

Leading together: Intergenerational church leadership through the C.H.A.I.N. model



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This article addresses the urgent need for sustainable intergenerational leadership within contemporary church contexts, particularly in Southeast Asia, where traditional hierarchical models often marginalise younger leaders. Drawing from the contrasting biblical narratives of Saul's failed leadership transition and Moses' successful mentorship of Joshua, the study develops a theologically grounded and contextually relevant framework for leadership succession. The proposed C.H.A.I.N. model: Calling, Honour, Alignment, Investment and Navigation, offers an integrative approach emphasising spiritual formation, mutual respect across generations, strategic coherence and Spirit-led transition. Employing qualitative theological research and narrative analysis, the article synthesises biblical insights with contemporary leadership theory to construct a model applicable to diverse ecclesial settings. The findings reveal that effective leadership regeneration is not merely organisational but deeply spiritual, requiring intentional mentoring, public affirmation and communal discernment. This article contributes a novel theological framework to guide churches in nurturing generational continuity, mission alignment and leadership resilience for the future.

Contribution: This study offers a theologically grounded and contextually relevant model for intergenerational church leadership, bridging biblical narrative with practical ministry frameworks to support sustainable succession in diverse ecclesial contexts.

Keywords: intergenerational leadership; church succession; Moses and Joshua; C.H.A.I.N.; leadership succession; sustainable leadership.

Introduction

In recent decades, churches across the Global South, including Indonesia, have faced increasing challenges in leadership continuity and generational integration. Many congregations rely on hierarchical, seniority-based models that unintentionally marginalise emerging leaders, especially the younger generation. While rooted in tradition, these models often lack the flexibility and spiritual intentionality needed to facilitate meaningful leadership transitions. As a result, leadership vacuums, generational mistrust and declining participation among youth have become recurring issues in ecclesial life (Babnik & Širca 2014:349–364). This phenomenon reveals a disconnection between theological ideals of shared spiritual leadership and the organisational realities experienced by many local churches.

One of the most compelling biblical responses to this crisis is the contrasting narratives of Saul and Moses. Saul's leadership reflects a cautionary tale of spiritual insecurity and failure to prepare a successor, while Moses exemplifies intentional mentoring and a Spirit-led transition to Joshua. These stories serve as theological archetypes highlighting the critical role of intergenerational leadership in sustaining God's mission. Yet, despite their relevance, few ecclesial models today effectively integrate these biblical insights with practical leadership formation and succession strategies.

Current studies on church leadership tend to focus either on individual competencies (Rojas 2022: 555–568) or structural models of ministry (Mc Crea & Smith 2014:95–114), with limited engagement in theologically grounded, intergenerational frameworks. The gap lies in a lack of cohesive models that combine theological depth, ethical grounding and practical application. Moreover, many churches in the Global South lack intentional processes for mentoring, communal affirmation and liturgical transition that could enable healthy succession and shared leadership.

This article seeks to address this gap by proposing a theologically robust and contextually relevant model for intergenerational leadership: The C.H.A.I.N. model, which stands for Calling, Honour, Alignment, Investment and Navigation. It offers a holistic approach that integrates biblical narrative analysis, contemporary leadership theory and ecclesial practice to equip churches for spiritually sustainable leadership transitions. The central research question guiding this study is: *How can churches cultivate intergenerational leadership that is both theologically grounded and practically sustainable in their local context?*

This study aims to construct an integrative theological framework for leadership succession that fosters generational continuity, mutual trust and Spirit-empowered mission. Drawing from biblical exemplars and interdisciplinary insights, this research contributes a practical theology of leadership development that churches can contextualise and implement for long-term resilience.

Theoretical and theological framework

A robust understanding of intergenerational church leadership must begin with a theological foundation rooted in Scripture while engaging insights from leadership theory, ethics and educational practice. This section outlines the integrated framework that undergirds the C.H.A.I.N. model, drawing from servant leadership theology, ethical leadership principles, conformation pedagogy and intergenerational cooperation theory.

