

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION:
BUILDING A LEGACY
IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN RURAL FAITH COMMUNITY
THROUGH CONNECTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

A professional project submitted to the Theological School of
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ABSTRACT

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The African American rural faith community is significant among African Americans. The faith community is the place where many people receive their foundation for spiritual and life skills. However, the millennial generation's sources of influence have shifted due to modern-day technology. This paper is a source of reminding and guiding African American rural faith communities to remain connected to the millennial generation. As younger generations disperse for social, economic and business pursuits, the challenge is to foster relationships which will stand the test of time. How this connection is developed may vary among a specific church but it will be a method to maintain a relationship in its efforts to secure the future of the rural faith community.

The Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Ansonville, North Carolina, faces the challenge of connecting and maintaining relationships with those who have left for a number of reasons and serves as the context for the project. The project consisted of utilizing preliminary meetings, interviews and survey questions with young adults between ages 18-35 to gather information that detected young adult's perception and connection with the rural faith community. As a part of

the project, The Pleasant Hill Baptist Church launched a *Millennial Spiritual Reunion* with efforts to deepen the cohesiveness among the Millennials.

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Glossary

- Ancestry.** A family or ancestral descent; lineage
- Ascension.** Refers to Jesus the Christ going up into heaven without actually dying.
- Bethel.** House of God.
- Big Day.** The term big day is referring to importance of the Pleasant Hill annual homecoming celebration. The homecoming service is held the fourth Sunday in August every year.
- Culture.** Culture is the accumulation over time of all the wisdom and methods of a given cultural group, for the purpose of ensuring its survival. Each group has a menu of acceptable foods, a collection of proper hairstyles and attire, a way to greet-people, ways to sing music and tell stories, and ways to build homes and rear children.”
- Diaspora.** New Testament word, which is translated as “the scattering” or “the dispersion.”
- Gifts.** Supernatural/natural graces that enables a person to do a certain task.
- Maqom.** Biblical term in which the Hebrew transliteration, which literally means a place.
- Relationship.** The way in which two or more people or things are connected.

Introduction

Beyond Homecoming

In Ansonville, North Carolina, the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church faith community refers to its yearly homecoming celebration as “the greatest homecoming on earth.” Established by the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in the year of our Lord, 1939, and held on the fourth Sunday of August, as many as four hundred to five hundred people attend every year. The homecoming of this historic church is now the biggest event in the entire town and arguably the county. Yes! Homecoming at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church is a big deal!

The Homecoming experience is full of fellowship, relationship and dynamic worship; a time when people from far and near reunite, rekindle past relationships and establish new relationships. Historically, among African American churches, homecoming can be described as a spiritual family reunion. According to Yvonne T. Jones, “the tradition of homecomings in African American churches dates back at least to the turn of the twentieth century.”¹

Homecoming is also one of the main opportunities for members who have dispersed. For example, the young adults who have left for college or settled in other places find their way back home to celebrate this annual gathering. At Pleasant Hill Baptist Church’s Homecoming, people return from various parts of the country: the West Coast, Northeast as well as the America’s heartland – the Midwest, to worship. In 2014, people came from twelve states and twenty counties. Attendance for this festivity revealed a four-hundred percent increase, compared to a normal Sunday of approximately ninety people attending worship. Consequently, homecoming

¹ Yvonne T. Jones, *Kinship Affiliation Through Time: Black Homecomings and Family Reunions In A North Carolina County, Volume 27, Number. 1* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980), 49-66.

remains one the most fruitful financial days of the church's calendar year. Each member gives an assessment in order to meet the financial obligation of the revival. Additionally, the generous Pleasant Hill out-of-town supporters also contribute large financial gifts.

I have been graced with the privilege of serving as the fourteenth Pastor of the historic Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. I recall my first Pleasant Hill Homecoming experience, on August 24, 2008. When the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees asked, "How do you feel about preaching to large crowds?" I responded, "I will be fine." I vividly remember walking out of the Pastor's study along with the other ministers. The moment the usher opened the door to enter the sanctuary, to my surprise I witnessed the huge crowd. Packed to capacity, the sanctuary had people standing near the walls. The choir ministered with passion and energy. Multiple generations were worshipping at the same time. Several of the baby boomers decided to wear their "Sunday Best" hats, and the millennials were dressed in their casual attire. During the visitor's moment, several people stood and proudly declared "*I'm home!*" The homecoming sermon God put on my heart was titled "*When You Know God,*" and the people responded to the message in the African American traditional way of call and response with unadulterated praise and thanksgiving. Excitement built to a climax of momentous celebration and humble gratitude.

In the years of my tenure as Pastor, the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church Homecoming has been centered on family, with every generation coming together. However, in the year 2014, there was a noticeable shift in the Homecoming experience that included an atmosphere of mixed feelings. The opportunity to greet the visitors and welcome home the out-of-town attendees occurred as usual. The habitual baby boomers stood and shared with everyone just how grateful they were to be at Homecoming. Nonetheless, this particular year some *new people* stood up with youthfulness in their voice and in their appearance. Immediately, it dawned on me that the

teenagers and college students from seven years ago (my first year serving as Pastor) were now young adults, and that these *new* people there to participate in Homecoming, were once Pleasant Hill's children, but were now all grown up! I also realized in that moment that a high percentage of the younger generations of the Pleasant Hill faith community have now migrated or dispersed into other areas of the United States. This generation that has dispersed is the millennial generation, a group of people who were born between 1980 and 2000, in unprecedented numbers. "Nearly seventy-eight million live births took place between 1980 and 2000."² This fact is validated by the Pew Foundation's research: "Surpassing the boomer generation in 2016, millennials now number 75.4 million in the U.S."³

On that Homecoming Sunday, the millennial generation had returned to the Pleasant Hill faith community with their own style, culture, and energy. And while their youthful energy is a yearly boost to the congregation, their presence in recent years highlights their Sunday-to-Sunday absence and the cultural gap between our local and dispersed membership. Every year after the homecoming celebration in the Pleasant Hill faith community, the atmosphere goes from a high to a low. It appears that so much energy is centered around the *Big Day*. Therefore, once Homecoming has ended, there is very little interaction with the dispersed until the next year. Thus, this project begins with the awareness that Pleasant Hill Faith Community has an opportunity to utilize the homecoming experience as momentum to keep a connection of excitement throughout the year, perhaps, the most important generation in which to build a strong connection is the millennial generation.

² Thom S. Rainer, Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 2.

³ Pew Research, "Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as America's Largest Generation" (April 2016): (accessed June 3, 2016), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/04/25/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers/>.

In this postmodern age there are resources available that must be tapped into that can aid in creating a connectional relationship, beyond Homecoming at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, between the Ansonville community at-large, and the young adults who have dispersed or scattered across the nation. Creating this connectional relationship truly matters because the economic, social and spiritual progress of any faith community depends upon its next generations. It also matters because Pleasant Hill faith community can become a place of ministry and connection for local and out-of-town members that extends beyond Homecoming.

As a Baptist community with congregationally centered polity, Pleasant Hill Baptist Church is responsible for creating its own system for success. The church does not have a denominational endowment that will provide economic security in the future. The church does not have a denominational spokesperson that deals with social issues for all Baptist churches. The church does not have monthly denominational Lectionaries that will provide an outline to deal with certain religious topics. Unlike other denominations, there is no handbook that says the church is bound to reaching goals in any certain way. Therefore, resources must and *can* be created directly by the Pleasant Hill faith community. The millennial generation in the Pleasant Hill faith community is the most educated generation; this puts them in position to provide resources for the church community as a whole, and the educational advancements of millennials are honorable. In, fact the millennials' educational awareness qualifies them to have a legitimate voice in the church. Allowing the millennials to share ideas and plans for the faith community is a brilliant way for this generation to remain connected to their home church. When a church and community raises up its young, it is with the intention the young carry on the faith because it is an actual experience for them. While there might be hope for their ongoing church participation and continued belonging as economic and social circumstances change, an understanding of

what it means to be *connected* must also occur. A connection does not require the millennials to attend their home church every Sunday, participate with every church activity or vote in every church meeting. A connection, nonetheless, could involve the following: reinforcing some of the spiritual teachings that millennials learned from their old faith community and applying them into their current home situations, interacting via social media on the church Facebook page, and being committed to offering a financial contribution towards the annual church college scholarship committee. In reference to the manner in which millennials communicate and express themselves, Thom and Jess Rainer state:

We communicate unlike any other generation. Remember Mark (who is a Millennial)? He provided us firsthand into his family life. You may have picked up on his methods of communication. He told us that he talks to his parents, sisters or brother through text messages, e-mail, and Skype. He also keeps us with his extended family through Facebook. What is not unique is Mark's using the multitude of communication avenues. While the previous insight may have been a surprise to you, this new information will probably not be a shock. Millennials communicate unlike any other generation.⁴

It is crucial to understand the way millennials and remember and connect is different than previous generations. It is not realistic to expect millennials to provide full support or full resources to the faith community if they have relocated. This is hard to do if the jobs, etc., are elsewhere and they have chosen to leave in order to find work, housing, and to develop social lives. However, the Pleasant Hill faith community desires the millennials occasionally provide partial resources and partial support as a gesture of their commitment to the place where they received their spiritual formation.

One of the reasons the church invested in and nourished the youth was to help them become future leaders in the faith community. Unfortunately, not all of the millennials remain in

⁴ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2011), 43.

their current faith community. Regarding this, however, the Baptist denomination Church covenant states: “We moreover engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God’s Word.”⁵ The rural faith community is not only concerned about the local millennial’s participation connection to their hometown church, but rather an important tenet the youth were taught is that the greatest connection is to the Body of Christ.

The Christian educators at Pleasant Hill are advocates for training the youth to serve, minister, and give back. Upon reflection, youth leaders taught the (then) young teenagers to possess a keen understanding of themselves in order to be the future of the church. But, for many of the young adults, life has compelled them to leave their small town roots to pursue greater opportunity.

Those young adults may find much reward in remembering the church that formed them. If the church is going to thrive in upcoming years, the young adults of the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church faith community must remember the place where they received their spiritual foundation. Pleasant Hill is the place where the millennials received their spiritual foundation because their parents publicly administered their baby dedication; it is the place where they publicly confessed Jesus the Christ as Lord and Savior; and it is the place they were baptized during childhood. The Pleasant Hill faith community is the place where many people received marriage counseling, public speaking experience, and where they buried their loved ones. The continuity of the church amid the seasons of life is a treasure that can be undervalued by young adults, but for their own well-being as well as the well-being of the church, it is essential for the young adults to

⁵ Marshall Davis, *The Baptist Church Covenant: Its History and Meaning*, (Rochester, NY: Marshall Davis, 2013), 1.

remember the church. Although it is not the millennial's duty to remember their faith community according to modern-day beliefs, nevertheless, parents strongly encourage the millennials to remember. The church should consider the way millennials remember is significantly different from the way previous generations remember. Remembrance language for millennials can be different. Therefore, it is the task of the church to learn and understand the millennials' way of life in order to establish a solid connection to this generation of upcoming leaders.

