

DREW UNIVERSITY

**DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE TO INCLUDE
AN ALTERNATIVE WORSHIP SERVICE TO RECONNECT
AND RETAIN MILLENNIALS' PARTICIPATION
WITHIN GRACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH,
ST. ALBANS, NEW YORK.**

**A Professional Project submitted to the Theological School of Drew University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree,**

Doctor of Ministry

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ABSTRACT

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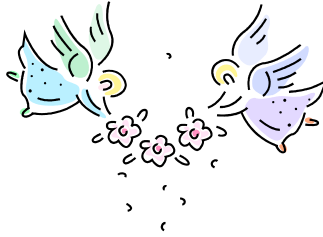
BY

Alpher Sylvester

There is a concern within our Grace United Methodist Church that attendance and participation of millennials within our church community is relatively non-existent, at best, disconnected. The purpose of this project was to ascertain the reason(s) why they choose not to become an integral part of our church community and what will be required to attract them. The scope of the project was limited to identification of the factors affecting them and finally piloting an activity that will reconnect them to Grace United Methodist Church. The data gathered revealed a dominant narrative that our millennials are absent because our churches have failed to offer different access points and to be pliable and flexible in addressing their needs. Likewise, the Church's failure in creating media for expressions of creativity or reciprocating an authentic response to their community allowed them to find comfort living on the fringes. This project provided an opportunity to assure transformational leadership to our community. It enabled our community to be ever cognizant of the opportunities and experiences for people, especially our millennials to encounter Jesus Christ so that transformation may occur. We dare to envision that this project had the immediate potential to reset ministry to be

driven by an evangelism emphasis that is locally mission oriented; this is a different narrative to what we have known in the past. As part of the reintegration process, our millennials embraced the charge to be to others what they would like the community to be to them.

DEDICATION



Elsie Sylvester Basedan

(Gone but not forgotten)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is posthumously dedicated to the memory of my mother, Elsie Sylvester who left me way too soon, but whose unconditional love, admiration and example guided me to “follow my heart, aim for the highest and reach for the best.” Her nurturance and wise admonitions shaped most of the beliefs and values that I still fearlessly embrace today. In true Trinidad and Tobago lingo, she would remind me that *Empty vessels make the most noise*; meaning that I had to acquire knowledge, more specifically, a sound education, if I were to contribute anything to this world, or uplift the family’s name.

I also dedicate my work in memory of those who have touched and shaped my life spiritually: my dad Elon McEwen, and my brothers and sister. They provided validation for my existence and constant encouragement following the death of my indomitable mother, my anchor. I reflect on their pride and inspiring words to continue my quest as an agent of change for those most vulnerable among us, especially those under my pastoral authority.

I finally dedicate this thesis to my wife, Carlene for her unwavering support, and my children Alpher, Jr., Simeon and Vanessa, and to the Lay Advisory Committee; also, my professors, Dr. Kevin Miller, Dr. William Presnell and Dr. Donna Ciangio whose lecture on “the generational divide” inspired the pursuit of this project; and, to the many church mothers and the people of Grace United Methodist Church, Saint Albans, New York.

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INTRODUCTION

A Legacy to be Lived: Methodism

As part of its legacy, the United Methodist Church places a high premium on Mission. This is our prime directive. It is driven by what we consider to be the “Divine Commission.” We are defined to a large degree by our investment in works of piety and mercy, which are operationalized through service organizations such as the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). Through these means, we make disciples, train disciples, and touch the world to the Glory of God.

According to the General Board of Global Ministries¹, “the denominational mission is to *make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*”² This statement guides the actions of our general conferences.³ The General Board⁴ posits that “transforming power belongs to God, and Global Ministries is in mission to witness to what God has done and is doing, and to learn from what God is doing in every land where disciples gather in the name of Jesus Christ.” The position of the Board further holds that “God’s Mission reclaims the life of all creatures and redeems all creation for

¹ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 578.

² *Ibid.*, 87.

³ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁴ *Ibid.*

God's intended purpose. Holy Scriptures bear witness to mission that begins with God, belongs to God, and will be fulfilled by God at the end of time."⁵

The United Methodist Church understands that God's Holy Spirit calls the Church into being for mission. "The Church experiences and engages in God's mission as it pours itself out for others, ready to cross every boundary to call for true human dignity among all peoples, especially among those regarded as the least of God's children, all the while making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world."⁶ The church sees mission as the hallmark of its identity and serving four functions; which are: 1) making disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the world; 2) strengthening, developing and renewing Christian congregations and communities through financial, spiritual and emotional support; 3) alleviating human suffering; and, 4) seeking justice, freedom and peace for all.

The concept of mission and the deep theological analysis that frames our understanding of mission is right before our eyes, yet, it is evidently unseen. As Methodists, we live in the presence of information, and at times are so ignorant of glaring truths! Our lethargic reaction to the absence of young adults within our worshipping community is demonstrable of this malady.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012).