Servant leadership and biblical models and perspectives

Theologically, servant leadership, grounded in the example of Jesus Christ, is central to sustainable and faithful church leadership. It emphasises humility, relational empowerment and mentoring for God's purposes (Etukumana 2024:1, 5, 8–9). Moses exemplifies this through his intentional mentorship of Joshua, demonstrating a leadership model that is both transformational and intergenerational (Ex 17:8–14; 33:11; Nm 27:18–23). However, many churches today struggle with this ideal. In the Global South, leadership succession often faces obstacles such as theological rigidity and authoritarianism (Tagwirei 2023:1–5). The story of Saul reveals the dangers of fear-driven leadership – his refusal to mentor and his resistance to God's redemptive work through David ultimately hindered his legacy (1 Sm 15:22–23; 18:7–11). These narratives underscore that servant leadership is not optional but essential for long-term ecclesial integrity. Authentic leadership is a sacred trust, cultivated through Spirit-led mentoring and communal discernment, rather than clung to in fear of discontinuity.

Moral authority and ethical leadership

In Christian leadership, actual authority must go beyond position or title. It must be rooted in character, relational integrity and theological accountability. Moral authority empowers leaders not by coercion but through trust and credibility. Avis (2020:113–123) argues that real influence stems from dialogue, example, and ethical coherence rather

than top-down control. Moses exemplifies this moral authority through humility (Nm 12:3), obedience and transparent succession planning (Dt 31:7–8). His leadership was not merely functional but spiritually affirming and relationally grounded.

In contrast, Saul represents the failure of leadership that is divorced from character. Though anointed (1 Sm 10:1), he compromised his moral standing through disobedience (1 Sm 15:24) and envy (1 Sm 18:8–9), undermining his role and resisting God's purposes. Such failures persist today when leadership prioritises image over integrity and position over service. The contrast between Moses and Saul reveals that moral authority is essential for lasting, intergenerational leadership earned through spiritual maturity, consistent ethics and the trust built through accountable, humble service.

Intergenerational cooperation and knowledge transfer

Intergenerational cooperation is vital for sustaining the church's spiritual vitality and passing down institutional wisdom. Theologically, it reflects the unity of the body of Christ, where each member contributes uniquely (1 Cor 12:12–27). Organisationally, it ensures continuity in vision and leadership, as Babnik and Širca (2014:349–364) emphasise, by enabling the transfer of knowledge and capacity across age groups. Yet, in practice, many churches experience generational fragmentation. Senior leaders often retain control without mentoring successors, while younger leaders feel sidelined. Tagwirei (2023:1–5) notes that theological and institutional barriers in many Global South churches reinforce authoritarianism, hindering generational exchange. As a result, leadership transitions become reactive, leading to the loss of valuable resources, wisdom and energy. A theological synthesis calls for the church to view intergenerational cooperation as optional and essential. Through intentional mentoring, shared leadership and mutual empowerment, churches can bridge generational divides, foster unity and cultivate resilient leadership rooted in trust, diversity of gifts and common mission.

Conformation and competency-based leadership

Developing future church leaders requires more than transferring knowledge; it calls for a paradigm of conformation (understood here as collaborative formation), a mutual learning process where spiritual growth unfolds through shared theological reflection and lived experience. Peace (2020:201–219) frames collaborative formation as a shift from traditional formation, emphasising partnership across generations. Within this relational paradigm, senior leaders and emerging voices engage as co-labourers rather than hierarchical opposites, fostering humility, attentiveness and relational discipleship. However, many churches rely on compartmentalised leadership training shaped by corporate efficiency rather than theological depth. As Rojas (2022:555–568) warns, such models reduce leadership to checklists, overlooking spiritual formation and communal

discernment. This fosters transactional leadership focused on performance, not transformation. A synthesis is needed that integrates Rojas's (2022:555–568) competencies, like spiritual maturity and ethical integrity, with Peace's (2020:201–219) call for collaborative formation. Churches must cultivate leadership through theological education, intergenerational mentoring and ministry immersion, forming both Spirit-shaped and missionary-grounded leaders.

