Distribution Agreement

The text below should be reproduced exactly as written, on the Distribution Agreement page. Sign the page on the signature line, and type your name under the signature line. Write the date on the date line.

Distribution Agreement

In presenting this final project as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my final project in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this final project. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the final project. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this final project.

Signature:

_____   _____

Cynthia Dixon   April 30th 2021

Approval Sheet

The approval sheet should be designed according to the plan below. See next page for several comments.

Engaging Black Millennials Ages 25-35 in Spiritual Formation and Leadership

By

Cynthia Dixon

Doctor of Ministry

Candler School of Theology

_____

Dr. Khalia Williams

Project Consultant

_____

Dr. Jennifer Ayres

Director of DMin Program

Comments

Signature Lines: Center signature lines for each approver above his or her typed name and role (Project Consultant or Director of DMin Program).

Layout: Remember that **the page margin rules apply to all pages**, including the special pages like this one.

If you have questions about any of these items, contact the Candler School of Theology Registrar.

Abstract

Engaging Black Millennials Ages 25-35 in Spiritual Formation and Leadership

By Cynthia Dixon

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are the age group born from 1980-1995. The absence of millennial engagement in church participation and involvement has presented a concern for pastors and church leaders. African Americans historically has been immune to cultural shifts and changes; However, that has not been the case with millennial engagement. Millennials have surpassed the Baby Boomers as the largest living generation in the United States. They have unique characteristics shaped by the timing of their birth. Generational literacy is key to understanding differences and staying relevant. Failure to understand and respond to the changing generational influences may have a negative impact on our churches and ministry." Some researchers have concluded that millennials have abandoned their faith and church altogether. While statistics cannot be denied, the interpretation of those statistics through qualitative research presented new information that re-defined the root cause of their disengagement. Black millennials have not abandoned their faith and consider themselves to be spiritual. Based on literary research and qualitative research, millennials have expressed that there are certain things that engage them to actively participate in ministry. Churches who embrace these cultural changes experience higher success with millennial participation.

Notes: The Abstract may not exceed one page, formatted according to the regular page formatting instructions (margins, spacing, font size; NO pagination). The text itself CANNOT exceed 350 words (not counting the title, etc.) The Abstract may be single-spaced.

Engaging Black Millennials Ages 25-35 in Spiritual Formation and Leadership

By

Cynthia Dixon

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, B.S., 1990

Shaw University, Master of Divinity, 2014

Gardner-Webb University, Master in Executive Leadership, 2018

Project Consultant: Dr. Khalia J. Williams

A Final Project submitted to the Faculty of the

Candler School of Theology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry
2021

Emory University

"Ministering to the Sling-Shot Generation."

Engaging Black Millennials Ages 25-35 in Spiritual Formation and Leadership

A Professional Project Submitted to

The Faculty of Candler School of Theology

in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Ministry

A Final Project submitted to the Faculty of the

Candler School of Theology

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

Contents

I.   Introduction

Let each generation tell its children of your mighty acts; let them proclaim your power.
Psalm 145:4

Each one of us was born in a unique space in time that influenced how we think, act, and engage in life. This unique time of our birth has been identified in a term called "generations". At any given time, there are five generations co-existing together, which I describe later in my paper.

Recalling my own growing up in the Generation X, I remember sitting at the dinner table with my parents and siblings, engaged in conversations about our day, school, family, and our faith in God. In the African American culture, with which I identify, passing down values, faith, and traditions is important. During dinner time, the whole focus was on each other and family dialogue.

Now fast forward three decades later, I witness a different narrative at the dinner table. This past November, my two sons along with their wife/girlfriend respectively, were home for Thanksgiving. All four of them are millennials, the generation born from 1980 – 1995, ages 26-41 years old.   While eating, I noticed they had their forks in one hand and a cell phones in the other as if they and the phones were inseparable. They were constantly engaged with the notifications going off while at the same time trying to engage with us. Me and my husband would tease them saying "can you all put those phones up?"   They would tease back, saying "we're listening" and remind us that the generations are different. Are the generations really that different? If so, what areas are the differences most noticeable and what impacted these

differences?   One area that I noticed a cultural trend and a divergence from tradition was in millennial presence in church attendance and participation.

I have served on the ministerial staff of First Waughtown Baptist Church (FWBC) in Winston-Salem, NC for 26 years. FWBC is a traditional African American Baptist church located in a residential community with an approximate membership of 800 people. In the early years of my ministry, between 1994-2000, we had very active involvement in our young adult age group (early 20's – mid 30's). Through participant observation, I noticed an unfortunate reality that the age group that was becoming least consistent in attendance and serving was the millennial age group and that it had been progressively declining over the last two decades. The grief over millennial absence led me to deep inner reflections as I pondered a few questions such as:

> ➢ Were millennials no longer present because they were abandoning their faith?

> ➢ Was it our ministry context not providing opportunities that met their needs?

> ➢ Was the problem I identified experienced in other ministries?

Significant amounts of material have been written regarding millennial engagement; however, less have been written on the absence of "Black" millennials in the church. Historically, the church has always been the bedrock for the Black community. Birthed in the context of the dehumanizing epoch of American slavery, the Black Church, or the "invisible institution," has been and continues to be a central force in shaping the ethos of the African American community (Raboteau 2004). Blacks heavily relied on the church for spiritual formation, emotional strength, encouragement, hope, and overall family support. Now to see Black millennials deviating from that norm is evidence that there are underlying trends that need to be investigated.

My search revealed some interesting facts that help me to understand that our problem, millennial absence, was not unique. While our problem is not unique, I argue that the absence of millennials from our ministry is not due to an abandoning of faith, but rather deficiencies or lack of understanding in how to engage them. Generational literacy and intelligence are fundamental to communicating with each generation to understand its needs, especially those of the millennials (Windle 2019, 26). As it relates to my project focus, generational literacy means becoming knowledgeable of the culture, experiences, and trends that affect how millennials think, feel, and engage with life. My interest in millennial engagement, and in particular Black millennials is born out of my scriptural interpretation and inward conviction that faith should be passed on from one generation to the next. Both the Old and New Testament are replete with scriptures indicating that God expects us to transfer our faith from one generation to another. However, what the bible doesn't implicitly teach is that generations are different and how to effectively reach them. My goal in this project is two-fold, first to understand generations more in-depth; and secondly, to create innovations that will increase millennial engagement and participation.

II. Project Rationale and Goals

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh (Ecclesiastes 1:|4a|).

A. Significance of Project

Why did I select millennials and not another generational group? There are three substantial reasons that undergird my project rationale: 1) church mission, 2) current trends in millennial engagement in the church, and 3) the importance of reaching those in the early adulthood life stage.