Rural African American faith communities as a whole are faced with a diasporic generational gap: once the millennial generation leaves the community and becomes successful, it does not stay connected to that place. It is an African American faith tradition to teach the youth to *never forget the bridge that brought them over*. Perhaps, that teaching is not understood by other faith communities, but it is deeply understood by the African American faith community. In fact the term *bridge* may not give the African American faith community its proper description of how powerful the church has been to its youth in years past. Lincoln and Mamiya discuss this in their publication:

The Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development. E. Franklin Frazier's apt descriptive phrase, "nation within a nation," pointed to these multifarious levels of community involvement found in the Black Church, in addition to the traditional concerns of worship, moral nurture, education, and social control.⁶

⁶ C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church In The African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 8.

It is apparent that the African faith community is a historical part of the heart of the African American race. However, in recent years, even in the African American community, it is a task for millennials to embrace the importance of the faith community.

Even so, in the twenty-first century, continuity and connection cannot be based upon authority and obligation, nor can continuity and connection be based upon moral obligation. A question popularly attributed to the millennials is: *What have you done for me lately?* It is not my task to deem millennials as self-centered and needy. However, millennials have lived in an age where things are constantly revolving and rapidly upgrading. If the church does not revolve and implement creative ways in its operation of doing church, then the institution of the church, in general, could possibly become irrelevant to the millennial generation. Because of this, the church has a lot to prove. Maintaining a connection with millennials demands an overall, strategic effort. A relationship between the church and the millennials can develop when the church reaches out to the faith community rather than waiting on the diaspora to return. millennials value quality relationship. Thom and Jess Rainer declare:

We cannot overstate how important relationships are in motivating the millennial generation. The best motivators in the workplace for this generation are relationships. The best connectors in religious institutions are relationships. The best way to get a Millennial involved in service, activity, or ministry is through relationships.⁷

Solid and sustaining relationships are essential in the overall engagement of the millennial generation.

A method for the African American rural community to enrich a connection among millennials is through the virtue of relationships. Connection is not centered upon excellent

⁷ Rainer and Rainer, *The Millennials Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, 104.

oratorical skills, biblical workshops or just the mere fact that the church exists. Rather, relationship is the driving factor to a connection in the life of the millennial.

Chapter 1

Connection With Place and Person

The development of a deeply rooted connection with millennials is essential in the African American rural church. A connection creates a sense of belonging. Thom and Jess Rainer discuss this fact: “Surprisingly, millennials desire close relationships, and just may be the ones to bring family back together. This concept of family includes the traditional concept of family, but it also encompasses church family, community family and work family.”¹

I will focus on the importance of the place where the millennials experienced God during their youth. Unfortunately, there is constant pattern of millennials moving away from the Pleasant Hill Church faith community due to life changes such as attending college, enlisting in the military or marriage. In efforts to provide contextual reality why people or migrating from the rural community into the larger community. Research data from the United States Department of Agriculture gave insight on the reason for this reoccurring pattern. What is the rural community? “According to the USDA Census Bureau, rural is defined in three ways; all areas outside of census places with 2,500 or more people, all areas outside census places with 10,000 or more people, and all areas outside of census places with 50, 000 more people.”²

¹ Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer, *The Millennials Connecting to America's Largest*, 31.

² Pender, J. "United States Department of Agriculture (2012): accessed August/September, 2016, www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population.aspx. 2012.

It is a major difference between the rural and urban/city communities in terms of population and resources. According to statistics from the 2012 urban geography world populations, “There are over 400 cities with more than a million people. In developed countries, up to 70% or more live in larger cities whereas in poorer countries this rate is below 40%.”¹ The reason people are moving from the rural to urban cities is for greater opportunity. Statistics also indicate reasons are because urban cities have more employment opportunities, education and better income.

The Pleasant Hill community is located in Anson County and the area is mostly rural. According to the Anson County Department Commerce: “The medium household income in Anson County is 33,388 with only twenty-five major employers employing only 4,358 of the 25,759 population.”² However, in Mecklenburg County and the Charlotte region, there are more than five hundred major companies and 1,147 employers employing over 676, 000 people.³ Charlotte is the largest city in North Carolina. The statistics give a description of how the opportunities are so much greater for millennials in urban/cities.

Statistics give a justifiable reason for the millennials to transition from rural communities to cities. The task is not to prevent young people from leaving the rural community and pursuing greater opportunity. The challenge is how do we maintain a connection with the millennials without their physical presence? The connection that church has with the millennials should

¹ Klaus, Rosmanitz, Human Population (2012): accessed August/September, 2016 [Http://www.english-online.at/geography/world-population/urban-areas.html](http://www.english-online.at/geography/world-population/urban-areas.html).

² Anson County Chamber of Commerce, Ansonville, North Carolina 2016.

³ "2015 Top Workplaces: List of the Top 50 Workplaces in the Charlotte Region" (September 23, 2015): accessed September 14, 2016, <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/business/top-workplaces/article36094395.html>.

mirror the connection God has with humanity. Distance does not eradicate the connection God has with humanity nor should it eradicate the connection between millennials and the church. The theological foundation of this paper will show the impact of a spiritual encounter with God. A spiritual encounter can possibly cause a person to remember the place where their life-changing experience occurred even if they relocate to another region.

Old Testament

In Genesis 28, Isaac gave his son Jacob instructions to go towards Haran and pursue a wife. Unexpectedly, Jacob did not find a wife at that moment, but he found God. Genesis reads: “Jacob had already a good bit of his life behind him. Some have concluded that Jacob is in his seventies around the time frame of Genesis 28.”⁴ Unlike the millennials, Jacob was of old age and away from his home when he had his encounter with God; yet he still had it. Ironically many of the millennials in the Pleasant Hill Church faith community attended a youth conference, participated in a church activity or went on a journey with the church group and instead of only experiencing just the event, many of the young adults actually had a divine encounter with God. Spiritual encounters are life changing.

Change is a sign of growth. For instance, when a person is born in the world during infant stages, the baby cannot walk or eat without the assistance of a parent or an adult. However, as the child grows to a toddler, the child is able to walk and eat on his or her own. In the case of the millennial’s growth, the evolution and maturity will eventually lead to changing

⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary Of The Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 238.

roles. Millennials will change from mentee to mentor or change from follower to leader in the Pleasant Hill Church faith community.

Maturation in growth and development is important in order for the Millennials to be successful in a competitive society. It is also important to grow spiritually. Spiritual maturity and responsibility will be an expectation for the millennials who hail from the Pleasant Hill Church faith community as they grow older because the Pleasant Hill Church faith community has been a place that teaches the value of maturity.

The Genesis 28 passage introduces us to Jacob's encounter. Genesis 28:11 reads: "Jacob went to a certain place."⁵ "The Hebrew transliteration for the phrase certain place is maqom, which literally means a place. Three times this chapter uses the word for the site where Jacob went. No name yet attached to this area by Jacob or narrator. It is not yet "Bethel" or "Luz, just a certain place."⁶ When Jacob had his encounter with God, the place where he was became sacred. An ordinary place became an extraordinary place for Jacob after he had his encounter with God in this location. Jacob finally had an experience that would change his life. The place that Jacob had his divine worship experience became monumental in his life.

Unless a person has a special experience in a place, most of the time they will identify it with general rhetoric. Even those who speak of the Pleasant Hill Church faith community view that place as just another church, particularly for those who have not had the Pleasant Hill experience. Certainly, there is a different response for those who have experienced God at Pleasant Hill Church faith community. Those who have had an experience with God at Pleasant Hill carry with them a sense of ownership when speaking of Pleasant Hill. Jacob eventually

⁵. Gen. 28:11 (English Standard Version).

⁶. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 238.

gave that *certain place* a name. Jacob called that place *Bethel*, which is translated to the *House of God*. Pleasant Hill is the place where many have experienced God, which just as for Jacob, for them, it becomes *Bethel*.

A spiritual encounter is defined as the distinct moment when a person has a life-transforming experience with Almighty God. The purpose of returning to Bethel of Ansonville, Pleasant Hill, is the same reason Jacob returned to Bethel. *Returning* is metaphorical for a time when a person reflects deeply and refreshes themselves spiritually. The legacy of *returning* continues from generation to generation when people continue to return home. This is important theologically because it displays the genuine power a spiritual encounter may have on a person. Moreover, it demonstrates that the experience is so powerful that it becomes an everlasting spiritual experience.

African American rural faith communities are uncertain about what occurs after the millennials have their experience with God during their youth. Are there any plans for the place that has been a part of their spiritual foundation? In the ancient times, Bethel became a place of ancestry. The term ancestry has been defined as a family or ancestral descent: lineage.

“According to Phillip King and Lawrence Stage the biblical writers describes open air sanctuaries in the days of the ancestry just a few sacred trees and stones-by-which they claim, through “patriarchal precedence, to holy ground on which old Canaanite temples had stood.”⁷

Most certainly Pleasant Hill Church faith community is a place of ancestry. The Pleasant Hill Church faith community consists of fifteen prominent families and the generations go far back as the mid 1800’s. The millennials were introduced to the church that their great

⁷. Phillip King and Lawrence Stage, *Biblical Life in Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 109.

grandparents, attended. It is amazing how the builder generation passed stories down to the baby boomer generation about the monumental things the church did during its early. The same strategic story-telling must be shared with the millennials from previous generations in order to create keen remembrance of their heritage. Ancestry is a deep part of the Pleasant Hill Church faith community. The builders and baby boomers who have moved away donate thousands of dollars annually to the Pleasant Hill Church faith community for the maintenance of the church cemetery. In a sense, when the church does something impactful in the community it is always to help keep the legacy of their ancestors alive.

In Genesis 28 Jacob's encounter at Bethel left an everlasting impact on his life. Bethel became a place of contribution. "Jacob focuses on the promise of divine companionship (cf.v.20 v.15) and the promise of a certain return to the land."⁸ When one has an awesome experience in a place, it always calls for a return, and those who return are expected to contribute something that will further enrich that place. "Just as God speaks to Jacob about descendants before Jacob has left the land. This Jacob will not need to find his way back. His parents prompted his departure from Canaan; Yahweh will determine and direct his return to Canaan."⁹

Jacob vowed a vow, saying if God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall he Lord be my God: And this stone which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shall be God's house: and of all that thou shall give me I surly give the tenth unto thee.¹⁰

In the same way, God directs the millennials back to the House of God at Pleasant Hill.

⁸. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 243-247.

⁹. Ibid.

¹⁰. Gen. 28:20-22 (English Standard Version).

In contrast with the various generations among the Pleasant Hill Church faith community, a vast number of them have dispersed away from home or away from the town of Ansonville. However, when they return home the builder and baby boomer generations have been committed to making contributions to the Pleasant Hill Church faith community. Hopefully, the millennials will be inspired to following the same historical tradition as the generations before them. However, it is important for the older generations to initiate dialogue and maintain a relationship with the millennials. If the older generations give the younger generations an invitation to have an intimate dialogue, it will create an avenue for a powerful relationship.