Theological integration in the C.H.A.I.N. model

Theologically grounded leadership must move from abstract ideas to embodied frameworks, integrating Scripture, ethics and practical ministry. The C.H.A.I.N.¹ model, Calling, Honour, Alignment, Investment, and Navigation, responds to this need with a holistic, intergenerational leadership vision. Each element is rooted in biblical and theological insight: Calling emphasises divine vocation; Honour promotes mutual generational respect; Alignment ensures mission-vision coherence; Investment focuses on mentoring and formation; and Navigation centres on Spirit-led transitions and communal discernment. Together, these form a transformative rather than transactional model. Yet many churches still operate with fragmented approaches, overspiritualising leadership or adopting secular strategies devoid of theological integrity (Rojas 2022:555–568). The result is leadership burnout, failed succession and generational disconnect. The C.H.A.I.N. model offers a redemptive synthesis: a flexible yet theologically rich architecture informed by Scripture, ethical leadership (Avis 2020:113–123) and conformational pedagogy (Peace 2020:201–219). It empowers churches to nurture leadership as a sacred trust, relationally formed, humbly passed on and communally stewarded.

Research methods and design

This article reports on the findings of a study that adopts a qualitative theological research design centred on biblical narrative analysis and an in-depth literature review. By examining the leadership transitions from Saul to David and Moses to Joshua, the research seeks to extract theologically grounded principles of intergenerational leadership that resonate with contemporary church realities. These narratives are analysed using narrative-theological exegesis to explore spiritual formation, moral authority and succession themes. The approach prioritises interpretive depth over empirical generalisation, making it suitable for uncovering the spiritual and relational dynamics embedded in biblical leadership patterns.

In addition to primary scriptural texts, the study incorporates secondary sources from peer-reviewed theology journals, leadership theory and ecclesial literature. The analytical framework is structured around the five components of the C.H.A.I.N. model: Calling, Honour, Alignment, Investment and Navigation, which function as theological categories and

interpretive tools. Each element is explored theologically and practically to generate contextual insights applicable to local churches, particularly in the Global South. This methodology enables the study to offer a normative theological framework that is spiritually rich, contextually grounded and pastorally actionable for intergenerational church leadership.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Results and discussion

Leadership failure in the case of Saul

The narrative of Saul, Israel's first king, illustrates a leadership model marred by insecurity, disobedience and the absence of succession planning. Although anointed by divine appointment (1 Sm 10:1), Saul's reign quickly deteriorated because of his inability to align with God's commands (1 Sm 15:22–23) and his jealousy towards David (1 Sm 18:7–11; 19:1–10). Saul's failure is not only moral and spiritual but also strategic. He lacked a mentoring structure, failed to prepare his son Jonathan for leadership and ultimately resisted God's choice of successor.

J. Vernon McGee emphasises that Saul's downfall was because of his unwillingness to submit to God's will and develop a heart after God, a crucial contrast with David and Moses' submission to divine leadership (McGee 1988). Saul's insecurity and failure to mentor a successor underscore the dangers of leadership without spiritual formation or communal accountability. Saul's downfall can be traced to both internal flaws and relational breakdowns. His spiritual inconsistency, manifested in a life entangled with worldly concerns, marked a drift from divine dependence to self-centred control (Ming 2022:294–310; Suharto, Daliman & Ngesthi 2023:1–10). This divergence from God's mission weakened his moral authority and alienated him from those he was called to lead. His escalating jealousy towards David, whose rising popularity and success he perceived as a threat, transformed Saul into a paranoid and hostile ruler. Rather than mentoring David or recognising divine favour, Saul attempted to eliminate him, an act that illustrates not only strategic blindness but also spiritual rebellion (Kagunge 2019:155–173).

