

The Millennial Church: Reforming the Church for a New Generation

Intro:

- The story of my experience in Amarillo, TX of watching a sunrise and a full moon set. This is a picture of where we are today in the USA church. We see a way of doing church in decline and new way emerging. But for the moment we are experiencing both.
- In this process of change, the millennial generation, those born c. 1980-2000, are the key generation requiring this shift. They are a “**hinge generation.**” Therefore, let's begin to understand more about this generation's perspective upon the church because it will enable us to better reform our churches.

Presuppositions:

- When we use demographical data you know that we are following trends and not everyone in a studied group will match all the trends and tendencies. However, when talking about the type of churches we will need in the future it is very helpful info, e.g. if most of our churches are type A churches, and if most of a generation wants a type B then our churches will experience decline. So understanding these generational trends would be helpful, esp. since the millennials are the largest generation (78 million).
- For churches to connect with a generation it must be relevant, and by relevant I mean it must connect with their highest aspirations. Consider these two case studies: 1) European churches during the 18th and 19th centuries and 2) the Black churches of the South during the civil rights era.

I. How involved is the Millennial generation in the church?

- Survey Audience: How many of you have a child or grandchild in that age group? How many of them are as involved in the church as you hoped they would be?

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- We think about 29% of that generation has no connection to any organized religion. They are the least connected of five generations that we have studied (PEW).

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- 65% identify themselves as Christian (Rainer, 231).
- 65% of millennials never or rarely attend a religious worship service making them the least connected generation at this point in their life of any studied generation (Rainer, 47, 236).
- 24% attend church weekly (Rainer, 236).

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- 13% of Millennials said that religion has had a significant impact upon them, rating music, internet, an TV higher. "We feared that this generation might be anti-Christian. In some ways the responses were worse than I feared. At least someone who opposes Christianity has our beliefs on his or her radar. Most Millennials don't think about religious matters at all" (Rainer, 22)

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II. Highest Aspirations of the Millennial Generation

1. **Service**—"Service Generation" (Rainer, 166)

- Survey audience: How many of you have had your millennial involved in a service project?
- 75% believe it is their role to serve others (Rainer, 37). In a survey 77% affirmed the statement "I am motivated to serve others in society" (Rainer, 117).
- They are very hopeful about the impact of their service. 90% believe that it is their responsibility to make a difference in the world (Rainer, 36), and 96% said they believe they can do something great (Rainer, 116). They are very confident and hopeful about what they can accomplish through their service.
- Care about the environment—87% thought their generation should work to clean up the environment. (Rainer, 42-43, 163)

2. **Relationships**—"Relationship Generation" (Rainer, 103)

- With Family—Relationship with their family was their number one priority with 61% indicating it was so (Rainer, 74, 93).
 - 1) Strong ties with parents—88% view parents favorably (Rainer, 33-34, 98) hover parents
 - 2) Two thirds got advice from extended family and siblings (Rainer, 121)
 - 3) Want to stay married—86% believe they will only marry once (Rainer, 70, 72)
 - 4) Work is important but must leave place for time with family and service to others (Rainer, 38-40).
- With Friends
 - 1) Relationship with friends was their number two priority with 25% indicating so (Rainer, 75).
 - 2) 81% indicated that friends were a positive influence upon their lives (Rainer, 121)
- With Older Generations
 - 1) 94% said they have great respect for older generations (Rainer, 71, 88)
 - 2) 75% have friend of a different generation (Rainer, 87)
 - 3) 75% would like an older mentors in their life (Rainer, 144) and Currently about 40% have a mentor (Rainer, 41)
- Use technology to stay in contact with friends and family (Rainer, 43-45, 187), about one-third of their wake hours are spent on a computer (Rainer, 198).