Significance #1 - Church Mission

It is extremely important for the purpose and nature of the church to be understood because knowing your aim is a key component of effectiveness. One of my favorite books is the *Purpose-Driven Church* by Rick Warren. He states that "Nothing precedes purpose. The starting point for every church should be the question: 'Why do we exist?' Until you know what your church exists for, you have no foundation, no motivation, and no direction for ministry*."* (Warren 1995, 81) One of the primary purposes of the church is to make disciples. Matthew 28:19-20 (NKJV) says: "*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* Another important purpose of the church's existence is to equip members to serve and lead. Ephesians 4:11-12 (NKJV) states: "*So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*." The church is called to "equip" its members to serve. The forming of a people provides a basis for the church's mission of service and proclamation. As a people, the church is itself the verification of the message it proclaims, or else the betrayal of that message. (Snyder 1996, 95) . If the church is not actively successful in reaching each generation, then she has lost focus of her mission and mandate.

In his book, *Eight Innovations to Leading Millennials: How Millennials Can Grow Your Church and Change the World,* author Benjamin Windle states: "Churches age naturally. It takes intentionality, social design, and foresight for leaders to keep reaching each successive generation." (Windle 2019). To maintain any thriving and growing

organization, there must be a continuity of leadership that will keep it alive and moving forward. In my ministry context, leadership positions are predominantly comprised of Baby Boomers and Generation X.   As Baby Boomers and Generation Xers retire, become unable, or pass on, it will leave gaps in competent leadership to keep a thriving ministry moving forward. It is important to build a culture of leadership continuity. "Leadership continuity is about helping sustain an organization's viability and future mission by supporting its people and developing human capital. The most important resources we have are the people who are working and volunteering to carry out the mission (Schlumpf 2019). The institution of the church operates through leaders who serve in various capacities. For example, the bible talks about pastors, teachers, deacons, and administrators to name a few.   Therefore, if churches don't maintain a continuity of participation with each generation, then the functionality of the church will be weakened and compromised. Millennial's participation, support, and volunteerism would provide the church with people resources needed fulfill its mission.

Significance #2 - Current Trends in Millennial Engagement

In the book "Millennials in Ministry," author Jolene Erlatcher states: "The loss of millennials in church and ministry leadership is arguably the most pressing issue facing the church in America at this moment. There has been a decline and absence of the millennial generation from the faith community, and faith altogether" (Erlacher 2014). These trends while noted in her book, are also trends I noticed in my own ministry context. However, while acknowledging the "raw" data, it is the "interpretation" of this data that needs more investigating. Deficiencies in membership retention of millennials should concern all churches who are affected. In Matthew 18:12, Jesus states: *"If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of*

them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? I liken this project to these words, seeking them which has gone astray.

The church is a community which we must continue to build. In the book *Community,* author Peter Block clearly identifies the essential ingredients, qualities, questions, atmosphere, and actions needed to create and build vital communities filled with possibilities generosity, accountability, and deep engagement (Block 2008). As he discussed the strategy of ownership he states: "Community will be created the moment we decide to act as creators of what it can become" (Block 2008, 127). Thus, in this project, I decided to act as a *creator*, of the endless possibilities of what we become as a thriving and growing ministry.

In the surveys I personally conducted, 90% of the millennials expressed a desire to serve in the church and volunteer their gifts and talents. It is through serving and giving that creates a sense of belonging and as Block states, creators of what can become.   Their desire for participation suggests that they share more in common with older generations than I might have initially perceived. This invites an assessment of how shared values may help bridge the generational divide (Bock and Del Rosario 2017).

Significance #3 - The Life Cycle Stage of Early Adulthood

It is the millennial age bracket (25-41) that young adults are more likely to be starting careers, getting married, and/or starting families. According to the 2019 National Vital Statistics Reports, the mean age of mothers of first birth was 27 years (Prevention 2019). Reaching millennials would have a ripple effect with reaching the children of these millennials as well as give the church an opportunity to cultivate strong families. If millennials don't bring their children to church, then two generations will be unchurched. I grew up in the church with much

of my biblical knowledge starting in Sunday School classes. Can you imagine, a generation of

children growing up without having a spiritual foundation. The church has a mandate by God to

pass faith on from generation to generation. In Psalm 78:4-6, we find these words:

4 We will not hide them from their children,
Telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord,
And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.
5 For He established a testimony in Jacob,
And appointed a law in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers,
That they should make them known to their children;
6 That the generation to come might know them,
The children who would be born,
That they may arise and declare them to their children.

In the scriptures above, Asaph, the psalm writer, wants us to learn the vital importance of

passing along our spiritual heritage to the next generation. Intergenerational engagement is

vital for the church growth. If millennials are not actively engaged in the church, then we

cannot pass on Christian knowledge, faith, and our experience in God.

As one who benefited from faith being passed on, I can intimately identify with the

words found in II Timothy 1:5 - *When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in*

thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am

persuaded that in thee also.   The way you reproduce leaders and train others in the faith,

is by passing on wisdom from generation to generation. In Psalm 71:18, David expressed

a cry or plea with our heavenly Father to not let him depart the earth without passing his

faith to the next generation. It is the church's responsibility to equip, train, mentor, and

lead the next generation.

B. Goals

One of the goals of this project is to excavate the thoughts, ideas, and concerns of millennials to understand why they are not engaged in the church and what the church can do to keep them. The action plan included having millennials complete surveys with questions designed to solicit information about what engages them. Additionally, the aim was to interview pastors who could give further insight into success with millennials. The third goal was to use a focus group to engage further dialogue of the surveys completed. It is through understanding the unique needs of millennials that our ministry will be better equipped to implement effective innovations. I interviewed Pastor Reginald Sharpe, who serves as Senior Pastor of Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, a 3000+ member congregation, in Chicago, Illinois. In my interview, he said: "*You must be intentional about making your worship and your ministries meet the needs of everybody on their level. Before you can meet their need, you must understand what works for them*" (Sharpe 2021). Sharpe's comments echoes that of author Benjamin Windle in what he calls generational literacy. It is through this understanding that I will be able to construct my research.

The 4th goal is to use findings from scholarly work, feedback from surveys, interviews and the focus group to spark ideas for innovation that would best suit the spiritual needs of millennials. Being open to new ideas and new methodologies is critical for progressive ministry. I interviewed Pastor Olu Brown who is Senior Pastor of Impact Church, a 5,000-member church in Atlanta GA that started as his own church plant. He states: "Our millennial attendance is better than average because of our outreach efforts and appeal to millennials. What is engaging them is the casual approach in coming to the ministry, whether in person or online. Additionally, there are no typical barriers of entry meaning: no push for membership, no push for giving, and no push for certain styles of dress. We embraced technology early on in a way that has allowed

people to feel deeply connected.". Being open to innovative ideas is a common thread with every pastor I interviewed who have achieved a level of success with millennial engagement.