Moreover, Saul's leadership failure underscores the consequences of unaddressed emotional insecurity and the refusal to embrace God's redemptive work through others. His resistance to God's chosen successor revealed a more profound fear of displacement and a clinging to power, which stifled generational renewal and created national instability. The absence of a mentoring legacy, particularly in Jonathan's underdeveloped leadership trajectory, highlights the systemic failure of Saul's reign. In contrast to models of servant leadership and spiritual formation, Saul represents a cautionary tale of leadership that begins with divine calling but collapses under the weight of pride, fear and unfaithfulness. His story serves as a sober reminder that

¹C.H.A.I.N. model is the original intellectual creation of the authors of this article.

successful leadership in the church today requires spiritual obedience and relational investment for continuity across generations.

This pattern reflects the consequences of leadership driven by personal control rather than communal stewardship. Without spiritual navigation and relational investment, Saul's leadership collapsed, creating a vacuum that led to national instability and intergenerational conflict (2 Sm 2–4). The case of Saul demonstrates the critical need for intentional mentoring, acceptance of divine timing and humility in leadership transition.

Mentorship and succession in the Moses–Joshua transition

In contrast to Saul, Moses exemplifies a leadership model rooted in spiritual discernment, mentoring and public affirmation. Joshua was not only Moses' assistant (Ex 24:13) but also his disciple, trained through experience (Ex 17:8–14), proximity to revelation (Ex 33:11) and eventual ordination (Nm 27:18–23). Moses prepared Joshua gradually, affirming his leadership before the congregation and emphasising continuity of God's presence (Dt 31:7–8). According to Warren Wiersbe, Moses was not only a great leader but also a faithful mentor who prepared Joshua not just for authority but for responsibility under God's direction (Wiersbe 1996). This reinforces the 'Investment' and 'Navigation' dimensions of the C.H.A.I.N. model. Matthew Henry also highlights Moses' relational humility and readiness to relinquish leadership when God commanded. He writes that Moses cheerfully resigned, not with jealousy, but with joy that another would carry the work forward (Henry 2008). This reflects the spirit of 'honour' and 'navigation' within the model.

Moses' mentorship was grounded in spiritual discernment, arising from his deep relationship with God and obedience to divine instruction (Moore 2007:80–88; Oprean 2023:179–188). This spiritual clarity enabled him to lead Israel through the wilderness and recognise and equip the next leader. Joshua's growth was nurtured through hands-on experience, serving during military conflict, dwelling at the tent of meetings, and observing the burdens of national leadership. These experiences shaped his character and conviction, anchoring his leadership not in charisma but in consistent formation and divine proximity.

Public affirmation played a decisive role in this succession model. The laying on of hands before the community (Nm 27:18–23) marked Joshua's appointment not merely as a functional leader but as a spiritually authorised one. This public liturgical act provided communal legitimacy, affirmed God's choice and modelled transparent leadership transition. Unlike Saul, who resisted God's successor, Moses embraced mentorship and planned succession as an act of faithful obedience. This pattern offers a critical blueprint for today's church leaders: mentoring must be intentional, spiritually grounded and culminate in public affirmation that ensures continuity, legitimacy and trust across generations.

The Moses–Joshua mentorship pattern exemplified here is rich with theological implications and directly informs the C.H.A.I.N. model's framework. Leadership, in this case, is a shared spiritual journey rather than a hierarchical replacement. The process includes divine calling, relational trust, communal support and spiritual empowerment. It exemplifies an intergenerational leadership paradigm where the outgoing leader honours and equips the successor with both authority and spiritual credibility. This transition affirms that leadership formation is not an event, but a process of relational discipleship and theological discernment – a model sorely needed in contemporary churches.

The C.H.A.I.N. model: A theological framework for intergenerational leadership

The C.H.A.I.N. model synthesises theological insights into five interrelated components essential for sustainable intergenerational leadership:

Calling

Leadership begins with divine initiative. As seen in Joshua's appointment (Nm 27:18), true calling is confirmed by the Spirit and affirmed by the community. This implies that leadership development must begin by creating environments where younger generations can discern and test their vocation.

