.

⁴⁹ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 32-48.

⁵⁰ Interview, Pastor X, male, 53, 2024.

⁵¹ Interview, Participant Y, female, 23, 2024.

religious practice beyond physical gatherings, creating opportunities for ongoing formation.⁵² Churches that effectively employed digital media for formation emphasized the importance of content quality and theological depth, avoiding the trap of superficial engagement. One church leader explained, "We don't just use social media to promote events; we use it to provide formation resources that help people grow in their faith throughout the week."⁵³ These findings suggest that digital media can contribute significantly to formation when approached intentionally and theologically, providing resources that extend the formative impact of worship beyond the Sunday gathering.

However, the research also identified challenges associated with digital media use, including the risk of promoting passive consumption rather than active engagement. Several participants expressed concern that digital resources could become substitutes for genuine community and formation, with one participant noting, "It's easy to watch a sermon online and feel like you've done church, but you miss out on the community and formation that happens when you're actually present with others."⁵⁴ This concern aligns with the observations of Root regarding the danger of technological solutions that bypass the embodied, communal nature of Christian formation.⁵⁵ Churches that navigated this challenge effectively emphasized the importance of digital media as a supplement rather than a replacement for in-person worship and community life. One pastor explained, "We use digital media to extend and deepen formation, but we are clear that it can't replace the embodied, relational practices that are essential to Christian formation."⁵⁶ These findings indicate that digital media must be integrated thoughtfully into a broader formation strategy, ensuring that it serves rather than undermines formation goals, and that maintaining the primacy of embodied worship is essential for authentic formation.

The integration of digital media with formation-oriented practices emerged as a particularly effective approach, with churches that linked digital content to in-person worship and community reporting stronger formation outcomes. One church developed an app that provided formation resources, discussion questions, and community connection opportunities that complemented the worship experience. A participant described the impact: "The app gives me things to reflect on during the week that connect to what we experienced in worship on

⁵² Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 75-78.

⁵³ Interview, Pastor Z, male, 49, 2024.

⁵⁴ Interview, Participant AA, male, 26, 2024.

⁵⁵ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 83.

⁵⁶ Interview, Pastor BB, female, 45, 2024.

Sunday. It helps me carry the formation from worship into my daily life."⁵⁷ This integration addresses the concern identified by Smith that formation requires ongoing engagement rather than isolated worship experiences.⁵⁸ Churches that effectively integrated digital media reported that young adults demonstrated greater spiritual growth and commitment, with one church leader observing, "We've seen a significant increase in spiritual growth and community engagement since we started using digital media intentionally for formation."⁵⁹ These findings suggest that strategic integration of digital media with formation-oriented worship can enhance the impact of liturgical renewal, providing continuity of formation across the week.

Finally, the research identified the importance of critical engagement with digital culture as a dimension of formation, with churches that addressed challenges such as digital distraction, online identity, and social comparison contributing to resilient spirituality. One participant described the importance of this engagement: "The church has helped me think critically about how I use social media and digital technology, and how it affects my spiritual life. I didn't realize how much it was impacting my faith until they addressed it."⁶⁰ Churches that effectively engaged with digital culture within worship incorporated teaching, reflection, and practices designed to cultivate healthy digital habits. One pastor explained, "We talk about digital discipleship and help people think theologically about their technology use. It's a formation issue that can't be ignored if we want people to have resilient faith in today's world."⁶¹ These findings indicate that addressing digital culture within liturgical renewal contributes to resilience by equipping young people to navigate the challenges of a digitally saturated world with faith and discernment, recognizing that formation must address the realities of contemporary digital life.

DISCUSSION

Theological Foundations for Formation-Oriented Liturgical Renewal

The findings of this research suggest that liturgical renewal must be grounded in a robust theological understanding of worship as formative practice, moving beyond pragmatic concerns of engagement and relevance. The study confirms Smith's argument that worship is inherently formational, shaping human desires, imaginations, and habits through embodied

⁵⁷ Interview, Participant CC, female, 28, 2024.

⁵⁸ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58-60.

⁵⁹ Interview, Pastor DD, male, 51, 2024.

⁶⁰ Interview, Participant EE, female, 24, 2024.