The 5th goal is to recommend the ideas resulting from my research to the executive board at FWBC. I will address the current decline in our millennial presence and through researched based findings highly encourage them to implement the innovations suggested. A changed world demands innovation, and a changed religious world requires innovative congregations (Cormode 2020, 3). Innovations that align with what millennials are looking for will draw and engage them in congregational membership. My expectation is that of a re-engagement of millennials resulting in spiritual formation, active engagement in ministry opportunities, and the development of leaders for continuity in ministry positions.

Congregations have never been more important. In a mobile and fragmented world, they are a spiritual home, a gathering place where care and trusting relationships are built and nurtured. (Dudley and Ammerman 2002, 1). Discipleship making is essential to pass on faith from one generation to another.   "If you can't reproduce disciples, you can't reproduce leaders. If you can't reproduce leaders, you can't reproduce churches. If you can't reproduce churches, you can't reproduce movements" (Hirsch 2016, 119). Cultivating new leaders is also essential for continued church growth, especially in a culture of change. Understanding the change process is less about innovation and more about innovativeness (Fullan 2001, 31). As I learn about millennials, the goal is to develop innovations to better serve them.

III. Ministry Context

> "*These words I am commanding you today must be kept in mind, and you must teach them to your children and speak of them as you sit in your house, as you walk along the road, as you lie down, and as you get up*" Deuteronomy 9:6-7 (NET Version).

To contextualize the scope of research and analysis, this project focuses on First Waughtown Baptist Church, (FWBC), located in the heart of the Belview/Easton residential community of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.   FWBC is a historically Black church located in the heart of a residential black community. As the central and most enduring institution in the Black community, the African American church has shepherded its flock from slavery to civil rights gained in a number of social and economic arenas (McKinney 2003, 8). FWBC has a rich history being in existing for one hundred twenty years and only five pastors since its inception. The long pastorate is the natural outgrowth of the father-figure image. The father-figure image syndrome, basic to the expectation of the black religious heritage, was rooted in Africa and the Bible (Massey and McKinney 1976, 26).

All five pastors are African American pastors who preached from a Black theology perspective and cultivated a church community that believed that our communal experience was essential for our own empowerment.   The result of preaching from this perspective was that it created a high level of loyalty to church participation and involvement. Since blacks have historically had a strong loyalty to the church, why have Black millennials shifted from that norm? The forementioned aspect of our culture further signifies the importance of my research. Not only were the congregants loyal, but the pastors were too. They had a strong conviction that they were called by God to lead their flock to a place of liberation, which is reflective of the Exodus narrative.   Black theology is the product of Black Christian experience and reflection (Pinn and Pinn 2002, 159).   Our history can be traced back to Baptist prayer meetings that began in Waughtown after the Civil War that grew into the Baptist congregation that met under brush arbors throughout the Waughtown and Happy Hill area of Winston-Salem, NC. FWBC was

founded in 1900 by the first the first Pastor. The membership grew and developed over the decades and now has a membership of approximately 900 with an average Sunday morning attendance of 500-600 people. Due to the recent pandemic, gatherings have been suspended and preaching can be accessed virtually through Facebook. FWBC has a rich history of large family groups making up the membership. Since the church is in a residential community, membership initially came from those within walking distance of the church's location. Descendants of these original families are still attending and present in the church today. Membership growth and expansion increased significantly under the leadership of our current pastor, Dr. Dennis Bishop.

Approximately 273 of FWBC's members are male and 455 are female. FWBC has always had a high level of volunteerism to support the ministry functions. There is a culture of long-standing lengths of service in leadership roles; for example, the financial officer held his position for 50 years before retiring, the Vacation Bible School Coordinator has been in position for 30 years, the president of the Usher board for 30 years, and the New Member Director for 25 years. This pattern is consistent with what Jolene Erlacher said about the Baby Boomer generation: *Boomers represent the senior leadership in most denominations and organizations today. In many cases, they represent the majority of decision-making positions. As they retire in the next decade or two, many churches and organizations will be scrambling to fill critical leadership roles for future growth and succes*s. (Erlacher 2014, 5). My project initiative was born out of this critical concern that Erlacher mentions. My goal is for our ministry not to be in a position of scrambling for critical leadership because there are no millennials to train and cultivate.

In the early 90's, those who were in leadership positions were in their 30's (which would have been within the millennial age group). Over the last decade, there has been a decline in

millennials assuming leadership roles. I have been a member of our church for over 30 years (1989-present). When I joined, the presence of families was very strong with both parents and their children heavily involved in ministry. In the early 90's our youth/young adult choir was 50-plus strong. Many of these youth (now late twenties and early thirties) have graduated college, married, and started families. They have strong roots in the church from their youth. In the early two thousand, many of these young adults came back and served with consistency. They served as missionaries, ushers, and various other ministries. There were several college students who graduated, found jobs in other cities and settled in their respective places. At first, I thought that the diminishment in millennial presence was because of the relocation due to job placement. Then I would see our young millennials out in stores, malls, and think they were visiting family for a weekend, only to learn that they had moved back to the Winston-Salem area. Knowing that I knew these millennials as young children, and their strong roots within the church, I pondered why they were not returning to our church and continuing to serve as young adults did in previous decades.

IV. Description of Research Methodologies

The methods chosen to for research and data collection included: 1) surveys, 2) interviews, 3) focus groups, and 4) participant observation. The purpose of multiple research methods was to capture data from different angles and evaluate the findings for a clearer understanding of the mindset of millennials within the Black community and within the ministry context. The goal was to solicit critical conversations that illuminated causes of disengagement. Many young people who grew up in church and have since dropped do not hesitate to place blame. They point the finger, fairly or not, at the establishment. (Kinnaman 2012, 9). The

church has been blamed for being judgmental, intolerant, and hypocritical. Since the scope of my project focused on my ministry context, what I endeavored to seek out was some things within our establishment that warranted innovation.

The survey method was selected to better understand the millennial subgroup of my religious community. The goal was to better understand things like preferences for worship times or habits of participation and much more. Additionally, the surveys would give voice to their concerns, hopes, delusions, frustrations, and disappointments. A total of 35 millennials, ages 17-37, were emailed and invited to complete the survey. Twenty-two of those surveys were completed. The surveys provided a clearer understanding on things that engage Black millennials, things that deter Black millennials, and suggestions/ideas to better serve and reach Black millennials. The candidates completed surveys using Google Forms. The survey questions can be reviewed in Appendix A.

In addition, I interviewed five pastors. Three of the pastors are local within the Winston-Salem community, and two of them are in other states - Illinois and Georgia. The purpose of the pastoral interviews was to gain experiential wisdom that could further inform my innovation. Additionally, I wanted to compare their responses to the survey responses from millennials to determine where they aligned and where they diverged.