The concept of 'calling' serves as a spiritual cornerstone in faith-based leadership, framing leadership not merely as a role but as a divinely initiated vocation. When leaders perceive their position as a response to God's summons, it imbues their service with deep meaning, intrinsic motivation and ethical responsibility (Longman et al. 2011:254–275; Sirris & Byrkjeflot 2019:132–147). This theological orientation aligns well with Joshua's story, whose leadership began not through ambition but divine selection (Nm 27:18). A sense of calling helps clarify identity. It fosters resilience, particularly when leaders face adversity or ambiguity. Moreover, calling strengthens commitment by orienting leaders towards a higher purpose and grounding their decisions in moral conviction (Sausser 2005:345–57).

However, the idea of calling is not immune to distortion. When misapplied or manipulated, the calling language can mask toxic leadership behaviours, favouritism, burnout or moral disengagement (Joynt 2017:1–10; Krishnakumar et al. 2015:17–37). Leaders who elevate their sense of calling above communal discernment may become authoritarian or resistant to accountability. This tension is further exacerbated when cultural or theological expectations pressurise leaders into unhealthy performance standards, blurring boundaries between spiritual care and psychological strain (Moore, Williams & Cooper 2022:80–88). In such contexts, calling becomes burdensome rather than liberating, as leaders feel compelled to meet impossible expectations while neglecting their well-being or the gifts of others.

Thus, theologically grounded leadership must balance the inward conviction of calling with external validation and

community discernment. As the Moses–Joshua narrative illustrates, calling is not a solitary epiphany but a relational process involving spiritual confirmation, mentoring and communal affirmation. Churches must foster discernment spaces where emerging leaders can test and clarify their vocation without fear or presumption. This dialectical understanding reframes calling as both a divine gift and communal responsibility, ensuring that spiritual zeal is tempered by humility, accountability and formation. In doing so, calling becomes the generative seed for intergenerational leadership, not a crown of entitlement but a cross to carry together.

Honour

Mutual respect between generations is fundamental. Moses honoured Joshua publicly, while Joshua remained loyal (Nm 27:20; Dt. 31:6–8). In contemporary terms, older leaders must empower without control, while younger leaders must serve with humility and gratitude (1 Pt 5:5).

Honour, as a relational ethic, provides the foundation for trust and spiritual continuity in intergenerational leadership. It reflects more than formal respect; it involves ethical concern, shared moral responsibility and the cultivation of mutual dignity (Rhodes & Badham 2018:71–98; Springer 2014:13). In the biblical example of Moses and Joshua, Moses honoured Joshua with public affirmation (Nm 27:20) through consistent mentoring and spiritual endorsement. This form of honour models what Grandy and Sliwa (2017:423–440) term ‘contemplative leadership’, where leaders engage others through relational wisdom and moral attentiveness. Within the church, such honour fosters deeper generational collaboration, ethical resilience and spiritual growth rooted in humility and shared mission.

Nevertheless, the pursuit of honour in leadership is fraught with complexity. Ethical engagement across generations often faces challenges related to cultural shifts, differing values and organisational hierarchy. Younger leaders may resist traditional forms of deference, while senior leaders may struggle to relinquish control without feeling displaced (Binns 2008:600–620; Voeller 2011:223–229). Furthermore, relational leadership can be undermined by power imbalances, infinite ethical demands and the instrumentalisation of relational labour. These pressures can distort honour into mere performance or manipulation (Rhodes & Badham 2018:71–98). These tensions reveal that while honour is an aspirational mutual value, it may be unevenly distributed or misunderstood across generational lines.