Gary L .McIntosh, author of the book titled *One Church Four Generations*, understands the importance of intergenerational ministry. McIntosh states: “Developing a ministry that meets the needs of the four generations may create several disruptive undercurrents. One of the main reasons churches face conflict among different generation is worship.”¹¹

In my early years as Pastor of the Pleasant Hill Church, there were different preferences regarding worship styles among the various generations. The elderly generation preferred devotion and testimony service. Devotion and Testimony service refers to a time that the congregation can sing hymns and express themselves vocally during service. However, the younger generation preferred Praise and Worship service, which includes singing contemporary gospel music. The elderly generation preferred a modest atmosphere during worship, and the younger generation preferred a more vibrant upbeat worship service. Regarding this, McIntosh states:

Disagreements over worship are so common that some pastors jokingly note that when Satan fell from heaven, he landed in the choir loft and has been making trouble in the music

¹¹. McIntosh, Gary, *One Church Four Generations Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2002), 202.

and worship service of the church ever since. While not every member of each generation sees things the same way, essentially the areas of difficulty are in nine areas.”¹²

I will not describe all nine areas, but I will describe a few: 1) Pace of Service is usually a different preference between millennials and older generations. “Millennials prefer for the pace of service to move quickly.”¹³ 2) Loudness of Sound is usually a different preference between Millennials and older generations. “Millennials appreciate loud sound and in some situations are comfortable with lots of interactive noise from videos, music, and talking. There is a trend in some areas of the United States toward acoustical music without the loud amplification.”¹⁴ 3) Feeling and quality of the service is something to consider in the process of intergenerational ministry. “The millennial generations prefer that the service is real and honest regardless of the style. Authenticity is equally as important to Millennials as the quality of service. A few mistakes in the worship service are fine with them, as it is more authentic and real.”¹⁵ The millennial generation at Pleasant Hill concurs with this thought.

Connecting Multiple Generations

It dawned upon me that allowing the generations to communicate with other generations will give the two an opportunity to express themselves, which can help both of the generations understand one another. A key factor for the Pleasant Hill Church faith community to remain whole and relevant is connectional relationships with the multiple generations. The generations

¹². Ibid.

¹³. Ibid.

¹⁴. Ibid, 203.

¹⁵. Ibid, 204.

cannot be divided and expect the lifespan of the rural faith community to continue thrive in a small geographical area. This thought is emphasized by theologian, Howard Thurman:

The human spirit cannot abide the loneliness of isolation. We literally feed on each other; where this nourishment is not available, the human spirit and the human body - both sicken and die...The purpose of the arrangements and conventions that make up the formal and informal agreement under which men live in society is to nourish one another with one another.¹⁶

The Pleasant Hill Church faith community will do the generations a disservice when they have an *us verse them* mentality, but rather, the perception should be an *us with them* mentality.”

The book of Proverbs 20:29 declares: “the glory of young men is their strength, but the splendor of old men is their gray hair.”¹⁷ In essence, each generation can benefit from the other. Communication among the generations is crucial. The dialogue is a key factor in maintaining a connection with the Millennials. Dr. Faye Taylor stated in her Doctor of Ministry thesis: “If intergenerational sharing in the church is to take place in the present age, it must be accompanied by recognition of the importance that each generation brings to the other. Most important, a dialogue must take place.”¹⁸ This is an important goal at Pleasant Hill.

The Scattering of the Generations

Jacob and the generations after him would become a part of the diaspora. It is a fact that Jacob and his offspring did not remain in Bethel for the entirety of their life span, but they were scattered to various places. Genesis 28:14 declares: “Your offspring shall be like the dust of the

¹⁶ Howard Thurman, *The Search for Common Ground* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 1986), 3.

¹⁷ Prov. 20:19 (English Standard Version).

¹⁸ Faye B. Taylor, *Intergenerational Sharing In the African American Church: Re-Establishing the Connection Between the Elders and the Middle Generation*, Doctoral Thesis, (Drew University, 2010), 32.

earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”¹⁹

In the Old Testament, the idea of the diaspora comes from the Hebrew word, “*puwts* (Y1!), which means to “scatter” or “disperse” (Gen. 11:4, 8-9; Ezek. 11:16-17; 20:34, 41). God had specific intentions for scattering the Israelites. In the beginning, God told Adam, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.”²⁰ The scattering of the millennials at the Pleasant Hill Church faith community can be a blessing. This scattering creates an opportunity for the millennial generation to go and be productive wherever they settle. Pleasant Hill has several millennials who have scattered across the country in the following areas: Washington D.C., New Orleans, Louisiana, and Atlanta, Georgia, just to name a few. The scattering process gives the millennials an opportunity make to positive and impactful influences in new places.

The term offspring is referring to next generation of Jacob’s family. “In Genesis 12:3 and 28:14 the “families on the earth” (*misp^hot ha dama*) are beneficiaries.”²¹ The tradition of remembering the house of God from generation to generation goes back to the bible.

Yahweh told Jacob: “I am with you, and will keep you in all places you go, and I will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”²² This indicates that the Presence of God would not only be at Bethel, but it will also be wherever Jacob went. Yahweh’s promise to Jacob that He would be with him and not just with

¹⁹ Gen. 28:14 (English Standard Version).

²⁰ Kim S. Seth, *A Great Commission for the 21st Century Transforming the International Student Diaspora in a Global Church Planting Movement*, Doctoral Thesis, (Gordon Conwell University, 2014), 88

²¹ Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 242.

²² Gen. 28:15 (English Standard Version).

Bethel indicates that both *place* and *person* are important to God. There are six times where Yahweh is the subject: “I am ... I will protect... I will return ...I will not abandon ...I have done ... I promised.” And six times Jacob is the object. This emphasis on Yahweh, the giver of promises, and Jacob the receiver of promises, makes all the more clear that Jacob (the person) is the recipient of God’s unconditional guarantee of involvement in protection over, and guiding of his life.”²³ Therefore, Jacob’s offspring had the presence God with them in Bethel as well as in the places where they were scattered. To align with the Jacob narrative, the millennial generation at Pleasant Hill Church has been taught that the presence of God will be with them wherever they go, and they are Millennials are consistently encouraged to remain connected to Bethel wherever they may be.

²³ Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, 242.

Chapter 2

What About Us?

Authors Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer stated that a young millennial requested not to attempt stereotyping the entire millennial generation. The millennial generation defies description, although it may be difficult to label the millennials by one specific description. Certainly, there are common themes that have touched a large number of its group. Below is a listing of relative population sizes of the multiple sizes of the multiple generations:

G.I Generation (1904-1924)	59.6 million
Silent Generation (1925-1945)	55.4 million
Boomer Generation (1946-1964)	75.9 million
Gen X (1965-1979)	51.5 million
Millennial Generation (1980-2000)	77.9 million

These two authors also state: “The Millennial Generation is a group of young people whose birth years range from 1980 to 2000. This generation edged out the Boomers (aka the Baby Boomers born 1946 to 1964) to become the largest generation in America’s history.”²⁴ The millennial generation is clearly the largest generation among the list. “Identifying a “generation” is an analytical tool for understanding our culture and the people within it.”²⁵ The millennials have a good chance to be highly successful in this society, and they are on track to become America’s most educated generation. In 2007, the first year the twenty-five to twenty-

²⁴ Thom, Rainer, and Jess Rainer, *Meet the Millennials: The Millennials Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2011.) 8.

²⁵ David, Kinnaman , *UnChristian What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2007) 15.

nine- year old age group was entirely comprised millennials, and thirty percent had attained a college degree. That is the highest rate ever recorded for that age group.

As a whole, the millennial generation has the highest level of economic security. Education has been an important resource for economic growth of individuals. According to the United States Department of Labor, the median weekly earnings in 2014 for a person with a high school diploma is \$668. The median income of person with a college degree is \$1101 in 2014. Also, the unemployment rate for a non-college graduate is 6.0 percent in the Unites States; oppose to a 3.5 percent unemployment rate for a college graduate.²⁶

Impact in Society

Authors Rainer and Rainer state that millennials want to make a societal difference. As an example, the Rainer’s interviewed Sharon, a young millennial, who stated:

I became a nurse because I really like helping people. It’s good money, but there are better paying jobs out there. I then decided to pursue my doctorate because I saw that the nursing shortage might become a big issue as the Boomers become senior adults. I want to become a part of the training of the upcoming generation of nurses. That’s how I want to make a difference.”²⁷

This generation is concerned more with the needs and wishes of others than with its own. To be selfless does not mean that the millennials do not have a desire to be successful. However, they commit to things for a purpose. “The Millennials are a generation that has hope for the future. Indeed, they are a generation that, as a whole, wants to make a positive difference for the future.

²⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics: “*The Economics Daily*” (January 23, 2015): accessed March 10, 2016, www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2015/median

²⁷ Thom Rainer and Jess Rainer. *Meet the Millennials.* In *The Millennials Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, 17.

Nearly nine out of ten respondents indicate that they feel responsible to make a difference in this world.”²⁸ Many millennials want to make a difference in life.

In a recent conversation a young lady millennial during an interview expressed her desire to have a more positive impact on life in general. She aspires to be a gospel music artist. Oftentimes, she feels she could be doing so much more with her life. This young lady’s desire to be a gospel musical artist is not solely because of her passion for music, but she feels her gift of music is uplifting for a lot of people. Although her financial security, at times, is suspect, in the music industry it does not enervate her quest to continue with her music-focused dreams.

In the book titled *Gen Y Now: Millennials and the Evolution of Leadership*, by Buddy Hobart and Herb Sendek, the authors agree with the millennial’s passion to impact society in a positive way. “The millennials have taken what Gen X did (having multiple jobs as a career by choice) completely to the next level. Work is a place to make a difference, not just earn a paycheck. To work is to contribute. Not just to my employer but also to my co-workers, the local community; and the world, millennials works to live and not live to work.”²⁹ The Millennials are not workaholics; their perception of work is different from previous generations. “A job that requires Millennials to be on-call or working more than sixty hours is not appealing. Time spent with family and friends will take precedence.”³⁰ Although career goals are important to the millennials, enjoying life is more important.

²⁸. Thom Rainer, and Jess Rainer, *Meet the Millennials.* " *In The Millennials Connecting to America's Largest Generation*), 18.

²⁹. Buddy, Hobart, and Herb Sendek. *Gen Y Now: Millennials and the Evolution of Leadership*. 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Wiley, 2014), 28.

³⁰. Thom, Rainer , and Jess Rainer. *Meet the Millennials.* " *In The Millennials Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, 39.

Hobart and Sendel also state: “The traditionalist generations, which consist of the “Baby Boomers,” looked at work as an obligation. Hard work was defined as putting in both time and physical/mental effort. These folk respected authority and deferred to the boss or the “title.” However, the Millennials are very goal oriented and always asking, “What’s next?” This generation is very comfortable multi-tasking and, in fact, prefers to multi-task. Speed of accomplishment is important. Putting in hours is not seen as important. But doing your share, producing results, and pulling your weight are admired. This cohort wants to learn new things and take on new challenges-quickly.”³¹

The millennial generation will respect an individual if they earn respect. However, millennials are not likely to venerate an individual based on their title, but give reverence to those who make an impact. President Barack Obama earned the respect of the millennials during his Presidential campaign, and as a result, the evidence was clear on Election Day. President Obama had the largest number of millennials votes than any other generation.