The focus group consisted of seven of the surveyed millennials to discuss the reoccurring themes in all the surveys I received and to dialogue about select questions that could further inform the innovations I wanted to recommend to my executive board. The main goal for a focus group was to engage group interaction that would draw up more information. My goal was accomplished in hearing this small group explain their responses and what they were looking for in a ministry setting. Much of their responses aligned with what I read from scholarly resources.

I repeatedly heard them state that they did not like "religion" but considered themselves "spiritual" and had a strong desire to serve.

VI. Literature Review

A. Differences in Generations

A generation is composed of those individuals who share a common historical experience. (Balswick 1977)   Another way to define the term is a group of people who are connected by their place in time with common boundaries and a common character. (McIntosh 2002) Generational theorist and analyst have discovered that each generation is unique, naming them by the characteristics they embody. As we look at a breakdown of generations, it is important to note that depending on the institution or theorist, date ranges may vary. In her book, *Millennials in Ministry*, Jolene Elracher cites the work of generational theorist, Neil Howe and William Straus. They divide the generations up as follows:

Generation	Dates of Birth	How parents raised them	Values
Silent	1925-1945 (Age 76-96)	❖ Enforced discipline ❖ Enforced conformity ❖ Enforced obedience.	❖ Tradition ❖ Security ❖ Hard work ❖ Respect.
Baby Boomers	1946-1964 (Age 57-75)	❖ Nurturing ❖ Pampering	❖ Strong Work Ethic ❖ Discipline ❖ Focus
Generation X	1965-1979 (Age 42-56)	❖ Experience explosive increase in divorce related to careers and relationships.	❖ Work-life Balance ❖ Independent
Millennials	1980-1995 (Age 26 – 41)	❖ Self Esteem Movement ❖ Building confidence, ❖ Put children first ❖ Supervised them closely	❖ Technology ❖ Teamwork ❖ Serving ❖ Interconnectedness ❖ Individuality ❖ Sense of Belonging
Generation Z	Born after 1995 (25 and younger)	❖ Parents share much of their lives on social media by posting pictures, events, and functions.	❖ Social Media, ❖ Technology

There are other researchers who define the groups with different names; however, they still characterize the generation with some of the same basic attributes. In the book, "*One Church, Four Generations*", author Gary L McIntosh divides the generations up in what he calls "waves". He states as a generation moves through time, it causes generational waves that are identified specifically with that generation. (McIntosh 2002, 15) A breakout of the waves he has categorized is as follows:

WAVE	Distinct Groups	Dates of Birth	Characteristics	Celebrities
Builders	❖ GI Generation ❖ Silent Generation	Born prior to 1946	❖ Hard workers, ❖ Saver, ❖ Frugal, ❖ Patriotic ❖ Loyal, ❖ Faithful, Committed, ❖ Get it done generation.	❖ Bob Hope, ❖ John Kennedy, ❖ Ronald Reagan ❖ Billy Graham
Boomers	❖ Leading-Edge Boomers ❖ Trailing-Edge Boomers.	1954-1964 (Age 57-67)	❖ Affluent, ❖ Independent, ❖ Educated, ❖ Media-Oriented. ❖ Cause-Oriented, ❖ Activist, ❖ Quality Conscious	❖ Spike Lee, ❖ Oprah Winfrey, ❖ Sylvester Stallone, ❖ George Bush
Busters	❖ Bust ❖ Boomlets	1965-1983 (Age 42-56)	❖ Issues of Survival, ❖ Feeling Neglected, ❖ Willing to Work, ❖ Practical Education.	❖ Johnny Depp, ❖ Whitney Houston ❖ Greg Maddux.
Bridgers	❖ Generation Y ❖ Millennials.	1984-2002 (Age 19 –37)	❖ Technological astute, ❖ Tolerant of diversity, ❖ Super-fragmented regarding their preferences. ❖ Live by internet, cell phones, and personal digital assistants. ❖ Entrepreneurial ❖ Likes to be Connected.	❖ Britney Spears, ❖ Jennifer Lopez ❖ Dr. Dre ❖ Puff Daddy ❖ Back Street Boys ❖ Christina Aguilera

McIntosh goes on to explain the current events of each group and how it shaped each generation respectively. We must understand these differences in order to stay relevant. McIntosh goes on to say: "Failure to understand and respond to the changing generational influences in the United States may have a negative impact on our churches and ministry. (McIntosh 2002, 20), He points out that the membership of churches that are able to understand the changing generational dynamics appear to be growing, while those that cannot understand and adjust to the changing generations are on the decline. (McIntosh 2002)

The Pew Research Center provides an ongoing and current analysis of generational research. A brief summary of each generation is listed below. (The Pew Research Center 2021). I have separated the millennial generation under its own heading since it is the focus of my research.

B. Understanding Millennials

The focus of this project is on millennial engagement within my ministry context. Thus, I want to focus more in-depth on characteristics of millennials in this section. What are their unique experiences, what are their likes and dislikes, and what do they want in their religious experiences?

Millennials have surpassed boomers as the largest living generation in the United States (Bock and Del Rosario 2017).   The Pew Research Center defines millennials as people born between 1981 and 1996 (Bock and Del Rosario 2017). Since millennials are the largest living generation, their loss of presence in the church would present a great impact. The impact would be decreased membership sizes, decreased financial resources, and a decreased pool of potential leaders to take the ministry into the next generation. We

need to make sure that millennials are engaged in spiritual formation so that number one,

they can become mature Christians and secondly be equipped to serve.

Millennials, also known as generation Y, was named as such because they crossed from

the 20th to the 21st century. Computers became personal, and the internet a reality. Gen Z on the

other hand, has only ever known social media, Uber, cellular devices, and wearable technology

(Windle 2019).   As a group Millennials are unlike any other youth generation in living memory.

They are more numerous, more affluent, better educated, and more ethnically diverse (Howe and

Strauss 2000, 4). Education develops critical thinking skills and expands one's perspective on

life.

Millennials experience more choices than any other generation. Jolene Elracher, in the

book Millennials in ministry cites psychologist Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper stating that too

many often lead to decision paralysis (Erlacher 2014, 10). As it relates to faith, millennials

readily acknowledge that they are spiritual but confess an aversion to religion. This

aforementioned attitude was communicated both in my readings and in the surveys I conducted.

They view formal religion as impersonal, intolerant, and inflexible. Millennials do not view

themselves void of faith or spirituality. For those who do value a personal faith, many chose to

identify themselves as "spiritual" rather than "religious" (Erlacher 2014, 12).

For this generation, religion must touch the heart and not simply mandate rules.

Touching the heart goes beyond cozy emotions and speaks to practical dynamics of faith. (Harris

2020, 6)   I experienced what Harris speaks of with my own two sons, who are millennials. I

recall a statement about church by my oldest son that really arrested my attention. He said:

"*Mama, we don't want just a bunch of emotional hype, hollering and screaming, and dramatic

stirring, but rather speak to our minds*." His comments left an indelible imprint on my heart and

a motivation to be a catalyst for change. His comments represent my earliest awareness of a

shift in generational thinking.   David Kinnaman states: *This is a generation hungry for*

substantive answers to life's biggest questions, particularly in a time when there are untold ways

to access information about what to do (Kinnaman 2012, 127).   My quest for millennial

engagement initiated with my desire for my sons to stay connected with the church and be rooted

and grounded in their Christian faith now that they were grown and living on their own.