Carlos F. Cardoza⁷ shocks our conscience and shifts the prevailing perception that mission targets countries abroad. He provokes us to rethink mission as essential to our Christian witness and that it must begin at home. While this commentary is unorthodox, it reinforces the notion that had the United Methodist Church remain true to its prime directive of mission and focus first on doing *mission at home*, we would not have lost our attractiveness to young adults across our denomination, and especially in the continental United States.

North America and my ministry context is part of a “global community,”⁸ that requires new strategies and a new outlook on mission for effective ministry. As Methodists, if we are to remain true to our prime directive, given the fact that we are hemorrhaging our youths to other faith groups and organizations, it will become mission critical to adjust missional strategy. This challenges us to think of our culture in missional terms says Stetzer and Putman⁹ in their writings on breaking the missional code. We are to identify the secret societal code that, if broken, creates a unique synergy between church and society. “There is a code to be broken which involves cultural and spiritual barriers that blind people from understanding the gospel.” In their words, “Our task is to find the right way to break through those cultural barriers while addressing the spiritual and theological ones as well.”¹⁰ All of this is to be done at our local parish level. It is

⁷ Cardoza-Orlandi, C. F, *Mission an Essential Guide*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2002), 20.

⁸ Stetzer, E. and Putman, D., “The Emerging Glocal Context,” *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

through this means that we refocus our missional priorities to include our young adults who are currently absent from our pews.

This thesis will attempt to do just that. It aims to refocus our efforts, as United Methodists, on our young adults who are known to society as ‘millennials.’ This group of young adults is living right under our churches’ steeples; they are without a voice, seemingly disenchanting and disconnected, yet among us. They are our millennial constituents.

Our reading of Stetzer and Putman ¹¹ challenges us to “break the code wherever we are, abandon our preference; minister to meet the needs of the people; proclaim a faithful gospel there in culturally relevant ways that connects.” ¹² It “breaks the code within our mission field and finds effective ways to reach the people to whom God has sent us. Breaking the code leads to ‘breakthrough!’” Our Christology, ecclesiology and missiology must align¹³ so that equilibrium is reestablished to our church’s growth and our church’s health. This will obliterate blindness to community, other races and other approaches. It will lend to a more relevant and effective missional agenda for our church and our local community.

Evidently, a “canned” missional approach is untenable. The current methodology prescribed by the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church seemingly does not bear fruits at the local level. Our outward focus and hands-off approach to mission has compromised the initial intent of our spiritual fathers.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 32.

¹³ Ibid., 53-58.

Consequently, our churches are dying because evangelism is not annexed to mission, neither do we see our parish as a mission field.

As in my ministry setting, we have failed to apply needed resources to break the code that will ignite ministry and specifically reclaim and stop the hemorrhaging of our young adults from our worshipping community. Embracing the priesthood of all believers is still a work in progress. The evolution from a ministry that is pastor centered to one that incorporates the gifts and graces of the people is slowly progressing. Our hope is that our people become Incarnational expressions of Christ in our communities.¹⁴ Grace United Methodist Church, the focus of this project, must transform our community through presence, service, and proclamation. This will be a significant missional shift as advocated by Stetzer and Putman.¹⁵ However, it will be mission critical for ministerial success and survival.

Contextualization gives the church a chance to become an “indigenous expression of its context.” It prepares the church to “present the gospel and church in a culturally relevant way without compromising the truth.”¹⁶ These are significant challenges that my ministry setting are confronting. Given this new insight, we are forced to embrace it as part of our journey to identify the missional code that could assure our relevance to our community, and to win a vanishing segment of our community who are becoming disillusioned and invisible to the church, right before our eyes.

¹⁴ Stetzer, E. and Putman, D., *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 5.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Progressive leaders within the United Methodist Church have been championing the cause for more assertive practices within our community. They envision that a grassroots approach at the local church levels could once again excite life and stimulate growth as we refocus our efforts on mission as our prime directive. Attempts are being made to center our attention on radical hospitality, passionate worship, intentional faith development, extravagant generosity and risk taking mission.¹⁷ This approach has a prophetic alignment to the clarion call postulated in the writings of Stetzer and Putman.¹⁸

As it is within the United Methodist Church, and specifically within my ministry setting, there is a need to break the missional code and reconnect our young adults without compromising the faith. All the best faith practices must inform our efforts to minister more effectively to them and our community.

Hemorrhaging is defined as an emergency condition in which a ruptured blood vessel causes bleeding; it is usually more difficult to treat when it is inside the brain. Since the brain affects all our body function and organs, continual hemorrhaging will eventually traumatize and shut down the entire body; so it is with this loss of millennials among our worshipping community. We must understand it and the participants involved. We must decode the root cause of this malady and design a formidable system to stop it. To that end, we must assess our ministry setting. We must resonate with Stetzer

¹⁷ Robert Schnase, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁸ Stetzer, E. and Putman, D., "Transition to Missional Ministry," *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 5.

and Putman¹⁹ and be more forward thinking, be willing to pay the price, build a great team, and while connecting the dots, work on the code with an unending passion to build God's Kingdom.