Impact Among the Church

According to the Barna Group’s research, they have been examining Millennial’s faith development. “In research Barna’s Group shows nearly six in ten (59%) of these young people who grow up in Christian churches end up walking away from the either their faith or from the institutional church at some point in their first decade of adult life. The unchurched ratio has increased from 44% to 52% in the last decade of life.”³² The decline did not

³¹ Hobart, and Sendek, In *Gen Y Now: Millennials and the Evolution of Leadership*, 28.

³² “5 Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church” (September 13, 2013): accessed January 5, 2016, www.barna.org.

sporadically occur, but it happened over a period of time. David Kinnaman gives some possible reasons for the decline. Hypocritical perception seems to be a possible reason for the decline. There are those who perceive that Christians who say one thing, but who live entirely different deems them as hypocritical. The hierarchy of the church mostly consists of Mosaics and Busters who believe hypocrites are two-faced or who have double standards. Anyone who says one thing and does another is subject to that label. Oftentimes, the church becomes guilty with making personal preferences commands.

However, large percentages of Millennials are transparent about their flaws, acting first and talking second. The pressure of being perfect in an imperfect system becomes challenging for some young adults. While having a dialogue with a millennial on one occasion the question of ministry involvement came up. The millennial's response was *she wanted to be saved for real*. This millennial was a loving, caring person who had an uplifting spirit and daily prayer life and it dawned on me that this millennial did not equate salvation to having faith in Jesus the Christ, which includes discipleship, that in turn leads to becoming more Christ-like on a daily basis. Nevertheless, because of her rare imperfections, she was held captive to an idea that one has to *have it all together* to be involved in ministry. Kinnaman addresses this:

Recent studies in which we asked Christians adults to identify the priorities Christians pursue in terms of their personal faith. We did not prompt any answers; respondents were able to mention anything that came to mind. What do you imagine was most common response? It was lifestyle-being good, doing the right thing, not sinning. Certainly Christ calls us to be different people, and it should reflect our lifestyle."³³

However, service, stewardship, and worship are other important tenets of the faith. The fact that lifestyle is the most common priority of Christians suggests a related difficulty: the

³³ Kinnaman, *Un Christian: What A New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity...And Why It Matters*, 15.

temptation to give a false pretense of holiness. It projects a *got it all together image*. In reality, a *got it together image* is a false pretense because humanity consists of a group of imperfect people. Isaiah 64:6 says: “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”³⁴ It is obvious that millennials are “turned off” by *religion*.

The Decline of Millennials in the Church

Although the millennials have increased in economic and educational security, the hierarchy of institutional religion would emphatically state they have a decline in eternity security. In response to the rigorist’s rules, many of the millennials across the country decided not to be bound to these doctrinal beliefs. This is emphasized by author Bryan Calvin: “Therefore, data from 2012 Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life’s Religious Landscape Survey shows while numbers of people who don’t identify with a religion has risen to over 30 percent, the trend has steadily been growing among Protestant mainline and evangelical populations.”³⁵ Without a question, there is an urge from the church to have the millennials within the four walls of the church building. In defense of the millennials I do not believe millennials have forsaken the church. However, I see the millennial generation searching to leave their mark on the world. In the Gospel of Luke 15:11-32, the prodigal son receives the label of being the *lost son*:

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and

³⁴ Isaiah 64:6 (English Standard Version).

³⁵ Bryan Calvin, “Why Aren't Black Millennials Leaving the Church?” (March 15, 2015): accessed January 7, 2016, www.relevantmagazine.com.

took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to^[a] one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!’¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.’¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’”²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’^[b]²² But the father said to his servants,^[c] ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.’²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,²⁹ but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.’³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.’³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”³⁶

I would argue that the prodigal son was like many of the millennials, he was excited about the possibility of exploring and finding his own identity. The prodigal son made some mistakes by asking for his father’s inheritance without being mature enough to maintain the inheritance, but every person makes mistakes. The millennials will make mistakes; they will not make all of the right choices. However, the church should not respond to their error or any other group of people in a harsh and judging spirit. The father in the biblical narrative demonstrates the same attitude that the faith community should demonstrate toward millennials. The millennials will explore in places away from home, but if the connection between the millennials and the faith community is strong, they, like the prodigal son, will return home. When the millennials reunite,

³⁶ Luke 15:11-32 (English Standard Version).

the church should recognize those moments with joyous celebration. Whenever, the millennials are celebrated, they feel important, and the church is showing how valuable they are to the entire faith community.

Dr. Joyce McDonald, who completed a Doctor of Ministry project at Drew University entitled, “Engaging Young Adults Re-igniting A Passion and Curiosity About God,” discovered there is a decline in the church. McDonald also found Barna Group to be helpful. Regarding this, she stated :

David Kinnaman, president of one of the most prominent public research groups, The Barna Group, presents a discussion in his book, *You Lost Me*, in which he addresses the problem of the disengagement of young adults. According to Kinnaman, the ages eighteen to twenty-nine are the “black hole” of church attendance. This age is missing from most congregations. There is a forty-three percent drop-off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church engagement. These numbers represent about eight million young adults who were active church goers as teenagers but who will no longer be engaged in a church by their thirtieth birthday.”³⁷

There must be a concerted effort to address this decline in the church of the millennial generation.

The book, *Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, provides another survey which further shows the decline in Millennials within the church:

Surveys reveal that about one-quarter (24 percent) of the unchurched Millennials believe the typical church experience is boring or tiresome. In addition, they do not see church as a place of meaningful community. Churchless people are about 40 percent more likely to say that church services felt like “a group of people that was connected to each other in any real way” than to say services felt like “a group that was in practical ways.”³⁸

The Rainer authors believe subgroups most likely to report this kind of disconnect within the faith community are adults under thirty, political liberals, and Hispanics.” Barna Group

³⁷ Joyce McDonald, “*Engaging Young Adults Re-igniting A Passion and Curiosity About God*,” May 2015. Drew University.

³⁸ David Kinnaman, *Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, (Grand Austin, TX: Tyndale Momentum, 2014), 51.

conducted a survey on the reason the unchurched avoid church. In fact, many have labeled the church as irrelevant. Rainer and Rainer also stated the following concerning the Millennials:

“They are not antagonistic against religions and religious people; they simply see them as unimportant and irrelevant.”³⁹

The African American Connection in the Church

The Pleasant Hill Church faith community is deeply rooted among the African American race. Certainly, one has to consider the culture of a faith community to properly assert it. This belief is explained by Henry Mitchell: “Culture is the accumulation over time of all the wisdom and methods of a given cultural group, for the purpose of ensuring its survival. Each group has a menu of acceptable foods, a collection of proper hairstyles and attire, a way to greet-people, ways to sing music and tell stories, and ways to build homes and rear children.”⁴⁰

Church has always played a vibrant role in the African American culture. Calvin Bryan states:

Research shows that the African American faith community has labeled the church as relevant in the 21st century. The numbers for black Millennials are in fact, not dropping. That is, black adults age 18-29 are not leaving the Church. The 2007 report shows that black Millennials make up 24 percent of Historically Black Churches, the same percentage as their Boomer Generation parents. Religious affiliation for young black adults going to historically black churches remains stable. If you look at trends between 2007 and 2012 surveys, there is not much difference in the numbers of black Millennials. In general, the numbers consistently show that blacks of all ages are more likely to maintain a religious affiliation than whites. It is obvious that the perception of church is different in the African American community opposed to other ethnic groups. The survey showed 79 percent of blacks say religion is very important to their lives compared to 56 percent of all Americans. In terms of how often people pray, 76 percent

³⁹. Thom, Rainer, and Jess Rainer. "Meet the Millennials." In *The Millennials Connecting to America's Largest Generation*. 2 Nashville, Tennessee: B & H Publishing Group, 2011. 111

⁴⁰. Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching: The Recovery of A Powerful Art*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992), 12.

of blacks report to praying daily compared to 58 percent of all Americans. Church attendance differs, as well with 39 percent of all Americans.”⁴¹

In fact, woven in the sentiments of the African American community heart, is the impact of the church. Many view the church as a “pillow post” or a “beacon of light for the African Americans. Sociologist, historian, and civil rights activist, Dr. W.E. B. Dubois, author of a book titled *The Souls of Black Folk*, was compelled to pen African American spirituals/songs to the African American experience. He stated: “The songs were developed from their African origin into powerful expressions of the sorrow, pain, and exile that characterize the African American experience.”⁴² For Dubois, these songs exist “not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human born this side the seas.”⁴³

Slavery was a system of oppression and segregation for blacks and in a large sense, *the good in spite of the bad* for slaves is they still had a chance to form their own religious communities. Silently, the slaves were able to keep alive their African culture and express themselves through their faith. “These invisible institutions”⁴⁴ as sociologist E. Franklin Frazier called them, would later become African American congregations.” In the African American faith community congregants have had and continue to have the opportunity to dance, sing, shout and praise their Lord. Moreover, in the African American community, the *congregants* who were known as slaves also experienced freedom to express themselves during worship.

⁴¹. Calvin Byran, "Why Aren't Black Millennials Leaving the Church?" (March 15, 2015). Accessed January 7, 2016. <http://www.relevantmagazine.com>.

⁴². Ibid.

⁴³. Ibid.

⁴⁴. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 427

During the second Great Awakening, churches were established among black slaves. The slave owners would give slaves an opportunity to meet for worship. While the slaves would attend worship, they would also receive a message of hope and redemption. The slaves would sing spirituals and oftentimes, would relate to the Moses story. In fact, James Cone, an influential liberation theologian shows a contrast with the Egyptians and the Israelites in the Exodus story.

During the Antebellum period and after the Civil War, black churches, not just in the North, but throughout the nation, offered African Americans refuge from oppression and focused on the spiritual, secular, and political concerns of black community. Following the Emancipation, the church continued to exist at the center of black community life.⁴⁵

In the twentieth century, the African American church remained the center of Black life. In fact, the black church was primarily the meeting place for Black Civil Rights leaders. Strategies and plans were implemented at the church among Blacks to address social issues and concerns. However and unfortunately, American Blacks still had to overcome racism and unfair laws such as the denial of voting rights and Jim Crow laws. The church, overall, was a place of strength for the African American community.

Faith-based organization such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed in 1957 to address civil right issues. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference is one of many organizations that was created and organized by the faith community for the betterment of humanity.

Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave one his most heart-wrenching, profound and his final dynamic speech titled *I've Been to the Mountaintop*, on April 3, 1968, at Mason Temple

⁴⁵. Kimberly Sambol-Tosco "Slavery and the Making of America" March 11, 2004 Accessed: January 21, 2016. <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/religion/history2.html>.

Church of God in Christ in Memphis, Tennessee, the night prior to his untimely assassination. King encouraged America to “be true to what was written on paper,”⁴⁶ meaning be true to the rights that all citizen should have regardless of color. Curtiss Young concurs with this when he states: “The spirit of great African American leaders lives on through the faith community.”⁴⁷ King hoped that by participating in protests for human rights, the church could transform society into a beloved community.

In fact, the Ansonville faith community has an annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., service to remember his legacy. During this annual service, hundreds of people gather to march and sing the old Negro spirituals such as, *We Shall Overcome* and the Negro National Anthem, *Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing*. The community is encouraged to remember its legacy and continue to keep Dr. King's dream alive.

