

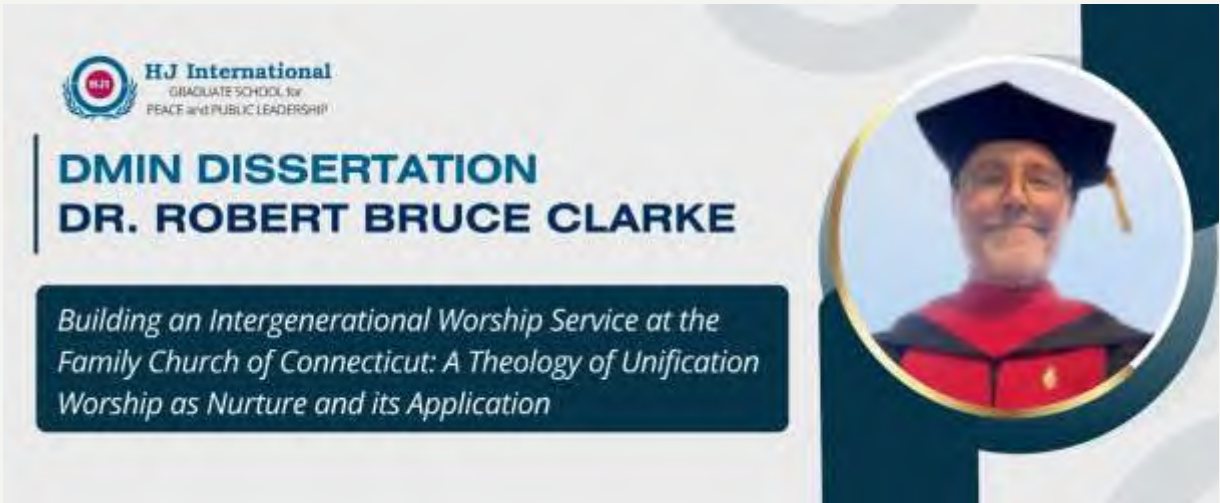
HJ International Graduate School for Peace and Public Leadership Newsletter

Thomas G. Walsh
August 17, 2026



August 17, Volume III, Number 33

In this issue, we feature three Alumni Spotlights with selected Doctor of Ministry (DMin) dissertation summaries from recent HJI graduates, as well as a report about the Association for the Sociology of Religion at the New Yorker Hotel. We also look ahead to the Fall 2026 semester, with classes beginning on August 24.



Building an Intergenerational Worship Service at the Family Church of Connecticut: A Theology of Unification Worship as Nurture and its Application

This research examined the development of intergenerational worship services that had begun the previous year by implementing a framework of six theological themes – mutuality, reciprocity, accommodation, interdependence, unity, and the divine, unique, cosmic value of every person, or equity. Intergenerational services intentionally sought to increase the closeness of members’ connection to God and to each other. [Continue Reading...](#)



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DMIN DISSERTATION DR. KALIFA FABRICE DEMBELE

Lost in the Bronx: Mentoring the Young African Immigrants for a Successful Socio-professional Integration in New York City



Lost in the Bronx: Mentoring the Young African Immigrants for a Successful Socio-Professional Integration in New York City

This dissertation project is a deep examination of young African immigrants lived experiences in New York City, and particularly in the Bronx. Their socio-cultural, economical, and professional context marked by both vibrant communal life and persistent structural marginalization constitute a reality. The study explores how these young adults navigate complex migratory trajectories, shaped by displacement, disrupted family pathways, educational interruption, and fragmented identity formation across, national, transnational, and intergenerational spaces. [Continue Reading...](#)

HJI President, Dr. Walsh, Attends Association for the Sociology of Religion's Annual Meeting



On August 8-10, 2026, the Association for the Sociology of Religion convened its annual meeting in New York City at the New Yorker Hotel, attended by approximately 300 sociologists from throughout North America and the world. The general theme of the conference was, "Beyond Binaries and Boundaries: Religion Redefined in Unsettled Times," and sessions topics included... [Continue Reading](#)



Fall 2026 classes begin on Monday, August 24! Enrollment and re-enrollment are open at HJ International Graduate School. Explore courses designed to deepen your knowledge, strengthen your leadership, and prepare you to serve communities with purpose.