As it relates to millennials and their church participation is where there is a noticeable

difference from Generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation.   In the book

Abandoned Faith, it says: "Despite the footprint in Christianity in America, its mark on

millennials is not as visible as it was with previous generations" (McFarland 2017). In my

surveys with Pastors, many of them mentioned that millennials were not loyal to a certain church

like their forefathers. They rather will move around to seek out the place that meets their needs.

In his book, *You Lost Me*, Kinnaman states: "Millions of young adults leave active involvement

in church as they exit their teen years. Some never return, while others live indefinitely at the

margins of the faith community, attempting to define their own spirituality"   (Kinnaman 2012,

19)*.*   I concur with Kinnaman that millennials are indeed defining their own spirituality;

However, I believe that the church can attract millennials if they are actively involved in

providing ministry resources that meet their needs. A ministry that is mindful of their millennial

engagement and make every effort to provide opportunities for active participation can greatly

benefit from their presence.

Kinnaman quoted an article concerning the loss of young people: *"I wonder what*

*percentage of ...."*Lost" Catholics feel like I do, that we did not leave the Church, but

rather, the Church left us*"* (Kinnaman 2012, 10). Interwoven into this project of engaging

millennials is a secondary message of every leader being cognizant that generations do change and that they need to remain flexible to flow with the changes that each generations mandate. Institutions such as media, education, church, government, and others significantly influence the faith journeys of the next generation. According to the research work by author, Brianna Parker, family dynamics has a significant influence on African American millennials. She goes on to say that many of them have not seen the healthiest of family (Parker 2018, 54). Her findings coincide with that of authors Howe and Straus who stated that Generation Xers experienced more divorces due to pursuing careers. (Howe and Strauss 2000).   Broken family relationships statistics are disproportionately higher within African Americans families, which speaks to why Black Millennials have a high need for authentic relationships. Author Joshua Mitchell echoes the same influence of family dynamics. He states nearly 40% of the black millennials in his study were raised by a single parent and the theme of fatherlessness frequently recurs in their stories. (Mitchell 2018, 20)

C. Historical Trends

Elracher cites research from the Barna research firm: "Parents and leaders have long been concerned about the faith development of the generation born between 1984 and 2002— and for a good reason. Barna research shows nearly six in ten (59%) of these young people who grow up in Christian churches end up walking away from either their faith or from the institutional church at some point in their first decade of adult life." (Erlacher 2014) Countless churches around the country that once stood as powerful pillars in their respective communities are seeing faithful parishioners age into retirement without a steady influx of young adults to carry the torch for the church into future decades. In the book *Black Millennials in the*

Church, Mitchell discussed concerns of pastors across the nation in how to attract, retain, and ultimately disciple this unique generation of young people who will be needed to carry the church into the second half of the twenty-first century. (Mitchell 2018) The grief expressed by pastors noted in Mitchell's research, mirrors the same grief that I experienced as an associate pastor in my home church.

No one can argue that these trends are problematic for many churches; however, their reasons for leaving or not engaging is an area to be continually explored.   I concur with Kinnaman, that this is a generation that is defining their own spirituality. This mindset was evident from the responses I received in millennial surveys. Although much research has been stated that there is an abandonment of the church and a huge decline, the majority of the church is still churchgoers (Richardson 2019).   Additionally, 70.6% of Americans still identify as Christians (Richardson 2019).   Richardson details several other statistics that he proves to be overly exaggerated and counters the myth with his researched-based findings (Richardson 2019, 42). He likens the over exaggeration of these statistics to the chicken little syndrome, fear-inducing arguments designed to sell books. Richardson's argument and findings informs an area of my innovation. A layer of innovation to meet the problem would be to actively evangelize the unchurched millennials. The unchurched would be those who has never been introduced to the faith, which is a different dynamic than people "leaving" the church. Per Richardson's study, millennials leave church at high levels during their eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-old period, but they return to church at a rate that is consistent with earlier generations between twenty-four and thirty-four.

D. Cultural Trends

The changes in the mindset of each generation represent real and substantial cultural shifts. While the gospel message of the church is the same, what happens when the culture, values, norms of the generation begin to change? Does it impact the church?   A new approach is required that understands the cultural shifts occurring while maintaining the integrity of the gospel. (Powe Jr. 2012). In the book, *What Google Can't Give,* Brianna Parker states *"While my early years in the church were positive and encouraging, the more I grew as a believer with a relationship independent of traditional thoughts and handme-down beliefs, the more my relationship with the Black church became fractured.* (Parker 2018, 13). The most significant culture change is that of the impact of social media, technology, and the internet. Whereas the baby boomers did not have access to sermons on Facebook live, Youtube, and Podcast, millennials have options to hear sermons and may not feel compelled to necessarily be a church member. With these cultural changes, church leaders have to offer more than a "good sermon" to attract and retain millennials.

E. African American Perspective & Challenges to Young Adult Receptivity.

These research-based findings raise questions even the more from the African American context.   In his book, "New Wine New Wineskins," F. Douglas Powe Jr. expresses these same thoughts: *Until recently most African American congregations have been immune to ongoing cultural shifts, because black church has historically been the epicenter of the African American community* (Powe Jr. 2012).   I believe that loss of black millennial presence in the church is not because of lack of interest in spirituality or religion, but rather due to the church's inability to engage them with how they desire to actively participate in ministry.

As a whole, millennials are more educated than previous generations. The combination of the "more educated" and "undereducated" creates a tension of knowledge in society and raises a lot of questions. Some of those questions about religion (Harris 2020, 6). Pastor Sharpe, who I interviewed, stated that leaders must be aware that an educated generation has been taught to be critical thinkers.   Millennials are exposed to more information than the generations before them. At the very moment that preaching is going on, congregants can fact check information being delivered over the pulpit. This is the generation that at the fingertip, have access to Google, Youtube, Instagram, Twitter, and various other media platforms.

Skeptics of significant influence in the African American community have used this platform to challenge Christianity sending millennials into a web of uninformed opinions. In his book, "*Is Christianity the White Man's Religion?",* Author and Professor Antipas Harris recounts a situation while teaching a graduate course on ministry leadership. A student interrupted his lecture and asked: "What do you say to friends who are leaving the church and arguing that the Christianity is the white man's religion?" (Harris 2020).

