

Intergenerational Dialogue towards Building of Synergy in Consecrated Life in Nigeria

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Introduction

We can look at intergenerational dialogue as referring to the exchange of ideas and experiences between individuals from different generations and age grades, such as a conversation between a toddler and his/her Aunty in her mid 30s, or a teenage grandchild and her grandmother. From my understanding, synergy refers to the idea that when different individuals work lovingly together, their combined output is greater and more beautiful than the sum of their individual input. We must also at this stage note the three key stages of the human life. We must also at this stage note the three key stages of the human life. 0-35/40 - good morning stage, 40-65/70 - good afternoon, over 70 - good evening.

At good afternoon stage the power of youthfulness is dwindled, possibility of failures in life begins to show itself, the dreams of early years tend to be shallow and pointless, then follows the proper old age (good evening). If the first two stages were not lived well, the 3rd stage will be problematic. Our past remains the greatest influence on how we deal with ourselves, others and God. Each of the above stages is complete in itself, but one affects the other.

Consecrated Life: Fostering Synergy through Intergenerational Dialogue

There are several Institutes of Consecrated Life in our country Nigeria. Let me attempt to list some of them, especially the female Religious Institutes: Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy, Handmaids of the Holy Child Jesus, Sisters of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus, University Sisters of Assumption, Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary Mother of Christ, just to mention a few. Intergenerational dialogue holds great relevance for fostering synergy within these religious communities of Consecrated Life in Nigeria, and in every country of the world. Consecrated life refers to a state of life in the Catholic Church in which men and women who live together commit themselves to live the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience in a radical way. That Consecrated persons live communal life does not suggest that they all have the same wealth of experience or have become mates. The African adage that says, “What an adult sees sitting is not seen by a child standing on top of a tree” holds an everlasting truth. In other words, experience matter a great deal. Another proverb says, “A child can never have as many ragged clothes as an adult”. What these two proverbs are emphasizing is the non-debatable wisdom and experience of the elderly.

What Intergenerational Dialogue is not

It is important to take cognizance of the fact that intergenerational dialogue in consecrated life must involve meaningful conversations and interactions whose aim is to bridge the generation gap and foster understanding, collaboration, and mutual respect. It must be life giving.

- It is not intergenerational dialogue when one group talks down on another and badmouth them.

- It is not intergenerational dialogue when one group says they lived in the best times, and the other is of a perverse generation.
- It is not intergenerational dialogue when the young tell the old “Welcome to the floor of temporary amnesia”
- It is not intergenerational dialogue when the reason for conversation is not to learn, but to judge and condemn.
- It is not intergenerational dialogue when conversation follows the argumentative pattern.

What else is intergenerational dialogue not? The list goes on.

Intergenerational dialogue is something beautiful. It is always lovely to see the young and old having a loving conversation. It is a wonderful to behold a young Sister not getting agitated, but patiently teaching an elderly Sister how to navigate the settings of her new gift of phone, and the elderly one telling her about how the European Sisters who formed them taught them how to prepare rose pancake. This type of interaction usually result in a wonderful synergy.

The Synergy We Need

In simple terms, synergy means that when people collaborate, they can achieve more than what they could achieve on their own. Imagine that you have two friends, Sr. Desire and Sr. Desola. Sr. Desire is good at speaking, and Sr. Desola is good at writing poems. Individually, Sr. Desire can make up beautiful speeches, and Sr. Desire can write fantastic poems. But when they work together, Sr. Desire can illustrate Sr. Desola's poems. The combination of their talents can result in the creation of a meditation book that is much more captivating and appealing than if they had worked separately. The book's success is an example of synergy. Synergy can be seen in various situations. In a team, each member brings their unique skills and expertise. When they collaborate effectively, their collective efforts produce better outcomes and solutions than if each person had worked alone.

Existing Synergies

Synergy can also be observed in business partnerships, where Institutes of Consecrated life combine their resources, knowledge, and strengths to achieve shared goals and generate greater success. The NCWR Secretariat, Iva Valley, Institute for Formators, Du, ASEC Learning Centre, Du and COSUDOW are examples of synergy. African Sisters Education Collaborative (ASEC): ASEC is an organization that works with Catholic religious congregations in Africa, including Nigeria, to provide educational opportunities and leadership training for women religious. Their programs bring together older and younger members of religious communities, fostering intergenerational dialogue and mentorship. Through these initiatives, younger Sisters gain guidance, skills, and support from more experienced Sisters, ensuring a smooth leadership transition and the preservation of tradition while embracing innovation. Ultimately, synergy highlights the power of cooperation and how working together can create results that are greater than the sum of their parts. These examples highlight the importance of intergenerational dialogue in various religious contexts. They demonstrate how intentional initiatives and organizations can create platforms for meaningful dialogue, mentorship, and collaboration between older and younger members, leading to mutual understanding, growth, and the fostering of synergy within religious communities.