Thus, a biblically faithful and theologically robust model of honour must be adaptive and grounded. Honour in intergenerational leadership should not be reduced to age-based hierarchy or empty ceremonial gestures. Instead, it must be reimagined as a mutual posture of humility, service and ethical regard that transcends generational preferences and affirms shared participation in God’s mission. Moses’ honouring of Joshua becomes a theological

archetype, where affirmation is not flattery but commissioning, where respect is not passive tradition but active empowerment. In this way, honour functions not as a boundary marker between generations but as a bridge, fostering trust, continuity and collaborative faithfulness across time.

Alignment

Vision and mission alignment ensure that leadership transition does not result in fragmentation. Paul’s metaphor of the church as one body (1 Cor 12:20) calls for integrated, multi-generational leadership that moves collectively towards a shared purpose. Alignment in church leadership refers to the theological and organisational coherence between vision, mission and practice across generations. When achieved, alignment fosters shared purpose, strengthens team performance and enables sustained community engagement (Haughton et al. 2020:1–11; Whitley 2018:21–31). Missional leaders who cultivate this synergy often function as transformative catalysts, embedding vision within organisational structures and empowering followers to contribute meaningfully (Niemandt 2016:85–103; Wiranto 2015:4629–4641). In biblical leadership, Moses and Joshua exemplify such alignment: their handover was spiritual and strategic, rooted in a shared mission to lead God’s people into the promised land (Dt 31:7–8). This alignment ensured that the transition was not a break in vision but a continuation of divine purpose.

However, alignment is often challenged by internal complexity and generational divergence. Churches are multi-layered organisations where theological priorities, leadership styles and ministry goals may compete (Hewitt 2014:200–214). Senior leaders may cling to paternalistic models (Wiranto 2015:4629–4641), while younger leaders push for innovation, creating gaps in shared vision and purpose. Resistance to alignment may also arise when initiatives consolidate power rather than promote participation (Dye 2014:56–58), especially in cultures with rigid hierarchies. Additionally, the diversity of ministries and theological emphases within a congregation can hinder integrated identity development if not thoughtfully coordinated (Marais 2018:1–7). Such misalignment risks structural confusion and spiritual stagnation as the church loses sight of its core mission.

Therefore, authentic alignment requires more than strategic planning; it demands theological integration, intergenerational dialogue and Spirit-led discernment. Churches must cultivate processes that bring together the wisdom of experience and the creativity of youth, ensuring that alignment is not forced conformity but a Spirit-shaped consensus. As Lucy, Ponzetti and Pruitt (2016:70–73) suggest, embedding mission into every layer of church life, from policies to relationships, creates a culture where every generation contributes to a common calling. When alignment is achieved through such integrative and dialogical means, it becomes a channel for continuity, coherence and collaborative discipleship in the church’s life.

Investment

Moses invested deeply in Joshua's formation. Churches today must reimagine leadership development as long-term mentoring, theological education, and experiential discipleship (Eph 4:11–12). This is more than skill-building; it is spiritual formation. Investment in leadership development is foundational to sustaining a healthy intergenerational church. In biblical terms, Moses' investment in Joshua was not incidental but intentional, characterised by shared experiences, spiritual instruction and relational trust (Ex 17:8–14; Nm 27:18–23). In contemporary terms, sustainable leadership similarly requires holistic investment, combining theological education, practical exposure and character formation over time (Elsawy & Al-Ghurabli 2024:235–246; Miralles-Quiros, Miralles-Quiros & Arraiano 2017:1014–1028). When churches view leadership formation as a long-term, Spirit-led stewardship rather than a functional task, they lay the groundwork for resilient and credible leaders who can navigate complexity with wisdom and integrity (Esty & Cort 2020:3–9).

Similarly, the Apostle Paul exemplifies this investment in 2 Timothy 2:2, where he instructs Timothy to pass on the teachings to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Paul's approach emphasises the importance of passing on not only knowledge but also the practical and relational aspects of leadership. This passage aligns with the idea of investment in leadership, where the older generation shares wisdom and responsibility with emerging leaders, ensuring continuity in God's mission.