As this young lady witnessed friends leaving the church, my question is are they really abandoning their faith too? Or is it that the church has not effectively engaged them in spiritual formation and education of the tenets of our faith? The question of black identity is certainly an area that black millennials wrestle with. Warnock in his book, *The Divided Mind,* states: *Observing that "white theology" is severely limited in its interpretation of the Christian faith insofar as the non-white peoples of the world are concerned," Joseph Johnson argues for a new Christology that engages the black experience* (Warnock 2014, 123).   Per my engagement with millennials during my time of research, these groups who pervert the true tenets of Christianity would not dissuade young adults if they really were matured in their spiritual formation. Author

Antipas Harris further confirms my opinion. After an encounter with the Nation of Islam he states: "*The brothers from the Nation of Islam were quite versed in the tenets of their own faith as well as Christian Scripture. However, I noticed how they misquoted the Scriptures to suit their own agenda. .....As I left the brothers from the Nation of Islam, I remember thinking, "Our students have to know the Scriptures!".* (Harris 2020)

Black millennials have had to wrestle with dialogue about Christianity being the white man's religion. The question of whether Christianity is a trustworthy religion is a challenge for black millennials and adds to the struggle to retain their commitment and engagement. Over the years, many people and groups have asked this question. (Harris 2020). This quest for truth and understanding can be met by the church's efforts to provide opportunities for spiritual formation the way millennials prefer to learn and engage. Pastor Olu Brown stated that African American churches have to address the miseducation of Christianity. He said what causes Blacks problems is using slavery as a starting point from how Blacks came to convert to Christianity. Pastor Browns comments confirms my views that historical teaching is needed for millennials to feel that they are indeed included in the biblical narrative. Without a foundation of identity through the word, I believe millennials lose hope in a relevant gospel.

F. Causes of Millennials Disengagement.

The underlining cause of millennial disengagement was a question of great interest in my research. Kinnaman's book *You lost me,* provided data supporting that it was the church that has left millennials and not so much that millennials left the church. He states: *Let's return to the way teens and young adults express their disconnection from the Christian community; you lost me. When someone uses this idiom, they are suggesting that something hasn't translated, that the message has not been received. Wait, I don't understand. You lost me. This is what many*

Mosaics are saying to the church. (Kinnaman 2012, 39). If his argument is true, I wanted to hear from millennials and the pastors who serve them. The question was asked "what are things that deter millennials from church attendance" to both my survey participants (millennials) and interview participants (pastors). Pastor Sharpe responded to this question as follows: judgmental atmosphere, blatant hypocrisy, unethical leadership, close-minded people, a church that worships but don't provide helpful ministry during the week, and when the preacher doesn't address what is going on in the world. Pastor Sharpe emphasized the judgmental attitude as one of the primary reasons millennials withdraw from a ministry. Of the 22 millennials who completed surveys, a majority of them stated that their number one turn-off from attending church is being judged. Millennials want to be accepted for who they are.

Another thing that deters is practices and traditions that do not line up with the evolving changes within our culture. One responder said the following: *"I think having a church that hasn't evolved with the times deter millennials. There are churches that believe in traditions that do not correlate to how we think. For example, women are becoming more and more independent. If you tell a millennial woman to be submissive, then they won't be receptive to the information. That is because that does not relate to our ideology."*

Another factor that can deter millennials is the lack of technology. Millennials like visual engagement. When examining our ministry context, I saw the need to expand our technological support. Pre-pandemic, we did not offer our sermons online. We still sold cds of the sermons but did not offer streaming, mp3s, or sermons via YouTube. Another technology feature we lack is big screens in our sanctuary that shows sermon points, announcements, and lyrics to music as choirs sings. In the book "The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture," quotes Pastor Rick Warren: *The methods always change, but the message stays the same.* (Hipps 2005).

Millennials were born into the technology era and have engaged with life mainly through technology. Imagine this you are sitting at the table eating dinner which historically was a time of family dialogue. You would now see phones setting either on the table or the people's lap so that the plethora of notifications can be responded to. Technology is here to stay. Providing opportunities via technology tools like Big Screens in the Sanctuary, Periscope, Give-to-text, Zoom, and the various other ministry apps accommodates the lifestyle of a generation that prefers to engage through quick access.

VII. Survey & Interview Results That Informed Innovation Ideas

The survey responses of the millennials helped informed me of practices that would engage them in spiritual formation as well as how we can help develop them into leadership roles. Participants were excited and eager to complete the surveys and expressed hope in seeing their suggestion implemented. There were common themes as I began to analyze the data and look for patterns that were consistent with much their responses. All of the participants that were surveyed are current members of a local church. The majority of them are members of my home church, First Waughtown Baptist Church and 7 of the 22 are members of other churches. The purpose of including a sample from other churches was to identify consistencies in the mindset of millennials. As stated earlier in my research, there are common experiences that shape the mindset of a particular generation. Two different authors described millennials basically the same way: valuing diversity, independence, teamwork, sense of belonging, and spirituality. Every pastor I interviewed shared that a large percentage of millennials confess that they are not "religious", but definitely are "spiritual".

As it relates to serving, many expressed a desire to volunteer their time in serving in one capacity or another. The 4 top deterrents were: the older generation not allowing the younger to serve, lack of training, lack of knowledge in the areas to serve, and not seeing other young adults serving. In observing our ministry, I must attest that their responses are indeed true. We have people who have served in their ministry roles for years and are not willing to pass the torch. We need a paradigm shift in our way of thinking as it relates to our young adults serving in ministry. In the book, "Millennials in Ministry", the author states:

> Leaders play a crucial role in the retention and success of young adults in ministry. Millennials desire and expect relational leadership from their senior pastors and other leaders. It is important to understand what this looks like in practice. When leaders view ministry as a business, they often see their role as that of a boss. Many young adults desire the church to function more like a family. (Erlacher 2014)

Drawing upon the responses of the participants and the research findings by Erlacher, I can conclude that the leadership in a ministry plays a vital role in engaging young adult volunteers to serve.

Another important thread that surfaced through the surveys was the importance of relevance in ministry. Practices that are engaging include ministry and teaching directly in line with their struggles and culture. One responder to the survey stated "*What I find engaging is having a church that provides relatable examples. Millennials like to know how they can apply the scriptures to their life. Within my church they simplify the scriptures into everyday tasks, so I understand what the Bible is saying more clearly and how to use it.*". Not only did the surveys inform me of this important component of ministry, but pastors echoed the same sentiment. Pastor Sharped stated in our interview: *Millennials look at ministry from the standpoint "is this*

purposeful?". If they perceive activities as a waste of time and not practical for everyday life,

then it will not be engaging.