The point being made here is that the African American faith community is not just something to do, but the church is a part of the DNA of African American culture. To this end, author Henry Mitchell, declares, “Black Christianity has the tremendous momentum of a faith deeply imbedded in the culture. Black Christianity refuses to die easily; decades of brutal urban existence and exposure were necessary to make even the dent in Black culture and religion that is apparent today.”⁴⁸ Yes! The church is deeply rooted in the history of African Americans.

Through suffering and sacrifice, the church has always been a source of strength.

⁴⁶. Martin Luther King, Jr., (April 1963): accessed October 2016, <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/644630>”title=Martin Luther King,Jr. quote.

⁴⁷. Curtiss Paul DeYoung, “The Role of the Black Church in the Civil Rights Movement” (January 2011): accessed July 2016, www.academia.edu.

⁴⁸. Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching The Recovery of A Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992),14.

Humanity as a whole has found the church as a place of comfort and strength. Fox News reported how people were in emotional pain and searched for answers after September 11, 2001, shortly following the crashing of the World Trade Centers in New York, New York. It is reported that following the tragedies, masses of people all over the country flocked to religious services like never before.

Pastor Ed Young, pastor, author and speaker noted for his creative communication style saw his largest crowd in the history of Fellowship Church in Texas, and he stated, “When I walked on stage I looked around and said, Where have you guys been? It takes something like this for you to show up to church?”⁴⁹ The congregation’s attendance went from a normal 14, 500 to over 20, 000 people showing up for worship. However, research shows that things were back to normal after the violent attack. The World Trade Centers experienced one of most brutal and violent attacks in America history.

The masses of people that flooded churches after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack was not limited to the African American race; it consisted of diverse groups of people. This devastating crisis was the primary reason so many people crowded churches to gain hope, strength and comfort. Perhaps, one reason the African American community considers the church to be the center of the community is because throughout time, crisis has steadily reoccurred in the African American community, such as the institution slavery, lynchings, and the horror of Jim Crow laws. A more recent crisis is a news report that states: “US police has

⁴⁹. Mike Tobin, “Church Attendance Back to Normal” (September 11, 2002): accessed March 8, 2016, www.foxnews.com

killed 1,134 black young men in 2015.”⁵⁰ Therefore, the African American community has always found the church to be a place of refuge.

Black Preaching Influences the African American Community

The historical struggles of crisis and oppression among the African American community leaves the black preacher assigned to address many cultural and social issues. The question was asked what is the perception of the Minister in the Pleasant Hill Church faith community? Dr. Todd Drew University Associate Professor who served as my D. Min Academic advisor wanted to know if the Minister is viewed as a *called* preacher or a *professional* preacher? Without any hesitation, the answer to that question is both *called* AND *professional*. The Black race would view the preacher as professional and the called to serve this present age. The Black preacher is one of the most influential persons in the black community. Oftentimes, when the preacher shows up the community demonstrates toward “him or her” a reverence that shows respect.

An interesting perspective from a well-regarded preacher is that of Martin Luther King, Sr., (“Daddy King” to many of us younger preachers), who once declared from the pulpit of Ebenezer Baptist Church of Atlanta, that there was no such thing as Black preaching or Black theology. While he was rightfully seeking to remove differences and draw the racial groups closer together, such differences cannot simply be out of existence. I humbly disagree with Dr. King, Sr. Black preaching has become a reality and deemed important to the African American community. “Just as Black music helped to make Elvis Presley the idol of a virtual cult, Black preaching has greatly influenced the style of some of America’s most popular media

⁵⁰ Oliver Jon Swaine, Jamiles Laughland Lartey and Ciara McCarthy, (December 31, 2015): accessed: June 20, 2016, theguardian.com.

ministers.”⁵¹ Black preaching is package with art and passion that touches people lives in a special way. During an African American Christian Education class, Dr. Mary Love who is the Christian Education Director at Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina, taught that preaching should touch both the head and the heart. Preaching is more effective when it informs and inspires the audiences at the same time. Among the Pleasant Hill Church faith community, the people enter the sanctuary authentically declaring that they want to hear a word from the Lord!

Henry Mitchell, author of *Black Preaching: The Recovery of A Powerful Art*, states:

“No matter how physically comfortable Blacks are today, their standard of living is about as far below that of the average White as ever. This oppression may have taken on some measure of sophistication and window dressing, but the majority of the citizens of Black ghettos are not close to real acceptance.”⁵²

I would argue that black preaching is so important to Blacks because it takes someone that has been oppressed, experienced racism, and who has been considered the minority in order to touch the broken black community. Mitchell further contends: “For ordinary Blacks to keep the faith at all, they have had to do so in their own relevant Black ways – inside the perimeters of their own religious experience.”⁵³ Black preaching undoubtedly matters to the African American community. In fact, black preaching is the vehicle for those who have received salvation in the African American community. The African American, without reservation, understands the importance of preaching.

⁵¹. Henry Mitchell, *Black Preaching The Recovery of A Powerful Art* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1992),12.

⁵². Ibid, 20.

⁵³. Ibid.

The Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Romans, 10:14-15, addresses the imperativeness of the preacher:

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”⁵⁴

While this text was written thousands of years ago, today, it remains applicable. Additionally, the gospel of Jesus the Christ is good news to the African American community even in the 21st century, and unquestionably, black preaching is central to the life of the Pleasant Hill Church faith community.

History Versus the Future

The millennials were born in a society where things continued to advance. They can share stories about their parents having mobile phones that would only work in vehicles. Also, they can remember people carrying pagers for call alerts. Millennials have experienced the evolution of the cell phone, and within the last decade, they have been recipients of smart phone devices. The Millennials have grown up in the heart of the technology age. Advancement is nothing new to Millennials, but it has caught the church off guard.

Institutional religion has not progressed with current social relevance. Author Reggie McNeal states: “The current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money, and energy of previous generations from a previous world order. The plug will be pulled either when the money runs out (80 percent of money given to congregations comes from the people aged fifty-five and older) or when the remaining three-fourths of a generation

⁵⁴. Rom. 10:14-15 (English Standard Version).

who are institutional loyalists die off or both.”⁵⁵ Possibly, the millennials have a concern with outdated ministry methods.

In many faith communities the Word of God is highly esteemed. The Pleasant Hill faith community believes that the Word of God has the highest authority. The scripture recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 24:35 declares: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”⁵⁶ Therefore, it is not realistic to expect the church to change the gospel. Nevertheless, the methods, which the church chooses to use when presenting the gospel, can change. For an example a large percentage of churches teach through lecture methods only. Lecturing is effective, but it eliminates those who learn and find interest other ways.

During an interview with a Pastoral Search Committee, the question was asked how up to date is the Christian Education ministry? The response to this pointed question was that the information or course curriculum is good, but our educational tools are not *cutting edge*. The church should consider the millennial’s resources in society. If the church does not consider using up-to-date methods, this may cause the millennials to lose interest regarding how Christian education is communication.

Dr. Herbert R. Davis, Executive Vice President of Apex School of Theology, who is a part of Generation X, believes the church should consider changing methods, not standards. Additionally, as the world changes, Kinnaman believes, “The growing acceptance of same-sex marriage in general all have an impact on what’s considered “normal” when it comes to

⁵⁵ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future SIX Tough Questions for the Church*, (San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003), 1.

⁵⁶ Matt. 24:35 (English Standard Version).

family.”⁵⁷ Due to many of the African American churches not willing to adapt to the changing and new face of the family system in America, many millennials have dismissed the church for taking this position.

The Pleasant Hill faith community will consider changing methods. However, changing standards is not a compromise for this faith community. Dr. Bernard Sullivan, former Theology Professor at Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina, believes the church is so powerful that it should change the culture as opposed to the culture changing the church. To speak from an antagonist voice, that concept is cute, but not realistic. Culture is influenced by more than the church. The challenge for the Pleasant Hill faith community is that it can continue to be a vital source in the lives of millennials if it can find a happy medium with the various generations. Below is a strategy addressed by Leonard Sweet that includes a description of how to change methods for modern-day ministry.

EPIC

Leonard Sweet, the Stanly Jones Professor of Evangelism Emeritus, shares a brilliant ministry technique that can be appealing to millennials. It is called the EPIC. The EPIC approach is an updated method and staple of postmodern theology. Leonard Sweet gave his explanation of EPIC in the book, *Postmodern Pilgrims*. The EPIC is shaped by four practical principles. The four practical principles could be applied when trying to reach millennials. The first principle is experience. Sweet highlights the importance of people experiencing God. He

⁵⁷. David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Austin, TX: Tyndale Momentum, 2014), 117.

states: “It is one thing to talk about God. It is quite another thing to experience God.”⁵⁸ I often say the same way the biblical characters had their divine experiences, such as the Hebrew boys’ deliverance from the fiery furnace; Daniel’s deliverance from the lion’s den, and the Apostle Paul’s conversion or transformation, society can also have their personal experience with God. “In Postmodern culture, there is no interest in a “second-hand” God, a God that someone else (church tradition, church professionals, church bureaucracies) defines for us. Each one of us is a Jacob becoming Israel, a wrestler with God. The encounter is the message.”⁵⁹

Sweet goes on to state: “If postmodern worship cannot make people furiously feel and think, it can show them how God’s Word transforms the way we feel. (In the modern world the church made people only think).”⁶⁰ Possessing the ability to touch head and heart is imperative in postmodern culture. Sweet’s book, however, *First Century Passion For the 21st Century World: Post Modern Pilgrims*, does not give a description of how to help people experience God. Interrogatives are important to help a person understand a matter. However, I think the task is not to show people how to experience God, but to help identify experiences with God. For instance, when miracles happen in a person’s life, the church community should echo “*that is God!*” I believe that clergy who minister out of personal experience will be more effective in this modern society. Bishop Rudolph McKissick, Jr., Senior Pastor at Bethel Institutional Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida often comments that what he used to preach is what he learned in the seminary. Now, he preaches what he has experienced.

⁵⁸. Leonard Sweet, *First Century Passion For The 21st Century World: Post Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Holman Publishers, 2000), 31.

⁵⁹. Ibid.

⁶⁰. Ibid, 43.

The game show “*Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*” can be used as an example. “The show is built on a participatory rather than a representative-model. *Lifelines* enable the studio audience and the cyber audience to become part of the actual experience. By inviting the contestants to call on friends, family, and the audience for help, there is a blurring of the lines between viewers and contestants.”⁶¹ Ministry is not a monologue approach, but it is more so a dialogue in which people need to be involved.

The challenge is to transition from the representative to participatory. Sweet states:

“A representative culture is based on certain beliefs: People want and need be controlled and have decisions made for them. The task of leadership is to administer guidance and regulations. However, participatory culture is based on just the opposite beliefs: People want to make their own decisions and have multiple choices. Leadership is emboldening and empowering others to lead.”⁶²

If people are entrusted to hold positions and join ministries, then people should be entrusted to carry out of the work of ministry. Ephesians 4:12 declares, “Equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”⁶³

The third principle of EPIC is image-driven. “Modern culture was word-based...Post-modern culture is image-driven.”⁶⁴ As a child, I heard that people would rather *see* a sermon than *hear* a sermon any day. Image is valuable in this society. In fact, it helps reach visual learners. The African American culture has a large percentage of people who are visual learners. In fact, one senior Coca-Cola executive is said to have declared that the company could survive the loss of all its assets (plants, employees, even access to raw materials), providing it kept

⁶¹ Leonard Sweet, *First Century Passion For The 21st Century World: Post Modern Pilgrims*, xx.