However, investment in leadership is not without challenges. Many churches, especially in resource-constrained contexts, struggle to implement structured development programmes because of financial limitations, lack of mentorship capacity or inadequate theological training infrastructure (Bencsik & Berke 2023:9–19; Suriyankietkaew, Kritayaruangroj & Iamsawan 2022:1). Furthermore, some leadership investment strategies risk becoming transactional, focused on short-term skill acquisition rather than deep spiritual formation. There is also the danger of inequitable access, where only select individuals are groomed for leadership, often based on conformity rather than calling. These dynamics, if unchecked, may reproduce hierarchical gatekeeping rather than cultivate a diverse and Spirit-gifted leadership community.

Thus, investment must be reframed as a relational and transformative commitment rooted in love, vision, and theological integrity. Churches should cultivate mentoring ecosystems prioritising spiritual depth, contextual relevance and community affirmation over mere institutional advancement. As Liao (2022:1–11) argues, sustainable leadership integrates economic, social and ethical considerations into its framework, a principle equally relevant for ecclesial settings. Investment becomes an act of faithfulness: a long obedience in the same direction, where leaders are not manufactured but disciplined. In this way, the church mirrors Moses' investment in Joshua, not as an act of control but as a legacy of spiritual multiplication and mission continuity.

Navigation

Transition requires humility and strategic foresight. Moses handed over leadership not by force but through faith and liturgical affirmation (Dt 31:7–8). Navigating leadership transition is a profoundly spiritual endeavour that requires discernment, humility and communal affirmation. In Scripture, Moses exemplifies graceful navigation by commissioning Joshua with liturgical intentionality and spiritual confidence (Dt 31:7–8). His act of public blessing transferred authority and reaffirmed God's ongoing presence. Contemporary missional leadership echoes this approach through Spirit-led transitions that balance strategic foresight with communal trust (Niemandt 2016:85–103). Effective navigation involves recognising that leadership is not owned but stewarded, a sacred trust meant to be handed over at the right time, with the correct posture and in the right spirit.

Nevertheless, leadership navigation often becomes entangled in institutional politics, resistance to change or emotional attachments. Some leaders may delay transitions, fearing loss of control or legacy erosion, while others may orchestrate hurried successions that lack spiritual grounding or relational continuity (Handley 2021:225–239; Wiranto 2015:4629–4641). Moreover, churches rooted in paternalistic models may struggle to navigate transition spaces with clarity, often defaulting to reactive decisions or behind-the-scenes arrangements (Dye 2014:56–58). These tendencies compromise the integrity of leadership handover and create confusion and disillusionment within the congregation, particularly among younger leaders seeking clarity and openness.

In the Bible, the Holy Spirit is depicted as the divine agent of empowerment and guidance in leadership transitions. Notably, in the New Testament, we see the apostles' reliance on the Holy Spirit when choosing leaders for the early church. One of the clearest examples of this is found in Acts 1:24–26, where the apostles, after the ascension of Jesus, are faced with the task of selecting a new apostle to replace Judas Iscariot.

Therefore, leadership navigation must be reclaimed as an act of spiritual stewardship. It requires intentional preparation, transparent processes and liturgical imagination that frames transition as a communal act of worship and obedience, not just organisational planning. Niemandt (2016:85–103) notes that missional leadership is inherently participatory and transformative, inviting the whole community into discernment. Churches that engage in Spirit-sensitive navigation, affirming successors in prayerful community, clarifying mission continuity, and releasing authority with joy, embody the biblical pattern of transition. In this way, navigation becomes a sacred choreography of past, present and future, anchored in God's faithfulness and animated by the church's shared calling to lead together.

Contemporary churches must establish transparent, Spirit-sensitive processes for leadership succession, avoiding reactive or politicised transitions. Together, these five elements form a robust theological blueprint for churches

seeking to nurture generational continuity, embody biblical leadership and remain missionally resilient across time.

Implications and recommendations

The C.H.A.I.N. model offers a theologically grounded and contextually adaptable framework for intergenerational leadership in local churches. Its implications reach beyond mere succession planning; it provides a holistic vision for nurturing a spiritually vibrant and collaborative ecclesial community.