The code that evolves for this analysis is that our young adults between the ages of eighteen to thirty five years are missing from among our worshipping community. They are usually referred to as "the Millennials." Attendance and participation of this millennial constituency within our church community is relatively non-existent, at best, disconnected. There is a need to ascertain the reason(s) why the millennial constituents at Grace United Methodist Church are choosing not to become an integral part of our church community, and what actions will be required to attract them.

Evidently, a need to identify the factors affecting our millennial constituents and to create a mechanism to reconnect them to Grace United Methodist Church has become mission critical to our church's survival. A break from tradition and a paradigm shift that will place ministerial effectiveness over comfort is needed. A deep exploration to find the missional code for this dilemma is necessary. Therefore, our vision must extend beyond the church's current operational needs and social comforts; it must extend to the multiplication of ourselves. We must stop the massive exodus of our young adults. All living things that will survive must multiply. To lose our millennial is to aid and abet the destruction of ourselves.

While we purport to be missional as Methodists, the reality is that our millennial constituents within the United Methodist Church are choosing not to become an integral part of our church community. As an introduction to this thesis, two scenarios below,

¹⁹ Ibid., "Best Practices of Leaders and Churches that Break the Code," 14.

might unveil this problem that exists among us as a people called Methodists. Moreover, this might theoretically provide an explanation for the exodus of our youths, especially from Grace United Methodist Church. It certainly will serve to validate the results of our project as we attempt to reconnect and retain millennials' participation within Grace United Methodist Church. Please consider the scenarios:

CHAPTER 1

The Malady of Parochialism

Scenario 1– The Local Church

Seated at the table were about fifteen individuals. Our diversity was limited to our gender and our age differences. We were all above forty five years old. This was our “key leadership committee.” We pride ourselves in being a forward thinking group that was willing to take on the challenges of church growth and expansion. It was about our third meeting. Clairvoyant as we thought we were, we were yet stuck in diagnosing the maladies of our worshipping community; those maladies seemed to be overwhelmingly voluminous.

As leaders, we were given the task to find workable solutions whereby we could build a church that will impact our community into the twenty first century and beyond. We were well equipped with data and had a general understanding of our community. Our information was gleaned from “MissionInsite,”²⁰ a database that analyzes the national census data and provides suggestions as to how ministry could be effectively organized. Sitting at the table, we understood that we were a midsized United Methodist

²⁰ MissionInsite, Community Engagement Specialist for Faith & Nonprofit Groups, Irvine, C.A., www.missioninsite.com **“We are Community Engagement Specialists.** MissionInsite empowers faith-based and non-profit organizations with the tools they need to visualize and cultivate their current and prospective members, donors and volunteers and solve their most difficult challenges. With a combined experience in the fields of non-profit and church development, strategic planning and mission context analysis, co-founders Mike Regele, Chuck Salter and Peter Wernett believe advancing an organization’s Mission, Vision and Sustainability should be cost effective and attainable.”

Church located in the St. Albans community of New York. Our community is roughly 1.68 miles in diameter within the southern region of the borough of Queens, New York. While population density is extremely high, the distribution is highly dispersed and diverse with no significant ethnic changes imminent. The report implied that the dynamic level of the area is considered “transformational.”

The Saint Albans population is ninety three percent African American and provides residential accommodations to thirty- nine thousand, seven hundred and four individuals, of which forty five percent is male and fifty five percent is female. Attention to culture and education are significant drivers of quality of life within this community. Forty percent of the population ranges in a “survivors age group,” ages twenty five to sixty five, while thirty three percent of the population ranges in ages five to twenty five years old. The average household income is seventy five thousand dollars with forty five percent of the households making between fifty thousand and one hundred twenty five thousand dollars. Based on the United States census data synthesized through the First View account, “the overall religious giving potential can be described as very high.”²¹ Most residents have a high school diploma and have completed some college. The crime rate index seems to exceed the national average with significant crimes being robbery, assault, motor vehicle theft and murder.²²

Our leaders attested to the fact that our active church membership is in excess of four hundred and fifty individuals who are primarily people of color, upwardly mobile

²¹ Percept Group, Inc., “FirstView,” Rancho Santa Margarita, C.A., 2007.