3. Diversity

- Expect diversity—Young lady’s comment that it seems so weird and uncomfortable to be where everyone is all alike. (Read quote Rainer, 83)
- 43% of the adults in this generation are non-whites and Latinos They are the most racially diverse generation. (PEW)
- 70% have a friend of a different ethnic or racial background (Rainer, 86)
- 70% have friends who have different religious beliefs (Rainer, 87)
- 80% had friends that lived differently from them (Rainer, 87)
- 93% accepting of marriages across racial or ethnic lines and 22% have done so (Rainer, 90)
- 60% accepted same sex marriages (Rainer, 90)

4. Cooperation—“Mediating Generation” (Rainer, 153)

- weary of polarization in families, politics and religion (Rainer, 153, 157-58)
- highly respectful of others—respect is the willingness to listen to what someone else says and not ridicule them. “This issue of respecting one another was one of the few where all subgroups of the millennials had the same strong opinion (Rainer, 158)
- many do not watch news channels with shrill voices

5. Ethical Spirituality

- 75% define themselves as spiritual, which they use to indicate a position that may or may not be connected established, organized, institutional religion. (Rainer, 47)
- This spirituality is concerned about building community based upon an ethical human connection, which is dedicated to social

justice, compassion for the suffering, and environmental stewardship. (stats in Bass, 92)

	1999	2009
Spiritual only:	30%	30%
Religious only:	54%	9%
Both:	6%	48%
Neither	9%	9%

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T/S These values are very important to this group and they want to live their life around these values.

III. How do Millennials view the church?

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1. 70% responded that the church is irrelevant (Rainer, 244).

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2. Why?

- Some believe that organized religion is a **divisive force** in the world. Church leaders attack other religions and the internal conflict in churches. This would not appeal to Millennials because of their desire to find cooperation/consensus and the strong belief in mutual respect even for those with whom you disagree. (Rainer, 170-171 read quote on page 171)
- They see the church as **inwardly focused** not working to make the community or this world a better place to live. They think the church views the community as simply a pool of prospects rather than a people they were called to serve and work alongside. This would move counter to their impulse to make the world better and to serve as a group. (Rainer, 174, 244)
- They are concerned about **authenticity** and they perceive that church is apathetic. They will take their commitments a step farther than their parents. Many of their parents were nominally Christian. They on the other hand do not make any pretense about connecting with the church. If the church doesn't take

the teachings of Christ seriously then why waste your time belong to it? (Rainer, 245-46)

- They have created a **social network of friends** and through the use of technology that does not require a church for social networking.
- They have made a distinction between organized religion and **spirituality**, e.g. exercise done with BUA students on the list of words found in Diana Butler Bass's book *Christianity After Religion*, (p 69), e.g. connection, wisdom, and doubt with spirituality; and order, rules, beliefs, and authority with religion.

- They do not believe that what the church is teaching requires them to be a member of the organized institutional church.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism:

1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

(Smith & Denton p.163)

instrumentalist—Religion is about getting God to respond to the desires and feelings of people. Therefore, religion is essentially a tool or instrument for people to get what they want. It is form of Christianity doped up on consumerism, which describes the way that many church members view religion.

Smith & Denton in *Soul Searching* make this observation, "The instrumental image of religion is not the invention of teenagers. It seems to be the dominating image of religion embraced by many adults in the United States." (148)

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Kenda Creasy Dean's book, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, writes, "The problem does not seem to be that churches are teaching young people badly, but that we are doing an exceedingly good job of teaching youth what we really believe, namely, that Christianity is not a big deal, that God requires little, and the church is a helpful social institution filled with nice people..." She goes on to say that "if churches practice MTD in the name of Christianity, then getting teenagers to church more often is not the solution (conceivably it could make things worse). A more faithful church is the solution.... Maybe the issue is simply that the emperor has no clothes."

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T/S Since many millennials do not view the church as relevant, what we must do is to better connect the church with their highest aspirations. **90% of this generation say they are looking for resources to live a meaningful life, which is higher than any other generation** (Barna in Facts and Trends, Spring 2014, 14). So If we can structure our churches so that they focus upon these values, and help them to live a meaningful life and help them create a world that matches their highest aspirations, then I think there is good possibility that our churches will be viewed as relevant by most of the Millennials.

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IV. **Creating Relevant Church Ethos for the Millennial Generation**

1. **Missional Creativity** (service, cooperation, ethical spirituality values)

A. Missional:

- A definition of missional church--A missional church is one in which every member seeks to **incarnate** the life and ministry of Jesus in this world, and thereby extends Jesus' Kingdom of God vision of making this world look like what God intended.
- The modern day missional movement is a reaction against the consumer/attractational church model—it is an identity change.

How many can you get out of the church,
vs
in the church

- Missional churches work to transform the community/world which requires the church bringing engaged in social justice, community development, compassion ministries, missions using the gifts and talents of everyone.