⁶² *Ibid*, 60.

⁶³ Eph. 4:12 (English Standard Version).

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 86.

possession of the Coca-Cola logo. With that one image, he argued, it would be possible to walk into a bank and receive sufficient credit to replace Coke's entire global infrastructure. The image of Jesus should be that valuable to Christianity. If people have hardships they should be able to recover with the image of Jesus.

The fourth principle of EPIC is *connection*. It is not just the extensiveness of connection that counts, but the diversity of connections that makes a difference. Those who subscribe to the postmodern method should understand the difference between a life in connections and life rich in contacts are rich in networking. God is the ultimate Connection and promises: "I will never leave you or forsake you."⁶⁵ Some of the most healing words of Scripture are God's promises of connectedness: "I will be with you," and, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age"⁶⁶ The postmodern society does not operate with an "us and them" mindset, but they connect to the community as a whole.

Witness

One way to look at this relationship is to see the church as the protagonist, the leading character, and look at the millennials as the antagonist, a person who struggles against the protagonist. The problem with the millennials is they have forgotten about the church. Perhaps, if the church initiates a relationship with the millennial generation, it will be difficult for the church to be forgotten. It is important for the church to reach out toward the millennial because in today's time it is not likely that the millennial will reach out to the church. We live in a time where people seek to be sought and not the other way around. This means that unless the church

⁶⁵ Heb. 13:5 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁶⁶ Ex. 3:8-12; Matt. 28:20 (New Revised Standard Version).

reaches out to the millennial generation, most likely the millennial generation will not reach out to the church and will, after a while, most likely forget about the church completely.

To prove this point, I will give two examples: the first being about a member of the faith community who went off to college. This girl did not say much during church; she was a part of some committees, but she was relatively quiet, she only did what was required of her and not much else. She did not talk much and the only time she spoke was when someone else initiated the conversation. She went off to college and every month she was gone the church sent her a card. Sometimes it had money in it and sometimes it just had encouraging words and a message just to let her know that the church was thinking about her. Because of this thoughtful gesture from the church, each time she came home, she made sure she went to church and thanked the congregation for their kind words and generous donations. She would tell the church how their kind words helped her through some of the toughest weeks she had ever endured in her life. She proclaimed because of their kindness, she wanted to make sure she showed her appreciation by always remembering where she came from and always coming back to people who love and support her.

On the other hand, there was a young lady who was a part of a church where she was fully committed to the church. She served on numerous committees within the church and would help out in any way she could. She went off to school and her church never reached out to her. It was as if the church had completely forgotten about her. Because the church never reached out when she went home, she almost never went back to her church because she felt like the church did not love and care for her like she had always believed. Because the church did not initiate and try and reach out to her, the love and care she had for the church deteriorated.

These stories did not involve cutting-edge concepts, but they involved a spiritual principle that still works, which is called *witness*. Writers George Barna and David Kinnaman state: “We must not lose sight of the fact that appealing to the unchurched is a spiritual quest, not a business transaction or bottom-line proposition.”⁶⁷ A biblical way of initiating relationships is to witness. A witness is a person who sees an event, and is able to share what they have seen. Act 1:8 says, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witness, in Jerusalem, and all of Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.”⁶⁸ This scripture reminds us the witnessing is not limited to a certain area. The millennials who have dispersed can receive the good news of the gospel Jesus Christ wherever they are.

In a time where bad news is surrounding our world, good news is always inviting regardless of a person’s generation. Witness does not have to be limited to spiritual jargon. However, to receive updates in a church member’s life can be uplifting and helpful. Imagine youth leaders maintaining a connection with young adults through college. Imagine intercessory prayer team constantly praying for the careers of young adults. Imagine the missionary ministry supplying young adult college students with toiletries and canned goods and other necessities. Imagine newlyweds receiving financial contributions and family counseling resources. While these may not be new ideas, the concepts are a consistent way of staying connected. “Christians have a responsibility to share their knowledge and experience of Jesus Christ with him. The full burden of that commandment does not rest on the shoulders of any one person though, the

⁶⁷ David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, 165.

⁶⁸ Acts 1:8 (English Standard Version).

congregation exist as a body of fellow sojourners whose love for one another witness to the good news of Christ.”⁶⁹

There are three key methods to effectively witness to the millennium generation. The first is proper communication and realizing how important it is not to pitch the usual question, *what can you do for the church?* Instead, it should be keeping up with upcoming events of the millennials’ lives such as graduation dates, exam dates, and birth dates. This shows that the church genuinely cares about the millennials. Retired Bishop Joseph Johnson would often share his thought that people don’t care what one knows unless you first show people how much you care. This is a foundational, but extremely important tenet of witness and communication.

The second method to effectively witness is through service. This principle is best demonstrated by Jesus the Christ. The Gospel of Matthew 20:28, says: “Come just as the Son of man did not come to be serving but to serve and to give its life as a ransom for many.”⁷⁰ The church should continue to practice the servanthood of ministry. Jesus demonstrated this practice by washing the feet of his disciples. On one occasion Jesus stated that “The greatest among you is the servant.”⁷¹ When one offers a service, it is an act of giving. Services are important for millennials because the usual request of treasure, time, and talent can be a turn-off. Faith communities that serve the millennials show them they can offer something as opposed to only receiving.

The third method to effectively witness is through listening. One may ask what listening has to do with witness. “While active listening is clearly the overarching discipline in kenotic

⁶⁹ David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, 170.

⁷⁰ Matt. 28:28 (English Standard Version).

⁷¹ Matt. 23:11 (English Standard Version).

communication, it relates to a set of skills that can be practiced in our daily conversations. These skills all spring out of the Christ-mindset whereby we clear away our communication baggage and seek the betterment of the receiver.”⁷² Dr. Carl Savage stated that “kenotic listening is to actually hear the stories of others. Listening is important because the church often makes a mistake of opposing their rules and expectation on people. People are more likely to connect to something that actually has a voice in it.”⁷³ Periodically, it would be great to set up a round table discussion with the millennials of the Pleasant Hill faith community. The purpose of the round table is not to give immediate solutions, but merely to listen. The millennial generation is one that wants to be heard.

Initiating Involves Being Mission-Minded

Initiating the connection with millennials is following the directions of the Great Commission as outlined in Matt. 28:18-20:

And Jesus came and said to them, All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”⁷⁴

These are words of Jesus the Christ before His ascension. The term ascension is referring to Jesus the Christ going up into heaven without actually dying.

A disciple is a follower of Christ. It is important to remember that disciples are not limited to the original twelve disciples. However, disciples include those that have a lifetime of

⁷² “God’s Communication Style is Kenotic.” The Mennonite. (Last Modified January 10, 2016). Accessed January 15, 2016, <http://www.themennonite.org>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Matt. 28:18-20 (English Standard Version).

commitment and in faith Jesus the Christ. The first step to the Great Commission is to *GO!* The term *GO* simply means to move from one place to another. Sharing the gospel has to do more with going instead of people coming. The church cannot forsake the original way of making disciples, which involved going by any means necessary. Additionally, going does not have to always include physical presence. Any form of communication is a way of sharing the gospel. The Apostle Paul found himself in places where travel was not an option due to his imprisonment. Also, there were times that distance and transportation deprived him of visiting the early Christian churches he had established. However, it did not stop him from sharing the gospel. The Apostle Paul sent letters that impacted the early church and continues to impact the church of the 21st century. It is important to go through any avenue to make disciples of Jesus Christ, just as He commanded all of humankind to do.

Chapter 3

Pleasant Hill's Plans for Connection

Purpose of the Project

The goal of the project is to equip, assess and assist, young adults ages eighteen through thirty-five in maintaining a relationship with Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Ansonville, North Carolina. The quality of the relationship with the church and young adults will be assessed by surveys through Facebook and emailing survey questions. The biblical mandate of making disciples is a core part for the project. Our children learn through nurturing, mentoring, and modeling, and doing so will bind us together.

It is equally important for all other generations of the church and young adults to benefit from the relationship. Although young adults are busy with careers, family obligations, and hobbies, there is still a need to remember the faith community. However, it is important for the church to offer young adults the guidance and resources that will benefit their daily lives. The project will help the young adults and the church to engage in new ways to connect beyond Homecoming, also known as the *Big Day!*

Scope of Project

In research, the project will become an avenue to assess the interest in young people as to whether or not they want to maintain a relationship with the Pleasant Hill faith community. The benefit of the young adults maintaining a relationship with the Pleasant Hill faith community is to become a part of the larger community and develop a connection with the present generations that remains in the community. After providing a priority poll for Pleasant Hill young adults, the

following topics were at the top of the list; premarital counseling, fiscal responsibility and parenting classes. Weekly workshops were offered concerning the things they have found interesting. Participants set up and joined a Facebook group entitled, The Millennial Legacy Builders. The participants used a closed, invitation only group Facebook page to answer the questions from the questionnaire and encourage discussions. Participants planned a face-to-face Spiritual Reunion with activities that included the idea of such an event occurring annually. The reunion activities and discussion are to be decided by The Millennial Legacy Builders.

The total numbers of participants was twelve (12) young adults between ages eighteen through thirty-five. The participants were randomly selected based on their age and relationship with the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Ansonville, North Carolina. The participants participated in a Facebook group once a week for group discussion. The project was twelve weeks in length: February 2015 until May 15, 2015. Participants were subject to quantitative and qualitative questionnaires based on religious, economic and social elements.

The participants emailed personal information from the questionnaires to the researcher in order to assure confidentiality. A list of questions was asked on the Facebook group page, but the answers were sent to the following email address madavis3@drew.edu. The Facebook group page was used as a meeting place for all of the young adults to develop a relationship through healthy discussion. The Facebook group planned the time, location and activities for the Spiritual Reunion.

Methodology

Connection Inspires Returning

Connecting with millennials will help maintain a vibrant relationship between the Pleasant Hill faith community and the millennials. Merriam Webster's Dictionary gives several descriptions of the term *relationship*. However, the one that is most suitable for the context is "the way in which two or more people or things are connected."⁷⁵

Research has proven that the church should initiate the connection with the millennials. It is important to understand there can be no relationship without mutual consent. The project cannot be successful if the faith community were to force a relationship through coercion without that person's consent. It is also important not to push the faith community's agenda down the millennials throat, but rather present a relationship strategy that the millennials will readily embrace. The prophet Elijah is inspired to return home to continue ministry after a moment of disconnection. 1 Kings 19: 4-15 says: "Then the Lord said to him: "Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria."⁷⁶ The irony of the project and Elijah's revelation is the Pleasant Hill faith community desires for the young adults who have dispersed to remember the importance of returning. Through research, we discovered that reminding the millennials by utilizing connections would lead to a return. Reminders through maintaining a relationship through via email, Facebook, and phone calls

⁷⁵. Merriam-Webster Dictionary, An Encyclopedia Britannica Company (April 2012): accessed October 2016, www.merriam-webster.com.