[For a quick review of course offerings for the Fall 2026 Semester click here.](#)

[For a short introduction to selected courses click here \(5 min\)](#)

[For full-length course introductions \(50 min\)](#)

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DMIN DISSERTATION DR. ROBERT BRUCE CLARKE

*Building an Intergenerational Worship Service at the
Family Church of Connecticut: A Theology of Unification
Worship as Nurture and its Application*



Doctoral Dissertation Project by Robert Bruce Clarke | r.clarke@hji.edu

[Watch 2026 HJI Graduating Students introduce their projects here](#)

Abstract

This research examined the development of intergenerational worship services that had begun the previous year by implementing a framework of six theological themes – mutuality, reciprocity, accommodation, interdependence, unity, and the divine, unique, cosmic value of every person, or equity. Intergenerational services intentionally sought to increase the closeness of members' connection to God and to each other. Through obtaining 110 questionnaires from six generations in

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principles translate into effective practical theology for intergenerational worship?

2. What are the benefits and challenges of implementing intergenerational worship in a Family Federation local church setting?

Major Findings

1. Members Became More Connected to One Another

One of the strongest findings was a measurable increase in relationships across generations. The project documented nearly a 20 percent increase in members spending time together outside of Sunday services. Participants reported greater trust, familiarity, and comfort interacting with people of different ages. Structured opportunities for sharing, discussion, and relationship-building contributed significantly to this outcome.

2. Stronger Relationships Supported Spiritual Growth

One of the most important conclusions of the study was that horizontal relationships and vertical faith growth are closely linked. Members consistently reported that trust, belonging, and interpersonal closeness helped them experience God's love more deeply. The findings suggest that healthy relationships are not merely a byproduct of spiritual growth; they may actually be a prerequisite for significant spiritual formation in a community setting.

3. Children's Inclusion Produced Significant Benefits

The strongest positive responses often came from children, youth, and young adults. Participants appreciated seeing children treated as equal participants in worship through crafts, presentations, games, testimonies, and visible leadership opportunities. Parents reported strong appreciation for worship environments in which their children were fully included rather than separated. Theologically, this reflected theology inherent in the Three Great Kingships theology.

4. Joy and Belonging Increased

Survey results showed strong agreement that intergenerational services created more smiles, laughter, anticipation, and enjoyment than traditional formats. The younger generations, especially Gen Z, demonstrated some of the strongest positive responses. Many participants reported looking forward to these services and experiencing a stronger sense of belonging within the congregation.

5. Younger Generations Responded Especially Well

Millennials and Gen Z consistently demonstrated the strongest levels of agreement regarding the

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6. Treat developing intergenerational relationships as a core principle of Unificationist family practice and ministry.



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DMIN DISSERTATION DR. KALIFA FABRICE DEMBELE

*Lost in the Bronx: Mentoring the Young African
Immigrants for a Successful Socio-professional
Integration in New York City*



Doctoral Dissertation Project by Kalifa Fabrice Dembele | k.dembele@hji.edu

[Watch 2026 HJI Graduating Students introduce their projects here](#)

Abstract

This dissertation project is a deep examination of young African immigrants lived experiences in New York City, and particularly in the Bronx. Their socio-cultural, economical, and professional context marked by both vibrant communal life and persistent structural marginalization constitute a reality. The study explores how these young adults navigate complex migratory trajectories, shaped by displacement, disrupted family pathways, educational interruption, and fragmented identity formation across, national, transnational, and intergenerational spaces.

Employing a qualitative, community-based methodology grounded in pastoral praxis, this research draws on the experiences of young adults, parents, mentors, and community, and religious leaders

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Despite strong communal traditions and significant cultural capital, many young African immigrants in the Bronx experience persistent difficulties during their transition from adolescence into early

in the Bronx experience persistent difficulties during their transition from adolescence into early adulthood. These obstacles include cultural displacement, fragmented identity formation, academic disengagement, and limited access to sustained mentoring relationships capable of addressing both social and spiritual dimensions of development.