⁶¹ Interview, Pastor FF, male, 47, 2024.

practices that orient participants toward particular ends.⁶² Churches that understood liturgical renewal as a theological enterprise rather than merely a strategic intervention demonstrated greater success in nurturing resilient spirituality among young congregants. This theological foundation involves recognizing that worship is not simply an expression of existing faith but a means by which faith is cultivated, deepened, and sustained over time. The emphasis on formation-oriented practices, reflective spaces, intergenerational engagement, and intentional teaching reflects an understanding that worship functions as a "school of faith" that educates participants in Christian identity and practice. The research indicates that theological reflection on the nature and purpose of worship is essential for effective liturgical renewal that achieves formation outcomes.

The theological grounding of liturgical renewal also requires attention to the relationship between tradition and innovation, with churches that maintained continuity with Christian tradition while adapting to contemporary contexts achieving stronger formation outcomes. Bradshaw reminds us that liturgical development has always involved negotiation between preservation and adaptation, a dynamic that remains essential for faithful renewal.⁶³ The churches studied that achieved a balance between tradition and innovation demonstrated the capacity to maintain doctrinal integrity while engaging younger generations meaningfully. This balance involves recognizing that tradition provides theological resources and practices that have proven formative across generations, while innovation enables these resources to be communicated effectively in contemporary contexts. One pastor captured this tension well: "We want to honor the tradition that has formed Christians for centuries, but we also need to communicate that tradition in ways that speak to today's young people. It's not either/or; it's both/and."⁶⁴ This perspective suggests that theological discernment is essential for liturgical renewal that achieves formation goals. The research indicates that formation-oriented renewal requires thoughtful integration of tradition and innovation.

The research further indicates that formation-oriented renewal requires a comprehensive theological vision that encompasses the entire worshipping community, not merely targeted programs for young people. Churches that successfully nurtured resilient spirituality integrated formation concerns across all aspects of congregational life, recognizing that young people are formed by the whole ecology of worship and community. This comprehensive approach aligns with the emphasis of Root on the need for holistic faith formation that addresses the full

⁶² Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58-60.

⁶³ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 54-114.

⁶⁴ Interview, Pastor GG, male, 54, 2024.

complexity of young people's lives.⁶⁵ The churches studied that integrated formation throughout congregational life reported that young adults developed not only individual faith but also commitment to the broader Christian community and its mission. One church leader explained, "We don't just focus on youth ministry; we think about how every aspect of the congregation contributes to the formation of all ages, including young adults."⁶⁶ This perspective highlights the importance of intergenerational and holistic approaches to formation-oriented renewal. The research suggests that effective formation requires the involvement of the entire congregation in the spiritual development of younger generations.

The theological foundations for formation-oriented renewal also involve a proper understanding of human formation and the role of grace in spiritual growth. The research suggests that churches recognizing formation as a divine work enabled by grace, rather than merely human effort, developed a more sustainable and less performance-oriented approach to spiritual development. Smith emphasizes that worship is ultimately about receiving grace and being transformed by God's presence, a perspective that challenges approaches focused primarily on human achievement.⁶⁷ Churches that maintained this grace-oriented perspective reported that young adults experienced less pressure and more freedom in their spiritual growth, contributing to greater resilience. One young adult participant expressed this sentiment: "I don't feel like I have to perform or be perfect here; I can be real about my struggles and trust that God is at work in me. That gives me hope."⁶⁸ These findings suggest that formation-oriented renewal must be grounded in a theology of grace that enables sustainable rather than anxiety-driven spiritual development. The research indicates that understanding formation as a work of grace contributes to resilience by relieving young people of the burden of achieving their own spiritual growth.

The Role of Technology in Formation-Oriented Worship

The research reveals that technology can serve formation when integrated thoughtfully into worship, functioning as a tool for deepening rather than distracting from spiritual engagement. Churches that used technology to extend formation beyond the worship gathering, provide access to formation resources, and enhance engagement with theological content demonstrated positive formation outcomes. Campbell's observation that digital media can

⁶⁵ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 83.

⁶⁶ Interview, Pastor HH, female, 42, 2024.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 97-100.