B. Creativity:

- The missional church that successfully engages the millennials will have to allow them to be creative in carrying out its mission.
- Millennials will create new ways of cooperating and networking along relational lines, which will cross religious/denominational/political lines, and in so doing will probably make broad use of technology. The church will be both local and global.
- Remember that one of the ways that the Spirit works in the church is by inspiring creativity.

2. Multi-Cultural Passion (diversity & relationships values)

- The church is multi-cultural in the sense that the church compassionately loves and appreciates people from all types of cultures. The church is *for* the world, because God is *for* the world.
- The multi-cultural church is a church that feels, listens, and acts in deep sympathy with all people of the world. In so doing the church participates in the life of people in other cultures, rather than expecting them to participate in the life of the church on the church's terms.
- The multicultural church is an agent of reconciliation in this world, working to bring peace to conflicts along national, ethnic, economic, educational, class, generational, gender lines, etc. . . .

- The multi-cultural church helps to create bridges between people of different culture, e.g. multi-cultural worship/study/dialogue, mentoring relationships,
- This passion must influence all dimensions of the church's life—staff, worship, teaching, fellowship, etc . . .

3. Focused upon Ethical Spirituality

This spirituality is focused upon building community, social justice, redemptive compassion, and environmental stewardship, e.g. new monasticism of Shane Claiborne.

V. Practical Steps Toward Reaching Millennials

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1. Outreach to Millennials

- Connect with the millennials you know, e.g. children, grandchildren, work place, church
- Help Boomer parents know how to move their millennial children closer to faith
- Get involved in service acts they are doing—join them, instead of them joining you
- Upgrade your churches technology capabilities for use of the internet and use of various social media
- Be authentic about yourself and the church
- Use mentoring with older members on very practical issues, e.g. family life, business life, finances
- Use of internships in the church organization & by church members in their vocation
- Communicate in normal (not religious) language—authenticity issue

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2. Worship for Millennials

- Experiences of awe and wonder are more powerful than reason for this group
- Worship that is experiential, participatory, image-driven, and communal will engage them more

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3. Theology for Millennials

- prefers narrative over systematic propositions when talking about faith
- Utilize insights that are ecumenical and interfaith
- Avoid using military warrior language
- most educated generation in our nations history, so don't hide from tough issues. Go more into depth study and discussion.
- Wisdom for life's journey is more important than theological data

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4. Discipleship for Millennials

- Use spiritual practices that lead to engagement to the world.
- Needs to be highly relational and conversational, not a bunch of do's and don'ts
- Use intergenerational encounters

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5. Missions for Millennials

- Hands-on better than surrogate approach
- Focus on meeting human need—spiritual, mental, physical, social
- Strong engagement in the community around the church
- Stress relationship building throughout the process
- cross-cultural mission experiences, mixing of age groups. Expect millennials to use technology in doing this.

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6. Church Organization for Millennials

- They seem to want organizations to help provide structure and guidance through which small groups can be creative and innovative. (hovering parents)
- Church leaders should demonstrate transparency, humility, and integrity in leadership

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7. Church Staffing for Millennials

- hiring a diverse staff can be a strong plus for them
- consider becoming a teaching congregation

Reading:

The Millennials, Thom S. Rainer & Jess W. Rainer (2011)

Christianity After Religion, Diana Butler Bass (2012)

Almost Christian, Kenda Creasy Dean (2010)

Soul Searching, Christian Smith & Melinda Lundquist Denton (2005)

The Irresistible Revolution, Shane Claiborne (2006)

Souls in Transition, Christian Smith & Patricia Snell (2009)

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/03/07/6-new-findings-about-millennials/>

<http://www.pewforum.org/2010/02/17/religion-among-the-millennials/>

<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a3D2ui5Yf_M

[http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thepeangeablog/2014/04/29/millennial-mentorship/?](http://www.patheos.com/blogs/thepeangeablog/2014/04/29/millennial-mentorship/)

Segment 1: Characteristics of a Missional Church. <http://vimeo.com/36165987>.

Segment 2: Structural Changes for a Missional Church. <http://vimeo.com/36164738>

Segment 3: Multicultural Church. <http://vimeo.com/36162755>

Segment 4: Engaging Millennials. <http://vimeo.com/36160533>.