²² Bureau of the Census, Crime Rate Index, 2012, (Washington, D.C., GPO, 2012).

and intelligent. Women make up the largest segment of the membership at sixty-five percent, with the men and children sharing the remaining thirty five percent. The church's campus encompasses one-fifth of a city block. It houses a new and technologically equipped sanctuary, an office building, a fellowship hall with other space used for ministry purposes. Within the Saint Albans' community, faith receptivity is average, with most persons somewhat religious and possessing a taste for a blended worship experience, both traditional and contemporary. Our leaders all agreed with the MissionInsite analysis as it suggested that "church program preferences, which will affect potential church strategies, are Food Pantry/Clothing Resources, Cultural Programs (Music, Arts, etc.), Care for the Terminally Ill, and Twelve Step Programs. It further postulated that, as an overall category, programs related to Recreation are the most significant based upon total number of households and comparisons to national averages."²³

As is customary in a situation like this, we celebrated the rich legacy that has come to define us. As a church, we are connectional in our United Methodist experience and have never defaulted on our commitment to pay apportionment²⁴ and to assure the sacred commitment to fellowship, discipleship and pastoral care. We were, however, cognizant that in the light of these accomplishments, the general United Methodist Church was struggling to bridge a cultural chasm that had separated the church and its appeal to the society at large. We were well aware that as the United Methodist Church,

²³ Percept Group, Inc., "First View," Rancho Santa Margarita, C.A., 2007.

²⁴ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 162.

we were haunted by declining membership, crumbling infrastructure, decreased giving, and a lackluster liturgy that was not working to bridge the divide or incentivize others to join our faith. Ideological difference around gender inclusivity threatens to divide our United Methodist organization. Our angst was heightened since we now recognized that our local church was not exempt from the maladies confronting our great denomination. Our ambition was tempered by the facts that we did not fully understand our own issues, far less to identify a solution.

It is in moments like this that conformity to a scientific approach to problem solving becomes somewhat irrelevant. Furthermore, when the multiplicity of issues becomes overwhelming and daunting, we often find a person or thing to blame. It was difficult to wrap our heads around the issues, far less the solutions. Ambitiously, as we sat at the table, we cocooned ourselves within the realm of our success and therefore touted that in order to expand our market share of potential worshippers and thereby grow our church, we had to assure longevity of our ideals through the care and instruction of our future generation. References were made to our baptismal liturgy that mandated that “we undertake to provide facilities and opportunities for Christian nurture and fellowship.”²⁵ Our paltry excuse for the inability to do the “God Talk” on these pressing issues devolved into a lamentation over the absence of young people within our worshipping community. Obvious to the participants’ was an absence of the “young people” that were spoken of; they were not even at this table.

²⁵ The United Methodist Hymnal, *Book of United Methodist Worship*, (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 44.

To some of us that sat in the room, the realization of how intellectually lethargic we were at engaging these issues, even at the local church level was evident. How are we going to assure a legacy if there is no one to pass it on to? To the best of our knowledge, there is always the presence of infants and teenagers, but young adults are noticeably absent and unaccounted for. Discussion around the issue of attendance and participation of this group of individuals, ages eighteen to thirty five years, which seemed to be relatively non-existent, and at best, disconnected, became our focus.

Explanation for their absence encompassed reasons that were far above our committee's paygrades. Intonation as to physiological, psychological, financial, social and even spiritual reasons were presented; however, it was all speculative. Some individuals recalled their own journey, as if to justify the absence of this group. They speculated that just as they left as youths and later returned to the church, so too will these young adults return. A moment of enlightenment within the group revealed that not all of our peers returned, and for those who did, the emotional and physical scars that marked that period of wandering were painful, but potentially avoidable.

There was general concurrence that for the multiplicity of issues, the problem of the absence of young adults within our worshipping community will be the best pursuit. A methodical approach to giving these young adults an identity within the broader community and to endeavor to understand the factors that have adversely affected them and acted as a deterrent to their participation within our worshipping community were important. Our current system as it existed was 'closed.' To this writer, the words of Dr. William Presnell,²⁶ frames the narrative that defines our current predicament. As a

²⁶ Dr. William Presnell, lecture, Drew University, March 2015.

worshipping community, we are ‘stuck,’ imbalanced, and stifled. Our community is not working well for many of its members. He postulated that symptoms that emerge from such a system are that it can be numb to the suffering of many and lack compassion. It is a community that fails to serve its members, or to motivate them to serve others. Close introspection of our community shows that our young adults are marginalized and disadvantaged; they are members but are often subject to voicelessness and disempowerment. Those of us who have the dominant influence maintain it by pulling the strings of power in defiance to the community’s covenant or mission.

As part of this project, and to assure intellectual veracity in understanding, analyzing and finding a solution to this problem, we, as a church, must actively take leadership initiative, avoid sabotage, encourage imaginative and innovative leadership. In Dr. William Presnell’s words, “the regulatory sub-systems (holons) of the faith community kick in to secure the previous homeostasis;”²⁷ hence, the evil that stagnates and contributed to this dilemma fights to sustain itself by any means necessary. Our Words spoken and the commitment we have made become meaningless unless we are intentional in establishing systems that will assure a resolution to this issue. As a committee, we would attempt to establish a biblical, theological and social rational as to why this issue exists and why resolving it is mission critical to our community. This approach will further help to elucidate the complexity with which the problem presents itself. This study will lend to a process of enlightenment within our community and potentially a better medium for dialogue and incorporation of the young adults’ gifts and

²⁷ Ibid.

graces as viable participants within our worshipping community, when we reconnect them. They were however, presently, absent!