⁶⁸ Interview, Participant II, male, 30, 2024.

extend religious practice is confirmed by this research, which found that digital resources helped young people maintain connection to faith communities and continue formation throughout the week.⁶⁹ However, the research also identifies the importance of intentional design, ensuring that technology serves formation rather than undermining it through distraction or superficiality. One pastor emphasized, "We always ask ourselves: Does this technology help people encounter God and grow in their faith, or is it just a gimmick? That question guides everything we do."⁷⁰ This perspective suggests that theological discernment is essential for the integration of technology in formation-oriented worship. The research indicates that thoughtful integration of technology can enhance formation while avoiding the pitfalls of superficial engagement.

The research also highlights the importance of balancing digital and embodied worship, ensuring that technology supplements rather than replaces the relational and physical dimensions of Christian formation. Participants expressed concern about the potential for digital worship to become a substitute for community engagement, reinforcing Root's caution about technological solutions that bypass embodied formation.⁷¹ Churches that successfully navigated this tension emphasized the complementarity of digital and embodied worship, using technology to extend and deepen community rather than replace it. One church leader explained, "We see digital worship as an extension of our embodied worship, not a replacement. People still need to be present with one another, to receive communion, to pray together physically."⁷² This approach recognizes that Christian formation is inherently embodied and communal, requiring practices that cannot be fully replicated digitally. The research suggests that maintaining this balance is essential for formation-oriented renewal in a digital age, ensuring that technology serves rather than supplants embodied faith practices.

A critical dimension of technology integration identified in the research is the need for formation in digital discernment, equipping young people to navigate digital culture with theological awareness and practical wisdom. Churches that addressed digital technology as a formation issue, teaching young people to engage critically and faithfully with digital media, contributed to resilience in the face of digital challenges such as distraction, comparison, and isolation. Kinnaman and Matlock similarly emphasize the importance of helping young people

⁶⁹ Campbell, *Digital Religion*, 75-78.

⁷⁰ Interview, Pastor JJ, male, 50, 2024.

⁷¹ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 83.

⁷² Interview, Pastor KK, female, 48, 2024.

navigate "digital Babylon" with faith and discernment.⁷³ Participants who received such formation reported greater capacity to manage digital technology in ways that supported rather than undermined their spiritual lives. One participant described the impact: "The church helped me think about how my phone use was affecting my prayer life and attention span. I've made changes that have really helped me grow."⁷⁴ These findings indicate that formation-oriented renewal must include attention to digital culture, equipping young people to live faithfully in a technologically saturated world. The research suggests that formation in digital discernment is an essential component of resilient spirituality.

The research further suggests that technology can be particularly effective when used to facilitate formation-oriented practices such as reflection, discussion, and connection. Churches that employed digital platforms for small group discussions, prayer requests, and formation content distribution reported stronger engagement and community connection. Ruth observes that creative integration of media can enhance worship participation, and the present research confirms that this integration can extend to formation as well.⁷⁵ One church used a digital platform to facilitate weekly reflection and discussion among young adults, with a participant noting, "The online discussion group helps me process what I'm hearing in worship and connect with others who are thinking through similar questions. It's been really formative."⁷⁶ This example illustrates how technology can serve formation by creating spaces for ongoing engagement with faith beyond the worship gathering. The research suggests that intentional use of technology for formation-oriented purposes can significantly enhance the impact of liturgical renewal, providing continuity and depth to the formation process.

Intergenerational Dynamics and Formation

The research findings underscore the significance of intergenerational dynamics in formation-oriented liturgical renewal, with churches that facilitated meaningful interaction between generations reporting stronger formation outcomes. Young participants consistently valued opportunities to learn from older believers, whether through formal mentorship programs or informal relationships within the worshipping community. This intergenerational dimension aligns with the recommendations of Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, who emphasize

⁷³ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 56-136.

⁷⁴ Interview, Participant LL, male, 25, 2024.

⁷⁵ Ruth, *Flow*, 101-103.

⁷⁶ Interview, Participant MM, female, 29, 2024.

the importance of older generations investing in the spiritual development of young people.⁷⁷ The research suggests that intergenerational engagement provides young people with models of faithful living, demonstrating that faith can endure through various life stages and challenges. One participant expressed this appreciation: "Seeing older adults who have walked with God for decades gives me hope that I can do the same. Their example is powerful."⁷⁸ Churches that successfully fostered intergenerational relationships reported that young adults felt more connected to the broader faith community and more confident in their ability to sustain faith over time.