⁷⁶1 Kings 19:4-15 (English Standard Version).

proves to be a much better way than relying on the memory of the millennials engaged in the project.

Local Advisory Committee

The Local Advisory Committee consisted of church members between the ages of eighteen through thirty-five who were members of the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. The following local advisory committee members advised the project:

- Chairperson of the Local Advisory Committee: Curtisha Brooks, whose expertise in ministry is the Children's Church Teacher

Names of LAC Members:

- Jannetta Walker-Young, Adult Layperson, whose expertise in ministry is Executive Assistant to the Pastor
- Kyri Davis- Young Adult Layperson, whose expertise in ministry is as the Men's Ministry President.
- Christy Davis, Young Adult Layperson, whose expertise in ministry is the Women Ministry and Young Adult President

The Local Advisory Committee met for the first time in November 2014. Typically, during the first fifteen to twenty minutes of each meeting, the local advisory committee spent time discussing the previous meeting and unfinished business. The agenda for the meeting included getting a clear understanding of the project. The Local Advisory Committee and I reviewed the project's narrative of concern. I explained the title of the project, "The Millennial Generation: Building a Legacy in The African American Rural Faith Community through Connectional Relationship." The group and I had a dialogue about how millennials view stereotypical ways from a personal perspective and from each of our rural church experiences. Surprisingly, many of the group members cherished their experience growing up in the rural

church. I asked the group whether or not they detected that many of the millennials who have moved away from the rural community never return to stay?

The committee agreed with the ministry concerns. During the planning phase of the project, the committee and I agreed to explain the project to the young adults in the church. The committee and I called a conference call meeting with the young adults in the church to have an open discussion concerning the project. I recall the young adults stating the primary reason for moving from the rural community is lack of opportunities and/or growth in the rural community in terms of job opportunities. The committee understood that the rural community has little resources and moving away is justified. However, the committee members as a whole agreed that it is important to maintain a connection with the millennials who have moved away from their faith community. The committee decided to meet once a month either face to face or through conference call. The committee also decided to prepare an interview questionnaire for the millennials, and the committee pledged to create the questions.

The committee met December 16, 2014, for the second meeting. The local advisory committee and I put the final touches on the interview questions and we decided to gather the young adults' contact information. The Project plans were delivered to the young adults via email, Facebook and through word of mouth. The young adults were informed that a closed Facebook group page would eventually be created. The closed Facebook group was entitled "Millennial Legacy Builder."

The committee met again on January 13, 2014 for the third meeting through a conference call. The "Millennial Legacy Builder" Facebook group was launched. "Millennial Legacy Builder" Facebook group was created to gather feedback, survey questioners, and weekly communication. The survey began by asking the participants to please rate the subjects and

respond according to their level of importance by using the number and their answer. The participants had six areas to address:

1. Career Success
2. Educational Achievements
3. Economic Stability
4. Marriage & Family Establishment
5. Religious Involvement
6. Organizational Membership

They were asked to respond with numbers 1-6 using either term:

- Not Important
- Important
- Highly Important

The survey participants were nine young adults from the Pleasant Hill Church faith community. *Career Success* rated as highly important to six of the nine participants. *Educational Achievements* was important to five out of the nine participants. Eight out of the nine participants felt that *Economic Stability* is highly important in their lives. *Marriage and Family Establishment* was highly important to six out of nine participants. Only one out of nine participants felt that *Marriage and Family Establishment* was not important at all. *Religious Involvement* ranked the second most important among the six areas, seven out of nine participants felt that *Religious Involvement* is highly important. *Organizational Membership* was highly important to six out of nine participants. The purpose of the survey questions was to find out what matters to the Pleasant Hill millennials. These results will provide the church with an

ideal of what the millennials deem important, and as well, what types of ministries to implement that will attract the millennials.

In addition, the committee thought it would be an excellent idea to create a centralized meeting location for local and out-of-town participants. The group also decided on the meeting place for a “Spiritual Family Reunion.” The reunion consisted of local millennials and those who have moved away. The reunion was designed to create a connection and strengthen the relationship among millennials in the Pleasant Hill Faith community. The group only required a forty-five minute lunch to gather information from the young adults. Unfortunately, they made the mistake of restricting and guiding the millennials in how to remain connected to the church. I put emphasis on giving financially; attending worship more frequently. However, the millennials responded with their own ideas and creative ways of connecting with the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church Faith Community.

Initially, the committee was going to make the Reunion a young adult worship meeting. However, the LAC made a suggestion to take the Spiritual Reunion to a place outside of the church. The reunion was not about reuniting to worship, but it is more about rekindling the connection among the young adults. The committee felt that a place of fun and place to establish relationships outside of the church was essential. Therefore, the committee selected *Joyfest* to be the centralized location of the Spiritual Reunion.

Joyfest is an event held every year at the Paramount Carowinds Theme Park in Charlotte, North Carolina. The event sells out every year. Usually, church groups from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia attend the event. During *Joyfest*, the pavilion is opened for a Gospel concert. The Pavilion can seat approximately five thousand people. The gospel concert

has some of the most famous gospel artists in the world performing, namely, Kirk Franklin, Tye Tribbett, and Tamela Mann.

During February 10, 2015, the Local Advisory Committee and I reviewed survey input from the Facebook group. The committee concluded that we did not get much success from the survey questions through the Facebook group. The feedback from the young adults was they did not feel comfortable with answering questions via Facebook group concerning the church. In addition, many of them felt they had to answer the *correct* answer to the Pastor. Considering that, I was the one primarily responsible for the group. During the planning phase of the project, we had to make some adjustments. Jannetta Walker resigned from the Local Advisory Committee. The committee elected to eliminate the Facebook Group and assigned Curtisha Brooks the task to complete questionnaires via face-to-face and/or by telephone. The project allowed me to see how the Millennials really felt about their faith community.

According to the questionnaire, information revealed that the average age of the millennials is twenty-eight years old. The participants reside in various places in the United States of America. The participants are from six different counties and three different states. The geographical locations of the millennials gave a brief description of how many of them have scattered from the Pleasant Hill Church community. All eight of the participants have some college experience. The educational experience of the eight participants correlates with the millennials being the most educated generation the world.

The Local Advisory Committee decided to gather information concerning the millennial's childhood in an effort to compare it to their adulthood. All eight participations in this study attended church at least fifty-percent of the time during their childhood. However, there is a small decline in church attendance from childhood to adulthood among the eight

participants. Only five of the eight participants attend worship more than twice a month as young adults.

The participants gave information concerning their financial contributions to their faith community. Six out of the eight participants offer monthly financial contributions. Data shows there is a correlation between those who give financially and attend church regularly. The participants that declined in church attendance are the ones that do not contribute financially.

All eight participants were active in the church during childhood and exercised their spiritual gifts and talents. The reoccurring theme among how the millennials were impacted in a positive way from the Church was their spiritual development. Many of the participants stated that they learned how to pray. In addition, they learned the importance of prayer. Participant one stated that “Teaching me the importance of prayer and listening out for God's voice and simply focusing on the positive in all situations has been the strongest impact for my life. I'm a firm believer that something good can still come out of the toughest or hardest situations.”

However, there is a reoccurring theme in terms of the participants' negative experience among the Pleasant Hill Church faith community, which is poor hospitality or not welcoming everyone. For instance, participant eight stated the church is not “welcoming to the lost (as is they are all ‘more’ saved), which is very judgmental.” The statement reminded the church that Jesus said that he “came to seek and save the lost.”⁷⁷ It is important to invite everyone to the church with great joy. Perhaps, the most controversial statement was to find out that, one participant did not feel like he would be accepted because of his sexuality. Participant two stated the “negative impacts range from feelings of doubt and low self-esteem because I’ve never felt

⁷⁷. Luke 19:10 (English Standard Version).

truly comfortable openly expressing my non-traditional lifestyle (i.e. in dressing, sexual preference, hairstyle, etc.).”

The participants were asked to give a description of ways in which he/she is willing to influence his or her faith community in the future. All eight participants responded by doing something that will influence the youth coming after them. This speaks to how the millennials recognized the need for intergenerational connecting and mentoring. Six out of the eight participants felt they currently have connection with the Pleasant Hill Church faith community. Most of the participants connected through technology (Facebook, Website). Surprisingly a reoccurring method of connection was through their family members who still reside in the faith community. The information taught me that if the local people connect to the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church faith community, it creates an avenue to connect with those who have dispersed.

During April 21, 2015, the Local Advisory Committee received an update from Curtisha Brooks concerning the interview questions. The Pleasant Hill Church purchased *Joyfest* tickets for the young adults. The committee decided to send out an RSVP form for the “Spiritual Reunion.”

During the month of May, the “Millennial Legacy Group” met at Carowinds for *Joyfest*. The “Millennial Legacy Group” had ten young adults to attend the Reunion. During the Spiritual Reunion, the group met to have a discussion on how to broaden the connection with the faith community. The millennials did a self-evaluation on their gifts and expertise. After reflecting on their skills, they was asked to create ways they could remain connected utilizing their gifts and talents.

Carmi Green, a second grade school teacher who lives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, committed to volunteer as a mentor to young girls between the ages of six through nine for two

months during the summer. All of the young adults agreed to engage in the Pleasant Hill Facebook page. Additionally, the young adults agreed on coming back to worship during their school breaks.

Veronda Bellamy, President of a non-profit organization, “Bridging the Gap of America, Inc., committed to donating book-bags and school supplies to ten youth in the Pleasant Hill Church faith community annually. Mrs. Bellamy is a millennial that moved to Raleigh, North Carolina to pursue her career. However, she thought the project would be successful in the community/church. Mrs. Bellamy’s only requirement was that the recipient agreed to be a part of the mentoring program provided by the organization.

The most amazing accomplishment was a young adult family opened a Pleasant Hill small group discussion session in their home in Charlotte, North Carolina. I actually attended the session; it was awesome! The discussion was on leadership. It was a very informal setting; we ate snacks and had constant dialogue for one hour. The small group was created because it was impossible for some millennials to commute to weekly service due to living over an hour away from the church. The millennials stated that the small group would be a way of meeting for bible study without neglecting their family life during the week. After the group met, the young adults spent the rest of the evening enjoying a sense of community, with laughter, dancing and taking selfie photos.

During the month of June, the Lay Advisory Committee and I reviewed the effectiveness of the project by measuring the following.

1. “Millennial Legacy Builder” Facebook group was measured by the young adult’s participation in the chats and feedback.
2. The LAC committee measured the cohesiveness of the Spiritual Reunion. We measured the cohesiveness of the group by the spiritual reunion attendance and input of the young adults through the project.

3. The young adults provided input concerning ideas of remaining connected with the faith community in the annual Rev. C. M. Huntley Scholarship essay.

In a large sense essays may be outdated and boring from one perspective. On the other hand, it is a resource to allow the millennial's voices to be heard. Historically, in the Pleasant Hill Church Faith Community, only the older generation has the voice of influence.

During the month of July, the Local Advisory Committee and I began research for the Writing Phase of the project.