The Malady of Parochialism

Scenario 2 – The Church at Large

The room was packed to capacity. As reported, in excess of eighteen hundred hopeful individuals, primarily pastors, were gathered as part of a Wesleyan Covenantal Movement. The group consisted of the disillusioned, the activist, spiritual nomads and those who were just primarily inquisitive.

The meeting of this group was the result of years of discontentment among an orthodox segment of the United Methodist Church who felt somewhat betrayed by the failure of our church to honor the basic credo of the Christian faith. They were tired of being perceived as antagonistic on issues relating to basic moral and spiritual values that govern the church. They perceived themselves as defenders of Wesleyan Orthodoxy within the United Methodist Church. This meeting provided a safe space to voice concerns, and corral support for the Book of Discipline, as written. It was evidently designed to send a message of seismic proportion to the upper echelon of the United Methodist Church that a significant cross section of the church leadership was prepared to exercise their rights to potentially separate from the main body should the issue of same sex marriage prevail as the direction of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church.

A litany of courageous speeches outlining the position of the movement marked the day's proceedings. The Wesleyan Covenant Association stands together as an alliance to advance vibrant, scriptural Christianity within the global United Methodist Church. They see themselves as “a coalition of congregation, clergy and laity committed to promoting ministry that combines a high view of scripture, Wesleyan viability,

orthodox theology and Holy Spirit empowerment.”²⁸ The voice of dissent affirmed classical Wesleyan doctrine and the historic faith which the church has used to define the parameters of Christian teaching. They affirmed that men and women are entitled to full access to the faith and the privilege of ordained ministry. They renounced racial and ethnic discrimination and affirmed a commitment to equality in society. These voices lauded the holy institution of marriage but only between a man and a woman. They affirmed the faithfulness of an exclusive heterosexual union and celibacy in singleness as equal paths of discipleship. This is not negotiable, even against prevailing cultural mores.

As a spiritual nomad and a participant that was primarily inquisitive, it was evident to me that the resolve of this group was that they will not succumb to postmodern heralds that piped an offensive evangelical message of inclusivity. This group was evolving from defensive to offensive; to that end, the Wesleyan Covenant Association will offer sanctuary to individuals and congregations that are in love with the Methodist Church but needs an “Orthodox city of refuge.” This group was prepared to depart from the mainstream church to form a new United Methodist organization should the Bishop’s commission on a way forward, “the council on inclusivity,” fail to rule on the side of the Book of Discipline. Our Discipline currently affirms heterosexual marriages while recognizing persons of homosexual persuasion as persons of sacred worth who must confirm to celibacy in singleness and “only” heterosexual marriages. The Council should present its report by December 2018.

²⁸ Howard A. Snyder, “New Wineskins,” *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 18, 5.

The feeling and resolve to embrace this new frontier was evidently energized with a sense of possibility. Here in this room was the formidable voices of disenchantment with the status of the current church. They were situated in this room, eighteen hundred men and women who were preparing to make a decision that would have lasting impact on a future church. It occurred to me that, just as in the case of my church, represented in this room, were individuals whose diversity were limited to gender and race. A visual assessment of the room revealed that, primarily, most individuals represented were well above thirty five years old. Again, absent were Millennials!

Evidently, just like our church, this microcosm of discontented individuals who were about to build a new movement, touted and prided themselves in being a forward thinking group. They were upholding the rich tradition of sacramental practices; in love with the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church. They were willing to take on the challenges of immoral practices even if they had to “start over.”

For all the zeal and fervent anticipation within the room, as one surveyed the gathering, it was evident that on this historic moment, the voice of the largest group of individuals on planet earth, the seventy eight million individuals that are known as millennials, was absent. The adverse effects of Parochialism in leadership that contributed to the rise of this Wesleyan Covenant moment was latently evident and functioning as a major contributor to future discontentment within the United Methodist Church. Individuals between the ages of eighteen to thirty five years, usually referred to as millennials, were absent; their attendance is relatively non-existent; at best, they were disconnected.

CHAPTER 2

Decoding the Malady

Parochialism is defined as “a limited or narrow outlook, especially focused on a local area; narrow mindedness.”²⁹ It is further defined as “the state of mind, whereby one focuses on small sections of an issue rather than considering its wider context. More generally, it consists of being narrow in scope. It ignores the impact of cultural concepts and diversity on organizations, professions, policies, procedures and programs. In that respect, it is a synonym of ‘provincialism’.”³⁰ It is this type of malady that we must first explore as we consider that the absence of ‘millennials’ voices could only be the platform for a split within the church, again in the future. Since they were not included as part of this decision making process, their attendance and participation within our church community is taken so lightly. To that end, the potential ramification of their absence is not even considered or addressed as essential to this seismic shift that is about to happen within our United Methodist Church.