The research also indicates that intergenerational dynamics contribute to formation by facilitating the transmission of theological wisdom and practical knowledge across generations. Older believers possess accumulated wisdom from years of navigating faith in various contexts, wisdom that can provide young people with resources for facing contemporary challenges. Bradshaw notes that liturgical tradition itself represents intergenerational transmission of faith practices, and the present research confirms that intentional intergenerational engagement strengthens this transmission.⁷⁹ Churches that emphasized intergenerational relationships reported that young adults gained theological depth and practical wisdom that supported their spiritual growth. One church leader explained, "Our older members have so much to offer; they've been through trials, they've wrestled with doubt, they've learned to trust God in hard times. When young people hear those stories, it gives them resources for their own journey."⁸⁰ These findings suggest that intergenerational engagement is essential for the transmission of resilient faith, as it provides young people with living examples of enduring commitment.

The research further reveals that intergenerational worship itself can be formative, with liturgies that intentionally include and value all ages contributing to a sense of belonging and mutual responsibility. Churches that designed worship to be accessible and meaningful across generations reported that young adults developed a stronger sense of connection to the broader community and its traditions. Dyrness emphasizes the role of the arts in engaging faith across generations, and the present research confirms that creative expression can bridge generational gaps when intentionally designed for this purpose.⁸¹ One church incorporated intergenerational elements such as shared testimonies, joint participation in liturgical leadership, and collective

⁷⁷ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 32-48.

⁷⁸ Interview, Participant NN, female, 26, 2024.

⁷⁹ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 54-114.

⁸⁰ Interview, Pastor OO, male, 60, 2024.

⁸¹ Dyrness, *Theology and the Arts*, 147-150.

reflection on faith journeys, practices that young adults reported as particularly meaningful. A participant described the impact: "When I see people of all ages participating in worship together, it feels like we're truly a family. I belong to something bigger than myself."⁸² These findings suggest that intergenerational worship practices contribute to formation by creating environments where young people experience belonging and see faith modeled across the lifespan.

However, the research also identifies challenges associated with intergenerational engagement, including differences in preferences, communication styles, and expectations that can create tension within worship communities. Churches that successfully navigated these challenges emphasized the importance of mutual respect, open communication, and a shared commitment to formation goals. The research suggests that intergenerational dynamics require intentional cultivation, with churches investing in relationships and practices that bridge generational divides. One pastor reflected on this challenge: "It's not always easy to bring generations together; there are different preferences and perspectives. But we've found that when we focus on our shared faith and commitment to formation, those differences become less significant."⁸³ These findings indicate that intergenerational engagement, while challenging, is essential for formation-oriented renewal and requires intentional effort to overcome barriers. The research suggests that churches must invest in cultivating intergenerational relationships as a core component of formation strategy.

Implications for Sustainable Liturgical Transformation

The research findings have significant implications for the design and implementation of sustainable liturgical transformation that prioritizes formation outcomes. First, the research suggests that liturgical renewal must be approached as a long-term process rather than a quick fix, with churches committing to ongoing evaluation and adaptation based on formation outcomes. Root emphasizes the importance of patient, sustained formation that addresses the deep needs of young people, and the present research confirms that formation-oriented renewal requires time and persistence.⁸⁴ Churches that implemented renewal gradually, with attention to building capacity and understanding, reported more sustainable outcomes than those that rushed into dramatic changes. One church leader advised, "Take your time; formation doesn't happen overnight. Build slowly, evaluate constantly, and keep the focus on what really matters:

⁸² Interview, Participant PP, male, 27, 2024.

⁸³ Interview, Pastor QQ, female, 52, 2024.

⁸⁴ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 83.

people growing in their faith."⁸⁵ These findings suggest that sustainable transformation requires a long-term commitment to formation goals, with patience and persistence as essential virtues.

Second, the research indicates that effective liturgical transformation requires the involvement of the entire congregation, with leadership that communicates the theological rationale for change and invites participation in the renewal process. Smith argues that worship formation requires the active participation of the community, and the present research confirms that congregational ownership of renewal contributes to its sustainability.⁸⁶ Churches that involved congregants in the design and evaluation of liturgical renewal reported greater acceptance and commitment to the changes, as well as stronger formation outcomes. One church leader explained, "We didn't just impose changes from the top down; we invited conversation, listened to concerns, and made adjustments based on feedback. That process built trust and ownership."⁸⁷ These findings suggest that inclusive, participatory approaches to liturgical renewal contribute to sustainability by fostering congregational investment and understanding.