The second method is an interview. My first goal was to glean from Pastors who have

had a success rate with millennial engagement. My second goal was to compare and contrast

similarities and differences from the millennial surveys completed to see if Pastoral observations

aligned with millennial responses. I interviewed Pastor Reginald Sharpe who pastors Fellowship

Missionary Baptist Church in Chicago, Illinois. He is a millennial himself at the young adult age

of 30 years old. His observations confirmed my hypothesis and was a witness to innovations that

I believed would be effective. He addressed areas that he has noticed that are unique with

millennials. A summary of our conversation is listed below. (Sharpe 2021)

- ➢ *Transient Nature*: Millennials are more transient than other generations. For example, they're in college, get out of college, and then go back to college pursuing advanced degrees. They are more likely to move from city to city, unlike their parents.
- ➢ *Church Faithfulness* - There faithfulness to the church is not like other generations. For example their grandparents can be loyal to a fault. When the ministry becomes problematic, the leader has some faults, or the leader demonstrates immoral, unethical, or unjust practices, they (former generation) will stay. A millennials' loyalty is not tied to the church and they will leave.
- ➢ *Relevancy* – Millennials look at ministry from the standpoint "is this purposeful?". If they perceive activities as a waste of time and not practical for everyday life, then it will not be engaging.
- ➢ *Participation & Involvement* - Millennials participate more when they are pulled in and asked: what are your thoughts, what are your opinions, and how can this be better? He's seen an increase in involvement when you pull them in to the initial planning. Also, too often churches are looking at millennials like they are youth and teenagers. He goes on to say, "We don't like it when churches view us as too young to contribute. Some of us are grown, married, have children, and pay all of our bills and thus wanted to be treated as an adult." Pastor Sharpe strongly emphasized listening to the things they say they need. He gave an example, which I too have heard: *"The church down the street got it.", or "I love my church, but, I go to the events at so & so church because it meets my needs."* Pastor Sharpe states, "Guess what, if they have to keep going over there to get their soul fed, and get their needs met, it won't be long before you lose them." When millennials keep saying, I need, I need, that is an urgent cry.

> ➤ *Preference for Delivery Style* – In the African American church, traditionally, Pastor's would often sing, hoop, shout, and preach – but the millennials say, we don't need all of that. Millennials were taught to be critical thinkers and engaged better with things that provoke thought.
> ➤ *Sense of Belonging* - Sense of belonging is a important for all humans, but especially millennials. Millennials thrive in safe environments and don't like to be judged. One of the most Christian things you can do is love people. Religion puts label, lids, and limits on people and are slow to love.

VII. Project Innovation

In an effort to effectively increase the spiritual formation of our FWBC millennials as well as active participation in serving, a 5-tiered innovation will be presented to the board in hopes of full implementation. These innovations were informed by the scholarly research work and the qualitative research used in this project.   These innovations take into consideration that generations are indeed difference.   Today's church leaders understand that ministry must take place among a mosaic of groups and subgroups – most notable generational cohorts. (McIntosh 2002, 4). The innovations that I have developed out of this research is in consideration of making sure "all" generations are getting the ministry needed. It is in meeting these needs that we show "hospitality" to each group as a valuable part of our body. Hospitality is the practice of God's welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God's action bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis. (L. Russell 2009, 19). It is important to show hospitality to every group within my ministry context. Hospitality is not optional for Christians, nor is it limited to those who are specially gifted for it. It is instead, a necessary practice in the community of faith (Kim 2018). The innovations that will be presented to the FWBC board is listed below.

1. **Young Adult Advisory Board - Reverse Mentoring**

In the book, YOU LOST ME, by Kinnaman, sates: *I believe that, within their stories of young people wrestling with faith, the church as a whole can find fresh and revitalizing answers. Let's*

call it "reverse mentoring," because we, the established Christians generation have a lot to

learn from the emerging generation. (Kinnaman 2012, 12). The first pillar of my innovation is

to establish an ongoing advisory board that can inform senior leadership of how to meet the

growing and emerging needs of the new generation. I recommend a board of 7-8 people, 2-3 of

which I would recommend being from the later end of the Gen Z age group (16-22). The

purpose of this board would be to be mentored by the very group we are trying to minister to.

My recommendation would be quarterly meetings led by one of our senior ministers to glean

constant feedback. Additionally, this feedback would be used to respond to trends in a changing

culture.

2. **Evangelism Efforts targeting Unchurched Millennials.**

My second recommendation is to work collaboratively with our churches' evangelism team

on creative ways to reach unchurched millennials. The church, sure of its unique identity, must

engage fully with the world – showing the world what God destines it to be (Kim 2018). For

starters, I would encourage a program of personal invitations. The survey in Richards' book

states in his survey of two thousand unchurched individuals, half of them told us that they would

respond positively to an invitation to attend church if the invitation came from a friend. He

further sates that 55% of those surveyed said they would respond positively if the invitation

came from a family member (Richardson 2019). According to the "unchurched report" by

Richardson, only 25% of the unchurched were *never churched* (Richardson 2019). In the

surveys that I completed, several millennials repeated over and over that they were "*spiritual"*

but not "*religious".*

3. **Add Opportunities for Spiritual Formation via Technology.**

Mitchell in his book, *Black Millennials and the Church* stated that he was playing round with Periscope and it ended up being a huge success. *I found myself logging on the next morning and many mornings after that, and more and more people kept tuning in. God has grown that platform to over 20,000 followers. The Morning Hype now averages anywhere from 450 to 1000 followers.* (Mitchell 2018, 42) Providing opportunities for Zoom bible studies, prayer sessions, Sunday School classes and New Member/New Convert classes would especially work for a fluid generation needing to have the flexibility of opportunities for spiritual formation. Interaction and community are extremely important for millennials and can be effectively achieved through technology. The pandemic afforded us the opportunity to actively test out whether or not technology usage increased engagement levels.

4. **Leadership Training Program -Equipping Millennials to Lead and Serve**

Real spiritual formation happens when people are able to exercise their faith and the core body of believes. We all need meaning life experiences with other believers as part of our formation. In the surveys I completed with for this project, millennials expressed the desire to give back and serve. In the article, "*Ministering to Millennials,*" the following statement was made relevant to this innovation:

> Since many millennials tend to perceive the church as too internally focused,
> pastors may need to elevate the visibility of existing ministries to the
> marginalized. Some churches may need to consider beginning such an outreach
> or partnering with a local organization already making an impact in the
> community. Regardless, inviting younger people to participate in compassion
> ministries that care for the poor in tangible ways can help challenge a false

dichotomy between teaching truth from the pulpit and loving our neighbors well

(Bock and Del Rosario 2017)

5. Mentorship

Millennials are looking for authentic, meaningful relationships with mature believers who love them well as they navigate the tensions of life and seek to grow in their faith. Rather than being most concerned about a pastor's Sunday sermon, many young people are desperate for discipleship. (Bock and Del Rosario 2017). Mentorship would facilitate a relational culture. A relational culture is one in which power is shared through people's participation both in the formation and in the ongoing functioning of their society's political, economic, and religious (values-sustaining) systems. (Linthicum 2003, 28)

I have several mentees that I am currently working with and have seen spiritual formation develop from these close- knit relationships.   Millennials believe in learning, not simply by lecture but by guided experience. It is probable that we are being called the prodigal child when we may have actually been exiled through neglect and misunderstanding, becoming the marginalized in ministry. (Parker 2018, 25)

VIII. Conclusion

As I conclude this narrative, I invite you to reflect on two biblical men that demonstrate a difference in generations in how they approached their battle: King Saul and David, who would eventually become king. These two represented two different generations.