Decoding the Malady

It Starts with an Understanding of the Generational Divide.

Our understanding of the malady that is currently confronting the church starts with an in depth analysis of this focused group called the millennials. They are the ones missing from among our worshipping community.

An understanding of the term “millennials” is pertinent to this narrative; it is used interchangeably with young adults. The relevance of this group of individuals could only

²⁹ Victoria Neufeldt, Andrew N. Sparks, *Webster New World dictionary*, (Cleveland, Ohio: Simon & Shuster, Inc., 1990).

³⁰ Ibid.

be understood through the broader context of our understanding of what social scientists call the “generational divide.”

A generational divide, as the term implies, indicates a rift or inherent difference between generations. Social scientists define a generation as the interval of thirty years between any given age group and their progeny.³¹ Social scientists generally posit that “generational understanding is the foundation to generational management.”³² It enables the social science discipline to segment and define each generation. To that end, each generation is given specific labels that enable them to be recognized and categorized as people having similar idiosyncrasies and cultural mores.

Another concept is the notion of a “generational gap.” This concept purports that to each period of time, significant social, economic and political forces apply unique pressure upon individuals born within that epoch, thereby determining their world view and the ways they conduct themselves within the society. Their behaviors and attitudes are peculiar and restrictive to their generation. As part of a broader narrative, it is critical to note that across several disciplines, the pertinence of understanding the generational divide is critical to reconciling human beings, especially when they are estranged.

Driven by differing needs within different industries or profession, the language that defines the generation might differ, however, as postulated, there are considerable familiarities in the factors that shape their peculiar idiosyncrasies. The impact of language use, technological innovation, workplace attitudes are some of the contributing

³¹ Ibid.

³² Leah A. Reynolds, *Generational Change and Total Rewards Communication*: (Deloitte Consulting LLP, Copyright 2005).

factors to the uniqueness of every generation. Understanding of these forces is critical in healing areas where there are social rifts.

The absence of our millennials from among our worshipping community is evidence of a *social rift*. This rift is further compounded since it has potential for serious spiritual ramification among this constituent. The journey to reconnect and retain them demands that we understand the root cause of this malady, and attempt to fix it once and for all. The social rationale to this approach of fixing this rift and at reconnecting and retaining the millennials takes us back to John and Charles Wesley. They began their ministries as young adults (millennials by today's standard).

Unlike millennials today, John and Charles Wesley were fired up in their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. In their days, their faith was on fire! John Wesley (33yrs.) and Charles Wesley (29yrs.) journeyed as missionaries to the Americas; they embraced responsibility for works of piety and mercy within the American colony. The Wesley's zeal and passion toward God fueled the impetus of a new faith movement that evolved out of the Church of England.³³ As young adults (millennials by today's standard), they rebuffed the status quo and challenged an archaic system that stymied their voices within the Church of England. Seemingly, resistance by the Church of England to the Wesley's desire to have personal voice and to be included in the decision making around their own faith formation propelled these two young men to organize a youthful spiritual revolution. That revolution had social and political impact. It resulted in the faith we know today as the Wesleyan Movement, more specifically, the United

³³ The Church of England is the Anglican church of the 17th century. Henry viii started the process of creating the Church of England after his split with the Pope in the 1530's.

Methodist. The actual United Methodist Church was born out of a merger in 1968 between the Evangelical Brethren Church and the Methodist Church. It was after this merger that the newly formed United Methodist Church “was substantially, quietly, steered toward a mainline destination.”³⁴

The Wesley’s action created a rift; the type of rift where the established church recognized the millennials’ discontentment and their absence, but failed to address it until it was too late. What began in 1742 as a Methodist class meeting in Bristol England³⁵ was an act of discontentment. That simple action resulted in young people protesting against the church, because of the church’s indifference: it mushroomed into a major religious movement that is known today as the “Wesleyan Movement.”³⁶

The work in antiquity of two millennials wanting to have their voices heard and to be included in the decision making around their faith and that of others on the fringes propelled them to be the most forceful conduit organizing a youthful spiritual revolution. The impact of this revolution, led by those millennials in antiquity, served to be the faith we know today as the United Methodist Church. It was birthed through the failure of the established church to understand the encoded language of its youth. The language then was spoken through their absence. Could it be that today, the same language is being spoken with the absence of millennials? Today, for the church to be a beacon of light, we

³⁴ George G. Hunter 111, *The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2011) 9.

³⁵ Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley & Patterns for Church Renewal*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980) 18, 54.

³⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, “Consolidation of The Movement,” *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1995), 4.

must struggle to decode this language and positively replicate this part of our heritage by reconnecting our young adults.