Third, the research suggests that ongoing evaluation and adaptation are essential for sustainable liturgical transformation, with churches that regularly assess formation outcomes and adjust practices accordingly reporting stronger results. Wuthnow notes the importance of understanding generational changes and adapting ministry accordingly, and the present research confirms that responsiveness to changing needs is essential for formation effectiveness.⁸⁸ Churches that implemented regular evaluation mechanisms, including feedback from young participants, reported that they were better able to identify what was working and what needed adjustment. One church leader observed, "We're constantly learning and adapting; what works for one group of young people might not work for another. Evaluation helps us stay responsive."⁸⁹ These findings suggest that sustainable transformation requires an ongoing commitment to learning and adaptation, with evaluation as an essential tool for maintaining formation effectiveness.

Finally, the research indicates that sustainable liturgical transformation requires theological depth and clarity, with churches that articulate and embody a clear theological vision for formation achieving stronger and more lasting outcomes. Bradshaw emphasizes that

⁸⁵ Interview, Pastor RR, male, 56, 2024.

⁸⁶ Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 58-60.

⁸⁷ Interview, Pastor SS, female, 44, 2024.

⁸⁸ Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 76-80.

⁸⁹ Interview, Pastor TT, male, 49, 2024.

liturgical development must be grounded in theological understanding, and the present research confirms that theological clarity contributes to sustainability.⁹⁰ Churches that invested in theological education for leaders and congregants, explaining the formation rationale for liturgical practices, reported greater understanding and commitment to renewal efforts. One pastor explained, "We spend a lot of time teaching about why we do what we do; when people understand the theological significance of liturgical practices, they're more committed to them."⁹¹ These findings suggest that theological grounding is essential for sustainable liturgical transformation, providing the foundation for faithful adaptation that maintains doctrinal integrity and formation effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between liturgical renewal and spiritual formation, investigating how churches can intentionally design worship to nurture resilient spirituality among Millennials and Generation Z. The findings reveal that engagement-focused renewal without intentional formation produces superficial results, while formation-oriented liturgical practices integrating reflective spaces, intergenerational dialogue, creative expression, and digital media foster deep engagement with Christian tradition and contribute to resilient faith. The research confirms that effective liturgical renewal must move beyond pragmatic concerns of attraction and relevance to address the deeper question of how worship forms Christian identity, habits, and convictions that can sustain faith through the challenges of contemporary life. The study demonstrates that formation-oriented renewal requires theological grounding, intentional design, and ongoing evaluation, with churches that prioritize these elements achieving stronger and more sustainable outcomes in the spiritual growth of young believers. The qualitative nature of this research limits generalizability; findings should be understood as offering insights for reflection rather than prescriptive models for all contexts, and the denominational contexts of the case study churches should be considered when interpreting the results.

The research contributes to practical theology, spiritual formation, and congregational studies by offering a framework for understanding liturgical renewal as a formation-oriented endeavor. The findings affirm that the liturgy functions as a school of faith that can either cultivate or undermine resilient spirituality, depending on the intentionality and theological

⁹⁰ Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 54-114.

⁹¹ Interview, Pastor UU, male, 53, 2024.

depth of its design. The study recommends that churches adopt a holistic approach to liturgical development that integrates formation-oriented practices, intentional teaching, inter-generational engagement, and thoughtful technology use. Church leaders are encouraged to invest in theological education that equips congregations to understand the formative significance of liturgical practices, and to implement evaluation mechanisms that assess formation outcomes rather than merely attendance metrics. Future research should explore the long-term impact of formation-oriented liturgical renewal on faith resilience through longitudinal studies, examine the effectiveness of specific formation practices across denominational traditions, and investigate how digital media can be most effectively integrated with embodied worship for formation purposes. By approaching liturgical renewal as a theological strategy for forming resilient faith, churches can fulfill their calling to nurture disciples who are equipped to navigate the complexities of contemporary life with faith, hope, and love.

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