I Samuel 17:38-39

38 Then Saul clothed David with his armor. He put a helmet of
bronze on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail,

39 and David strapped his sword over his armor. And he tried in vain
to go, for he had not tested them. Then David said to Saul, "I cannot
go with these, for I have not tested them." So David put them off.

   The Biblical story of David and Goliath is a well-known parable. Goliath, a giant and the champion of the Philistines, challenged the Israelites to send out their champion and decide the outcome of their ongoing war in single combat. None of the Israelites dared to face Goliath, except David. David expressed his willingness to take on the giant: *Then David said to Saul, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine (I Samuel 17:32).*   Saul did not fully see or discern David's capabilities saying: *And Saul said to David, "You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth." (Vs. 33).* David was skilled enough to help even though Saul thought he was too young.   David, confident of his abilities, persisted on the opportunity, and Saul agreed. Upon agreement, Saul armed him with his amor, helmet, brass, and coat. David's response was: *"I cannot go with these".* What worked for Saul, was not going to work for David.   David was basically communicating: we want to engage in the army of the living God, but your armor (way of doing things), is not working for me, "give me a sling-shot." Millennials are like the Stone-Sling shot generation and their forefathers are like the armor-bearing generation. To fight with armor on, you have to get close up on it, but to fight with a sling shot, you can be far away and still be effective.We see two men who were both skilled in fighting but fought it completely differently.

   I see the narrative of millennial engagement in this story. Whereas many assumed that millennials were not engaged in church because they had abandoned their faith, but they were saying the way you are doing things is not working for me.   My research has led me to change the armor and allow the millennials to inform us in how they want to engage. Millennials want

the opportunity to be innovative and collaborate together. (Windle 2019). The local church is one mechanism that can be instrumental in bringing us closer to Him and helping us to be more like Him.

      As we develop generational literacy, be innovative in our methodologies, and be intentional about keeping up with cultural changes, then we can better fulfill our Christian mandate and stay relevant in our present-day world.

References

Balswick, Jack O. 1977. "Church Generation: A Neglected Research Issue." *Sociological Analysis* 258-265.

Barna, George. 2012. *Revolution.* Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers.

Block, Peter. 2008. *Community.* San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. .

Bock, Darrell, and Mikel Del Rosario. 2017. "The Table Briefing: Ministering to Millennials." *Bibiotheca Sacra* 343-55.

Cormode, Scott. 2020. *The Innovative Church.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Dudley, Carl, and Nancy Ammerman. 2002. *Congregations in Transition.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Erlacher, Jolene Cassellious. 2014. *Millenials in Ministry.* Valley Forge: Judson Press.

Fullan, Michael. 2001. *Leadidng in a Culture of Change.* San Franciso: Jossey Bass.

Harris, Antipas. 2020. *Is Christianity the White Man's Religion.* InterVarsity Press.

Hipps, Shane. 2005. *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Hirsch, Alan. 2016. *The Forgotten Way.* Grand Rapids: Brazon Press.

Howe, Neil, and William Strauss. 2000. *Millennials Rising: The Next Generation.* New York: Vintage Books.

Kim, Grace Ji-Sun. 2018. *Healing Our Broken Humanity.* Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press .

Kinnaman, David. 2012. *You Lost Me.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Linthicum, Robert. 2003. *Transforming Power.* Downers' Grove: Inter-Varsity Press.

Lumen Learning. 2021. *Lumen Learning.* January. Accessed 2021. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-psychology/chapter/early-and-middle-adulthood/#:~:text=In%20early%20adulthood%20(ages%2020,%2C%20vision%2C%20and%20reproductive%20capability.

Massey, Jr., Floyd, and Samuel Berry McKinney. 1976. *Church Administration in the Black Perspective.* Valley Forge: Judson Press.

McFarland, Alex and Jimenez, Jason. 2017. *Abandoned Faith.* Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

McIntosh, Gary. 2002. *One Chuch, Four Generations.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

McKinney, Lora-Ellen. 2003. *Christian Education in the African American Church.* Valley Forge: Judson Press.

Mitchell, Joshua. 2018. *Black Millennnials & the Church.* Valley Forge: Judson Press.

Parker, Brianna Katrice. 2018. *What Google Can't Give.* Mansfield: Black Millennial Cafe'.

Pinn, Anne, and Anthony Pinn. 2002. *Black Church History.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

Powe Jr., F. Douglas. 2012. *New Wine New Wineskins.* Nashville: United Method Publishing.

Prevention, CDC Centers for Disease Control and. 2019. *National Center for Health Statistics.* January. Accessed January 2021. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr70/nvsr70-02-508.pdf.

Raboteau, Albert. 2004. *Slave Religion: "The Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Richardson, Rick. 2019. *You Found Me.* Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Publishers.

Russell, Letty. 2009. *Just Hospitality.* Louisville: Westminister John Know Press.

Russell, Letty, M. 2009. *Just Hospitality.* Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press.

Schlumpf, Heidi. 2019. "Building a Culture of Leadership Continuity." *In Trust* 30 (4), 18-19.

Sharpe, Reginald, interview by Cynthia Dixon. 2021. *Millennial Engagement* (January 11).

Snyder, Howard. 1996. *Radical Renewal.* Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.

Taylor, Paul. 2014. *The Next America.* New York: Public Affairs.

The Pew Research Center. 2021. *Pew Research Center.* January 5. Accessed January 2021. https://www.pewresearch.org/.

Warnock. 2014. *The Divided Mind of the Black Church.* New York: New York University Press.

Warren, Rick. 1995. *The Purpose-Driven Church.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Webster-Miriam Dictionary. 2021. *Miriam-Webster.* January Friday. https://www.merriam-webster.com/.

Windle, Benjamin. 2019. *8 Innovations to Leading Millennials.* Cheadle: The Thrive Co.

Appendixes A

Some of the questions that were on the survey are as follows:

1. What are the biggest challenges that millennials face today?

2. How did you come to join your church? (Born, referred or invited by someone, outreach etc.)

3. What do millennials find engaging in a church/ministry?

4. What types of things deter or turn off millennials?

5. How would you describe the consistency in your attendance?

6. What ministries do you serve in at your church?

7. Why is there not a high number of millennials serving in ministry positions?

8. What things do you feel would enhance a church or draw more young adults?

9. Who has influenced you the most in your Christian journey?

10. What changes would you make in your church? In other words, what ministries or programs would you add or delete?