Intergenerational Dialogue and Synergy in the Bible

There is no specific Bible passage that mentions "intergenerational synergy" as a phrase. However, the Bible does contain teachings and principles that relate to the idea of intergenerational collaboration and the importance of unity across different generations. One such passage is: "Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of

good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned,having nothing evil to say about us." (Titus 2:2-8). This highlights the mutual responsibility and influence between older and younger individuals within a community, and the importance of older individuals providing guidance and positive examples to the younger ones. At the same time, younger individuals are encouraged to listen, learn, and exhibit self-control, while honoring and respecting their elders. The passage promotes synergy and unity between generations for the overall well-being and growth of the community. Psalm 145:4 "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." This verse speaks of the responsibility and privilege of passing down knowledge and faith from one generation to another. It emphasizes the importance of sharing God's works and testimonies, fostering a sense of continuity and unity between different age groups.

Generation Gap: A Challenge to Intergenerational Dynamics

In Nigeria, the consecrated life faces various challenges concerning intergenerational dynamics. These challenges impact the synergy and unity within religious communities. Addressing these challenges require a concerted effort from both older and younger members of religious communities. One of the primary challenges is the generation gap between older and younger members of religious communities. The generation gap within the consecrated life in Nigeria reflects the differences in values, perspectives, and approaches to religious life between older and younger members. These gaps can pose challenges but also offer opportunities for growth and synergy. By acknowledging and understanding these differences in values, perspectives, and approaches to religious life, the consecrated life in Nigeria can embrace the opportunities for growth and collaboration that arise from intergenerational dynamics. Engaging in open dialogue, mutual respect, and a willingness to learn from one another can bridge these

gaps and foster synergy that enriches the consecrated life, ensures its relevance, and strengthens its impact in the Nigerian context.

Values

Different generations often hold varying values shaped by their unique experiences and societal contexts. Older members may emphasize traditional values such as obedience, humility, and reverence, which have been passed down through generations. Younger members, influenced by contemporary culture, may prioritize values like social justice, inclusivity, and environmental stewardship. These differing values can lead to tensions and require intentional dialogue to find common ground and shared values that align with the mission of the consecrated life.

Perspectives

Each generation brings its own perspective on religious life, spirituality, and engagement with the world. Older members may have a more inward focus, emphasizing personal holiness, contemplation, and ascetic practices. Younger members, influenced by a changing society, may have a more outward focus, emphasizing social activism, outreach, and engagement with pressing societal issues. Combining these perspectives can enrich the consecrated life and foster a holistic approach that encompasses both contemplation and action.

Approaches to Community Life

Different generations may approach community life differently. Older members may prioritize hierarchical structures, strict obedience, and adherence to established rules and customs. Younger members may seek more participatory decision-making, collaboration, and a sense of shared ownership. Balancing these approaches is essential for creating a healthy and inclusive community where all members feel heard and valued.

Engagement with Technology

Technological advancements have a significant impact on intergenerational dynamics within religious communities. Younger members, having grown up in a digital age, are often more tech-savvy and comfortable with technology. They may embrace social media, online communication, and digital tools for ministry and outreach. In contrast, older members may have less familiarity and be less inclined to adopt these technological advancements. Bridging this technological divide and finding ways to leverage technology for the benefit of the consecrated life can enhance collaboration and communication across generations.

Intergenerational Dialogue is Essential for Building Synergy in Consecrated Life

Intergenerational dialogue is essential for building synergy in consecrated life for several reasons. It enables the sharing of wisdom, fosters mutual understanding and respect, harnesses the synergy of diverse gifts and talents, ensures continuity while embracing adaptation, supports leadership development, and promotes growth and renewal within the community. By actively engaging in intergenerational dialogue, religious communities can thrive and fulfill their mission in a dynamic and changing world.

Wisdom and Experience

Intergenerational dialogue allows for the exchange of wisdom and experience between older and younger members. Older members have a wealth of knowledge and insights gained through their years of commitment to religious life. By engaging in dialogue with younger members, this wisdom can be shared and utilized to guide the community's decisions, practices, and responses to challenges. Younger members, in turn, bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas that can invigorate and inspire the community's mission.