Research consistently demonstrates that the intersection of poverty, minority status, and immigrant background significantly increases the likelihood of school dropout, social disempowerment, and long-term economic vulnerability. For many African immigrant families, these risks are compounded by transnational dynamics that shape parenting strategies and educational decisions. In response to perceived threats within the American urban environment, such as violence, delinquency, and the erosion of parental authority, some parents prefer to send their children to their countries of origin for cultural, moral, or religious reorientation. Although such decisions are often motivated by care and the desire to preserve inherited values, they may result in unintended consequences, including emotional rupture, disrupted schooling, identity confusion, and significant reintegration challenges upon return.

Looking from a practical theological perspective, the problem extends beyond material deprivation or educational failure to encompass deeper questions of meaning, belonging, moral formation, and vocational discernment. Many young African immigrants navigate their early adulthood without sustained pastoral accompaniment capable of integrating cultural heritage, faith commitments, and the socio-professional demands of urban American life. As a result, their past and present are frequently experienced as competing narratives rather than complementary dimensions of a coherent identity.

Research Questions

- How does community-based mentoring shape the socio-professional integration and identity reconstruction of young African immigrants experiencing transnational educational and cultural disruption in New York City?
- How do transnational educational disruptions, cultural rupture, and family dynamics influence young immigrants' educational trajectories, institutional navigation, and socio-professional outcomes?
- In what ways does mentoring—particularly within a faith-informed framework—facilitate identity reconstruction, resilience, skill development, and long-term socio-professional integration?

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interdependent domains: identity reconstruction, educational re-engagement, career development, and psychosocial stability. These young adults, who adhered to specific faith traditions, were, in most cases, receptive to religious teachings and predications. This doctrinal receptiveness facilitated both the initial engagement and the acceptance of the program's basic. A fifth, cross-cutting dimension also emerged: the reconfiguration of the participants' relationship with work, time, and economic success, set against a backdrop of transnational migration and structural marginalization. Put together, these findings demonstrated that the mentorship model developed at the Kunta Institute functioned not merely as a relational, developmental, and theological-practical process fostering holistic human flourishing.

This doctoral project has demonstrated that the socio-professional integration of young African immigrants in the Bronx cannot be adequately understood as a purely economic or educational process only. Rather, integration emerged as a holistic process of identity reconstruction, relational stabilization, and vocational discernment, shaped by transnational migration, educational disruption, psychosocial vulnerability, and structural marginalization. The findings confirmed that mentorship, particularly when embedded within a culturally awake and faith-informed community such as the Kunta Institute, functions as a practical-theological intervention capable of mediating transformation across multiple ecological levels: personal, relational, institutional, and structural. In alignment with Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, participants' developmental trajectories were shaped not only by individual agency but by interactions with family systems, educational institutions, labor markets, and neighborhood environments. Likewise, Berry's acculturation substructure, and Erikson's identity theory illuminate how transnational disruption destabilizes identity formation, requiring relational accompaniment to restore coherence and belonging.

From a practical-theological perspective, this study confirmed Osmer's central claim that ministry emerges at the intersection of lived experience and theological interpretation, where communities of faith participate in God's restorative work. The Kunta Institute, therefore, must be understood not simply as a service provider but as a community of vocational mediation, facilitating identity reconstruction and socio-professional reintegration.

The main findings of this project suggest that the identified problem is rooted in a combination of socio-professional exclusion, limited access to guidance, weakened self-confidence, and insufficient culturally relevant support systems among young African immigrants. The proposed mentoring program would address this problem by providing structured relational support that connects young

adults to practical guidance, emotional encouragement, and community-based resources. More specifically, the mentoring program would respond to socio-professional integration challenges by helping participants navigate education, employment, and institutional systems more effectively. Through one-on-one mentoring, role modeling, and skills development, the program would strengthen self-confidence, improve decision-making, and support career and educational planning. It would also address the psycho-social dimensions of the problem by reducing isolation, restoring hope, and creating a stronger sense of belonging and future orientation. In addition, because the findings highlighted the importance of cultural and faith-based dimensions, the mentoring program would be designed to be culturally responsive and community-centered. It would recognize the