It is in our attempt to decode this rift that we look to several intellectuals outside of our theological arena as we endeavor to understand it. Lydia Ostermeier,³⁷ as a health care executive, gives us an insight as to how understanding the generational divide is important to her industry. She states that “Generational understanding is the foundation to generational management. Demographers have spent millions of research dollars since World War II attempting to segment and define each generation.”³⁸ While there continues to be nuanced differences in how these generations are defined and described, there are some broad generalities upon which most researchers agree. Lydia Ostermeier presents an explanation of the generations as follows:

“**Traditionalists** – Born before 1945. Often called the Silent Generation. Typically defined as ‘team players, indirect communicators, institutionally loyal, obedient, dutiful and associated with organizational seniority.’”

“**Baby Boomers** – Born 1946-1964. Traditionally described as ‘visionary, skilled at seeing the big picture, title agnostic, optimistic, job-oriented, conflict adverse, competitive but also increasingly interested in work-life balance.’”

“**Generation X** – Born 1965-1979. Usually regarded as ‘positive, goal oriented, multitaskers, globally minded, self-reliant, informal, freedom loving, job neutral and techno-literal.’”

“**Generation Y** – Born 1980-2000. Also called Millennials. Typically described as ‘confident, sociable, street smart, diverse, technologically savvy, multitaskers and non-confrontational.’”

³⁷ Lydia Ostermeier, *Bridging the Generational Divide*, (B.E. Smith Inc., 2014) Accessed November 2016. <https://www.besmith.com/thought-leadership/white-papers/bridging-generational-divide>.

³⁸ Ibid.

Ostermeier purports that these definitions can be useful in understanding the various attitudes each generation brings into the workplace. They can also help to identify commonalities around which management strategies can be built. The same rational holds true within the theological square. Understanding the generational divide is mission critical to our context, and is the most significant part of a broader narrative as we endeavor to reconnect this group to the church at large and more specifically to the Grace United Methodist Church within the St. Albans' community.

Among theologians, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons from the Barna Group,³⁹ exercised 'intellectual licenses' in categorizing the generational divide. Although they rebuffed the notion of doing so, they found it to be critical in the synthesizing and reporting of their research findings. In their words, "Identifying a 'generation' is an analytical tool for understanding our culture and the people within it. It simply reflects the idea that people who are born over a certain period of time are influenced by a unique set of circumstances and global events, moral and social values, technologies and cultural and behavioral norms. The result is that every generation has a different way of seeing life."⁴⁰ These two theologians used four terms that relate to the primary generations they studied: Mosaics (born between 1984 and 2002) and Busters (born between 1965 and 1983, additionally, Boomers (ages 42-60) and Elders (61+).

³⁹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UN Christian, What a New Generation really thinks about Christianity...and Why it Matters; Ground Breaking Research from the Barna Group*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Thomas and Jess Rainer⁴¹ are other theologians, who, in an attempt to describe millennials have found it necessary to focus on their behavior. In doing so, they have juxtaposed them to other generational groups. It is from their research work that we are able to ascertain that they also found it best to advance their narrative through the lens of contemporary social scientists from other professional disciplines. They saw the influence of five generations of intellectual and professional work as salient in describing the generational divide. One caveat to their explanation is that the millennials, as a group, are the ones who take humanity into the twenty first century. Thomas and Jess Rainer⁴² see the generational division with their unique characteristics as follows:

G.I. Generation. (1904-1924, 59.6 million live births) They are the fairly stable population of a generation affected by the Great depression and World War II. They are powerful and most affluent of all generations. They have enjoyed an expanding economy, rising real estate values and generous government programs to include jobs. Their level of education did not equate to the sophistication of their lifestyles.

Silent Generation. (1925-1945, 55.4 million live births). This generation has gotten a bad deal with their names, basically because initially, they lacked influence. Today, this generation has emerged as leaders. They have influenced corporations, sophisticated industries, governmental and political organizations. They are frugal and are credited for being affluent. Given that corporate access was easier and demand for jobs was greater than the availability of skilled individuals, competition was limited as they came of age. Their journey was less stressful yet fruitful. According to the social scientists, “with the present economic scenario, this group may be the last generation to enjoy affluence in their retirement years.”

Boomer Generation. (1946-1964, 75.9 million live births). According to Thomas Rainer and Jess Rainer,⁴³ this generation was the largest before the millennial generation. They are “the most discussed, marketed and most debated generation

⁴¹ Thomas and Jess Rainer, *The Millennials, Connecting to America's Largest Generation*, (Nashville Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 8-12.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

ever.”⁴⁴ Their influence has affected the social and political trends of the country. Their influence was countercultural and anti-authoritarian. New age spiritualism and the self-help movement were significant cultural values that defined them. It is agreed that “by 1995 three out of ten living Americans were Boomers. No generation had its own generational literary genre until the Boomers. Hundreds of books have been written on this generation and the writing continues.”⁴⁵ Their existence as part of the American society was impactful. The full ramification of their presence and their peculiar habits continue to affect succeeding generations.