Knowledge Sharing

Intergenerational dialogue facilitates the sharing of knowledge and insights across generations. Older members possess a wealth of experiential wisdom gained from their commitment to religious life. By engaging in dialogue with younger members, this wisdom can be imparted, benefiting the community as a whole. Simultaneously, younger members bring fresh ideas, perspectives, and knowledge influenced by their generation's experiences. This exchange of knowledge enriches the community, broadens its collective understanding, and encourages

Preservation of Tradition

Intergenerational dialogue plays a vital role in preserving the tradition and heritage of religious communities. Older members carry the wisdom of the past, the practices, and the values that have shaped the community. Through dialogue, these traditions can be passed on to younger members, ensuring their continuity and relevance. By understanding and appreciating the rich traditions, younger members can engage with them authentically and contribute to their preservation, fostering a sense of identity and rootedness within the community.

Mutual understanding and Respect

Intergenerational dialogue fosters mutual understanding and respect among members of different generations. It creates an environment where individuals can listen to each other's perspectives, values, and concerns without judgment. This understanding leads to stronger relationships, improved communication, and a sense of shared purpose. When different generations feel heard and valued, they are more likely to work together harmoniously and support one another's growth and development.

Synergy of gifts and talents

Each generation possesses unique gifts, talents, and strengths. Intergenerational dialogue enables the identification and utilization of these diverse qualities within the community. By appreciating and combining the talents and expertise of both older and younger members, the community can achieve a higher level of synergy. This synergy allows for the collaborative pursuit of the community's mission and the fulfillment of its charism.

Continuity and Adaptation

Intergenerational dialogue ensures both continuity and adaptation within the consecrated life. It facilitates the passing on of traditions, values, and practices from older members to younger ones, preserving the community's identity and heritage. Simultaneously, dialogue allows for adaptation to the changing needs and contexts of the times. The insights and perspectives of younger members can help the community remain relevant and responsive to societal challenges, ensuring the continuity of the community's mission in an ever-evolving world.

Personal and Spiritual Growth

Intergenerational dialogue offers opportunities for personal and spiritual growth among community members. Engaging in dialogue with individuals from different generations expands one's understanding, challenges assumptions, and broadens one's perspective. Through dialogue, older members can witness the passion, idealism, and dedication of the younger generation, renewing their own sense of purpose. Simultaneously, younger members can benefit from the wisdom, guidance, and mentorship of older members, deepening their spiritual journey and fostering a sense of continuity with the community's legacy.

Suggestions on Practical Strategies for Fostering Intergenerational Dialogue Within the Consecrated Life in Nigeria

Active listening, respect, and openness is expected from all community members. Fostering intergenerational dialogue requires an ongoing commitment and intentional effort. The consecrated life in Nigeria can cultivate an environment that values intergenerational collaboration, understanding, and synergy. Fostering intergenerational dialogue within the consecrated life in Nigeria requires practical strategies and methods that create a supportive and inclusive environment for all members, such as: Establishing Intergenerational Committees that consist of representatives from different generations within the community. These groups can be responsible for organizing intergenerational activities, workshops, and discussions to ensure a diversity of perspectives and ideas that cater to the needs and interests of all generations. Another strategy is to organize intergenerational prayer reflection sessions and sharing. These sessions can take place during community gatherings or retreats and provide an opportunity for members of different generations to share their insights, stories, and reflections. We can facilitate these sessions by using prompts or questions that encourage open and respectful dialogue. Design liturgical services or prayer gatherings that involve members from different generations in the planning and execution. This can include readings, reflections, and music selections that resonate with various age groups, ensuring a sense of inclusivity and shared worship experiences.

Conclusion

Intergenerational dialogue plays a pivotal role in building synergy within the consecrated life in Nigeria. By bridging the gap between generations, it promotes understanding, collaboration, and the preservation of tradition while embracing innovation. Through open

and respectful communication, the barriers of age, values, and perspectives can be overcome, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose. Intergenerational dialogue allows for the exchange of knowledge, experiences, and insights, enriching the spiritual and vocational journeys of all members.

In Nigeria, where the consecrated life is deeply rooted in tradition and facing evolving societal challenges, intergenerational dialogue is particularly crucial. Let us recognize the immense value of intergenerational dialogue in the consecrated life in Nigeria. By organizing intergenerational committees and prayer sessions, fostering open communication, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and promoting inclusivity, we can build synergy that transcends generational boundaries. Together, we can create a vibrant and harmonious community, embracing the richness of our collective wisdom and ensuring the enduring legacy of the consecrated life in Nigeria.

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