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The empirical results of this study, interpreted through rigorous theological reflection and grounded in sustained practical engagement with the African immigrant community in the Bronx through the Kunta Institute provided a robust foundation for the formulation of informed, contextually relevant, and actionable recommendations. Drawing on the qualitative data presented in Chapter V, the theological and theoretical framework developed in Chapters II and III, and the pastoral praxis examined in Chapter IV, these recommendations seek to strengthen the socio-professional integration of young African immigrants, and to enhance the effectiveness, coherence, and long-term sustainability of the “Lost in the Bronx” mentoring initiative. Rather than remaining at the level of abstract analysis, this chapter intentionally translates the research recommendation and conclusions into concrete institutional, community-based, and theologically grounded strategies designed to address the structural, relational, and identity-related barriers identified throughout this project.

These suggestions emerge directly from the standard life experience, and organizational praxis of the Kunta Institute, which functioned as a locus of transformative accompaniment and restorative intervention. An African proverb affirms that “What people have seen with their eyes is always better than what they have heard with their ears,” underscoring the epistemological primacy of lived experience as a source of practical wisdom and credible knowledge. In this respect, the proposed actions represent a deliberate movement from diagnosis to praxis, embodying what practical theology defines as a faithful and responsible response to God’s presence within the realities of human struggle. They affirm that the challenges encountered by these young adults, including educational discontinuity, socio-economic precarity, identity fragmentation, and socio-professional marginalization, all of which are encountered daily in the institution’s fieldwork, must be understood as manifestations of deeper structural, and relational fractures, requiring intentional, contextualized, and structurally informed interventions.

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mentoring program, community-based resources, and institutional systems more effectively. By providing intentional accompaniment, ethical and moral formation, cultural affirmation, and spiritual grounding, mentoring relationships create structured pathways through which young adults can reconstruct their identity, reengage educational and professional trajectories, and recover their dignity, agency, and autonomy. Mentoring, therefore, must be understood not exactly as a social service but as a transformative and restorative bridge linking personal reconstruction to sustainable socio-professional integration. The recommendations that follow seek to institutionalize, strengthen, and expand this model, ensuring that the formative vision of this project continues to serve as a sustainable framework for empowerment, belonging, and holistic human development within the African immigrant community of the Bronx.

Grounded in the empirical data, theological discernment, and pastoral praxis developed throughout this study, the following institutional imperatives are proposed to consolidate, expand, and ensure the long-term sustainability of the “Lost in the Bronx” mentorship initiative. These guidelines aim to formalize its structural integrity, strengthen its transformative capacity, and establish it as a sustainable and replicable framework for fostering the socio-professional integration, restoration of human dignity, and holistic development of young African immigrants in the Bronx.



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Attends Association for the Sociology of Religion's Annual Meeting



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- Congregational Life Five Years After Covid
- Gender and Religion
- Race and Religion
- Religion in New York
- Congregations and Closures
- Religion and Social Movements

wrote that, "We are excited to reconnect with long-time members and welcome those joining us for the first time. We want to especially welcome international scholars who have traveled the farthest... to join us. Our central site, the famed New Yorker hotel, is an art deco-styled residence that was once purchased by the Unification Church. To be sure, religion is as much a feature of New York as any other major cultural institution, from sports teams like the Yankees, Knicks, Giants, Jets, and Rangers to the Apollo Theater, Broadway, Radio City, Times Square, Avengers Headquarters, and Madison Square Garden, to name a few."

HJI President, Thomas Walsh, attended the ASR and had the opportunity to reconnect with old friends and meet with new friends.

The photo, left to right: Richard Cimino with Religion Watch; Joseph Yi, Hanyang University; Holly Folk, Western Washington University; Minjung Noh, Lehigh University; Minyoung Moon, University of North Carolina Pembroke; Thomas Walsh, HJI; Roberta Ricucci, University of Torino; Stephen Hewko, University of Wycliffe College of University of Toronto; Matyas Bodi, Regents Park College of Oxford University; and Olena Bogdan, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.



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