Chapter 4

Evaluation of the Project

To evaluate means to adequately determine the worth of a person, place or process through critical reflection. The project had many variables to consider. The participants of the project were the millennials of the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Ansonville, North Carolina. The ages of the millennials are between eighteen and thirty-five years of age. Joyce McDonald, in her research that was valuable for this project, noted: “The literature states that young adults are involved in critical life tasks such as choosing a college, finding new friends and relationship engagements, marriage, establishing families, and vocation and parenting.”¹

The project participants consisted of twelve of the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church young adults. Many of the participants are currently in college. A major concern that we had with college young adults is the small percentage of young adults who seldom return to their faith community after college. The participants also included one married couple with children. The project included four young adults that have started their careers. The actual participation from the group members was inconsistent. However, I was able to gather small bits of information from most of the participants.

Through critical reflection, the project worked well from one perspective but not good from another. The first perspective is, I do not think the participants viewed the task as a real project. Therefore, not all of them answered every survey question. Oftentimes, I had to send several reminders to receive a response from the participants who were hesitant with getting

¹. “Engaging Young Adults: Re-igniting a Passion And Curiosity About God,” Joyce McDonald. Madison, New Jersey: Drew University, 2015.

involved with the project. The frustration of the project is it worked without a usual systematic process. The preliminary prospective was only an outline and not a law because the project plans had to adjust at times. The up side to the project is although the LAC and I developed a strategic plan, it did not go smoothly. Nonetheless, it did create a deeper among the Millennials which is much stronger than ever before.

The project has also been a launching pad for transformation for the overall faith community. The millennials no longer just talk at church. I have seen them conversing on social media. The college students are dedicated to coming back to worship service on their school breaks. When they come back, they are celebrated and recognized by the Pleasant Hill faith community. Also, many of the millennials assisted in educational community activities, i.e. vacation bible school, Martin Luther King celebration, and the Pleasant Hill Baptist Church Community Fun Day. Eight years ago, the millennials of the church would go directly to their cars after worship. Now, I observe them in small groups after church fellowshiping with one another. The project did not only influence the millennials but the baby boomers have started embracing the idea of being connected and involved in ministry outside of the actual church building. The baby boomers have also accepted a mobile bible study.

Prior to this project, mobile bible study was a church taboo for the baby boomers. In addition, many of the baby boomers have embraced the idea of checking the church Facebook page for announcements and current events. The project has also started a transformation within me, as the Pastor. I started to consider the greater faith community in Ansonville. Prior to the project, I focused only on the Pleasant Hill Church. I established a community fellowship named the "Ansonville Community Fellowship," that consists of eight churches and Pastors from different denominations gathered for worship, fellowship, and community development. The "Ansonville

Community Fellowship” will eventually offer a community scholarship for college students within the community. The greater community has enjoyed building relationships.

The community fellowship holds several events throughout the course of the year. The events of the Ansonville community, overall, include an annual Martin Luther King Jr. service in January of each year. The event is a time that the community comes together in remembrance of the great Civil Rights Activist, Dr. King. The community also has an annual Thanksgiving service with the hope of having a free dinner for the entire community. The purpose of the Thanksgiving service is to express thanks to God, family and community. The Ansonville Community Fellowship also joins together for its annual watch night service. The purpose of the watch night service is to celebrate the beginning of a new year.

The community believes that if we keep God in the center of our hearts, we will have the strength to be successful throughout the year. The fellowship is not an easy responsibility. It requires Pastors and churches unifying for the greater good. As the leader of the Community Fellowship, I am intentional about refraining from denominational traditions that may be different from others. The community fellowship is in the beginning phase. It is the belief of the Fellowship that we are stronger together.

The project was an avenue to gather real heart touching information from the millennials. The participants that decided to respond to the project interview questions were transparent in their communication. The project allowed me to see how the millennials truly felt about their faith community.

Conclusion

The “Millennial Generation” project has been a launching pad to create more ways of effectively connecting to the millennials, who in particular, have derived from a rural faith community. This project has shown the Pleasant Hill faith community a way to change their perception of the church, especially, that of the young adults. For them, the church has changed tremendously. Perhaps, in an underlying way, the church hierarchy viewed the faith community as a place of privilege. However, this project has been a resource to remind the church that it should be a place of privilege not for its own sake, but to serve humanity.

The words penned by Charles Wesley are still prevalent in the twenty-first century: “A Charge to Keep I have, A God to Glorify, A never dying soul to save, A fit it for the sky, To serve the present age, My calling to fulfill: Oh, may it all my pow’rs , Engage to do my Master’s will.”²

The project has helped the church shift its attention from going through extreme measures to get millennials to remember the faith communities; to going through extreme measure to stay connected. The faith community now believes that a connection is possible. In fact, the project has raised the awareness of just how to connect and remain connected. The project has given the faith community a vision for live streaming services, pushed more T-shirt sales and encouraged the church to utilize a mobile app for up-to-date information concerning the church.

The project has created an avenue for the Pleasant Hill faith community to become connection-conscious. The members of the church either developed ideas or connected with the millennials to create resources for increased connection. For example, Mrs. Margaret Sheppard,

² Charles Wesley, *A Charge To Keep, I Have*, 1762.

a baby boomer, who is an example of a Pleasant Hill member migrating to the north but who maintains a connection with the church. Mrs. Sheppard moved back to Ansonville, North Carolina after retiring from Social Services in New York City. In turn, she made the church aware of how the cemetery is way of connection that is not often considered. The Pleasant Hill faith community has a beautiful cemetery on their campus. Oftentimes, families from across the world will commute to the cemetery to pay tribute to their love ones. Mrs. Sheppard convinced the Pleasant Hill faith community to donate at least one dollar in a birthday basket to maintain the church cemetery. The cemetery drive created a way for the church to continue the connection by maintaining a legacy for its ancestors. In essence, many have been willing to maintain a relationship with the church because the Pleasant Hill faith community has provided a final resting place for those they love who have departed this side of life.

It is without question that a connection and relationship is inseparable. Intergenerational ministry has become a key factor in connecting with the millennials. Therefore, the project reminds the faith community the importance of hearing the stories of multiple generations within the church. Undoubtedly, this research has proven that people know “what works for them.” It is the responsibility of the faith community to hear and follow through to connect or reconnect.

Information from the project will be available to share in Rural Church Development Conferences, Local District and Association annual sessions, and the General Baptist State Convention. The methods of this project may vary in different faith communities, but in my deep conviction, the principles of the project are relevant for rural faith communities. This project is the beginning of increased intentional connection with the Pleasant faith community and its multiple generations for years to come.

Appendix A

The project research will involve questions and interviews by the Local Advisory Committee. Below are the following questions:

Interview Questionnaire

A. The project involved gathering the following personal data on each participant:

- Age
- Current location
- Level of education
- Average monthly church attendance as a child under the age of 18.
- Average monthly church attendance as a young adult.
- Average monthly financial contribution to a local church.

B. The project will listen to the narratives of the participants for the purposes of collecting the following data:

- A description of his/her involvement in his/her faith community as a child under the age of 18.
- A description of how his/her faith community has positively or negatively impacted his/her life.
- A description of how his/her spiritual gifts/natural gifts can be utilized in their new/old faith community. Gifts are “supernatural/natural graces” that enables a person to do a certain task. The group will be encouraged to think about the things that they do really well and enjoy doing.
- A description of ways in which he/she is willing to impact his or her faith community in the future. If the participant is not willing to impact his or her faith community, then he/she will be asked to explain why.
- A description of the qualities of connection that already exist at the church?
- A description of the qualities of connection the young adults will like to see in the church.

Appendix B

Youth, Millennials, and Baby Boomers Generation





Homecoming Picture - *The Big Day!*



Appendix C

Millennial Legacy Builder Survey Questions

I will like to begin our analysis with a priority survey. I encourage you all to be very honest as this will help us record more accurately. Thank you in advance for your support and response.

Rev. M. Andrew Davis

You will respond with numbers 1-6 using either term:

- Not Important
- Important
- Highly Important

Please rate these subjects and respond according to your level of importance by using the number and your answer. You will have a total of 6 answers.

7. Career Success
8. Educational Achievements
9. Economic Stability
10. Marriage & Family Establishment
11. Religious Involvement
12. Organizational Membership

Appendix D

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church History

The Pleasant Hill Baptist Church of Ansonville, North Carolina, was established in the year of our Lord, 1870, by Reverend Frank Richardson, who also served as the first Pastor. The newly organized congregation met in a brush arbor. Charter members Charles McLendon, Joe McLendon, Robert Broadway collectively purchased the first two acres of land (a part of the current campus) on January 24, 1880. Another land purchase occurred on May 29th 1896 of 4 six tenths acres was made by Harry Broadway, J.C. Lilly, Henry Lee, Clay Watkins, and Albert Tanner. The third and final land purchase was made by Frank Richardson, Jr., Claude Threadgill, and D. L. McLendon on May 16th 1944.

Under the pastorate of Rev. Richardson, who often preached from the subject, “The Brotherhood of Man” in those early days, services were held once a month, later changing to twice monthly. He was compensated by the harvest of produce from gardens of members, as farming was one of the area’s more lucrative occupations. The congregations grew steadily under Rev. Richardson’s leadership, and sometime during the 1920’s, Pleasant Hill constructed a modern and convenient sanctuary. During the Pastorate of the Reverend C. L. Chambers, the building was remolded between 1967 and 1968. Later, a fellowship hall had begun to be constructed and was complete, under the Pastorate of Rev. Clarence M. Huntley. Under Rev. Huntley’s leadership, the addition of an education building, a baptistery, and the expansion of

both the choir loft and Pastor's Study was completed in 1991. Additional walk ways, were added to the campus in 1994.

The Reverend Lynn A. Jackson became Pastor in September 2007. Under his leadership, the third Sunday was added in addition to the second and fourth Sunday regular worship times.

Ministers who have served Pleasant Hill as Pastor are:

Reverend Frank Richardson

Reverend Walsh Leak

Reverend Sid Alsobrook

Reverend Richard Allen

Reverend Travis Medley

Reverend Grant Flake

Reverend Robert Alsobrook

Reverend J. P. Sloan

Reverend H.B. Watson

Reverend Robert Funderburk

Reverend W.W. Powe

Reverend C. L. Chambers

Reverend C. M. Huntley

Reverend Lynn A. Jackson

The Reverend Melvin Andrew Davis has served Pleasant Hill Baptist Church as Pastor since July 2008. So far in his four years as Pastor, three Deacons were appointed and ordained in 2009; new lighting fixtures were added to the sanctuary; new flooring was installed in the

fellowship hall in the bathrooms; parking lot lining was added; LCD projectors and accompanying screens were installed in the sanctuary; a van for transportation was purchased and upgraded; a Minister of Music was added to the church staff; Men's and Women's ministries have been established; The Rev. C. M. Huntley Memorial Scholarship was created; an annual Community Fun Day has been set in place; worship services on the first Sunday were initiated; associate Minister Evette Parsons was licensed to preach; and three trustees were confirmed in 2012.

Appendix E

Church Covenant

Having been led, as we believe by the Spirit of God, to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Saviour and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love; to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also engage to maintain family and secret devotions; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the sale of, and use of, destructive drugs or intoxicating drinks as a beverage; to shun pornography; to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay.

We moreover engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.



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