Firstly, the model reframes leadership development as a spiritual calling, not merely an administrative function. Churches must therefore prioritise vocational discernment over positional appointments. Young leaders should be equipped through intentional environments where their spiritual gifts and callings are identified, affirmed and nurtured.

Secondly, mutual honour between generations must become a foundational ethic within church culture. Senior leaders must relinquish control without disengaging, serving instead as mentors and spiritual fathers or mothers. Conversely, emerging leaders must cultivate humility and honour the legacy and wisdom of their predecessors. This relational ethic transforms leadership transition from a moment of tension to a celebration of continuity.

Thirdly, alignment of vision and mission is crucial. Churches should develop shared frameworks that integrate multi-generational perspectives while maintaining fidelity to the gospel and ecclesial purpose. This includes involving all age groups in vision casting, theological reflection and strategic planning, ensuring coherence and cohesion across leadership transitions.

Fourthly, churches must invest in leadership formation through robust discipleship, theological education and practical ministry exposure. Investment should be seen as long-term and relational, not transactional or programmatic. Mentorship programmes should be formalised and culturally contextualised to support spiritual formation and character development.

Finally, navigating transitions requires humility, liturgical recognition and communal discernment. Leadership succession should not be left to informal decisions or last-minute replacements. Instead, churches should develop clear, Spirit-led pathways that involve communal affirmation, intercessory prayer and open communication. This mirrors the biblical pattern of leadership handover witnessed between Moses and Joshua.

Practical steps for implementing the C.H.A.I.N. model include: (1) Establishing intergenerational leadership teams tasked with fostering dialogue, mentorship and vision integration; (2) Developing a church-wide theology of calling that helps young leaders identify and respond to God's invitation to serve; (3) Creating mentoring networks that pair senior leaders with emerging ones for regular spiritual and

ministerial formation; and (4) Incorporating leadership succession into the church's liturgical and communal life as a sacred act of stewardship, not just organisational necessity.

In applying this model, churches in Indonesia and globally can respond faithfully to the challenge of generational discontinuity. The model is not only a leadership strategy, but an ecclesiological commitment to embody the unity and diversity of the body of Christ across time.

Conclusion

Leadership continuity in the church is not a passive inevitability, but a theological imperative that requires intentional, Spirit-led formation. The contrasting biblical narratives of Saul's failed transition and Moses' successful handover to Joshua reveal that leadership succession can either disrupt or deepen the mission of God across generations. This article has argued that sustainable intergenerational leadership must be grounded in biblical principles, theological reflection and spiritual mentorship, elements embodied in the proposed C.H.A.I.N. model.

The C.H.A.I.N. framework, consisting of Calling, Honour, Alignment, Investment and Navigation, offers a holistic and theologically integrative approach to cross-generational leadership. It challenges churches to rethink leadership beyond succession planning, emphasising instead spiritual calling, relational integrity, communal vision, long-term mentoring and humility in transition.

This model contributes a novel synthesis of theology and practice, integrating biblical narrative analysis with contemporary leadership theory to produce a framework applicable to diverse ecclesial contexts, especially in the Global South. By rooting leadership development in relational discipleship and theological integrity, the model reframes generational transition not as a problem to solve, but as a sacred stewardship of God's mission across time.

Future research could further explore the empirical implementation of the model across various denominational and cultural settings, assessing its adaptability and long-term impact. Meanwhile, churches are encouraged to embrace the model not as a technical fix, but as a missional and pneumatological invitation to lead collaboratively, steward the present in light of the past and prepare for the future with hope.

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Authors' contributions

A.A. was primarily responsible for developing the C.H.A.I.N. model, including biblical analysis, theological synthesis and contextual application. E.P. contributed mainly to the article's theoretical framework, interdisciplinary integration and structural refinement.

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The authors declare that all data that support this research article and findings are available in the article and its references.

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