Gen X (1965-1979, 51.5 million live births)⁴⁶ “This generation were originally called the Buster generation because of the dramatic decline in live births from their predecessor’s generation.”⁴⁷ Generation X, a label derived from a nondescript novel by Douglas Copeland, stuck as the name that defines them. This generation is labeled as the harbinger of “poor work ethics.” They are typecast as pessimists since this is the general attitude they exude given that their formative years in the workforce have been “difficult times.” They are guarded and parsimonious since their long term financial prospect seemingly appears dismal to them.

The Millennials (1980-2000, 77.9 million live births)⁴⁸ It is the general consensus that this generation will, by all indicators, surpass all other generations in their peculiarities, efficiency and resilience. They are impacted by the rapidly changing nature of human existence. They live in a world that is closely connected via technology where cultural borders have become obsolete. They are the arbiters of a cultural melting pot where the dynamism of our humanity and our individuality has become blurred.

Millennials are defining a new space through technology, and are legitimizing its relevance through the sheer force of their numbers. Peculiar as they are, they are everywhere. They are in the workplace as entrepreneurs, musical artists, media moguls, chefs, doctors and morticians. They refuse to acquiesce to their elders based on

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 12.

antiquated rules that mandate that one should wait their turn. They are defining their space and living within it.

The attitude and idiosyncrasy of this generation reaches across the millennium and draws on the spirit of millennial non-conformist of prior epochs. Jesus Christ, our Lord, was a non-conformist and rebuffed the status quo; by today's standards, to his contemporaries, he will be defined as a millennial. The apostle Paul, John and Charles Wesley were all millennials (by today's standard) at the peak period of their influence on humanity. An unscientific assessment of the temperament of these millennial, non-conformists will indicate that they are intolerant, lack patience and feel a strong sense of purpose. They possess a respectful view of themselves and their potential value added benefit within any organization or situation. Their uncanny ability to capitalize on the liberality afforded by the society to this generation shapes their responses to any adverse stimuli or situation.

Whenever millennials feel undervalued or their voices unheard within their circle of influence, they redirect their passion and their commitment. It is this type of atmosphere that has lent itself to the absence of a viable millennial constituency among the United Methodist Churches. While our Book of Discipline strongly advocates for a continued youthful presence on committees, boards and throughout the organizational structure, our actions, as a church, have conveyed a different signal. This signal is in direct contravention to the peculiar mores of millennials. Our failure to hear their voices or include them as a viable part of our decision making process has affected their attendance and participation within our church's worshipping community.

Decoding the Malady

They are not here – a church without a future!

Dan Kimball⁴⁹ in his exposé on the emerging generation and their connections to the church quoted J.R.R Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring*: “Galadriel, the elf queen played by Kate Blanchett in the movie, says a classic line about the changes happening in Middle Earth. She says to Frodo, ‘the world is changed. I feel it in the water. I smell it in the air. The world around us has changed.’⁵⁰ And that is why emerging generations are disappearing from most churches.”

This sentiment provoked a discussion among our lay advisory team.⁵¹ As we considered how to reconnect, reclaim and retain our millennial constituents, we were challenged by the six millennials that participated on the team. They asked that we look back in biblical antiquity and examine the presence of comparable biblical personalities that by today's standards could be considered millennials. What could we learn from them? On examination of the biblical and scholastic records, Paul, the apostle, and other names such as John the Baptist, Timothy and Titus were added as comparable biblical personalities that could be considered millennials.

Since Paul, the apostle was identified as best known and most accomplished, he was considered as the best candidate to be comparatively analyzed with today's

⁴⁹ Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but not the church, insights from emerging generations*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵¹ Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) – A group of twelve laypersons with Millennials comprising 50% of the group. They will work with the Doctor of Ministry candidate to research, plan and execute all aspect of the professional project.

millennial constituents that are among our worshipping community. The general consensus among the lay advisory team was that Paul was characteristically idealistic and opinionated; yet, he was resilient and fervent in his Christian commitment. Paul's personal and spiritual resolve influenced Christianity as we know it today. Seemingly, his desire to have a voice and to be included in the decision making around his faith propelled him to be the most forceful conduit of Christian principles. He organized a youthful revolution that resulted in a movement that today has served to be the faith we know as 'Christianity.' It was noted that the peculiarities of Paul's personality was a main driver behind the advancement of Christianity. Paul's action placed him on the fringes of his society; from which vantage point, he influenced people on the fringes. It is there that he tapped into people that were silent to the church and by the church. Just like the millennials today, Paul's disciples were, at least, without a voice, disconnected and not an integral part of the worshipping community of his time.

Unless the maladies of an era are analyzed, understood and corrected, it is inevitable that history will repeat itself. It was this same youthful fervor and idealism that moved John and Charles Wesley. As millennials to their era, they disconnected from the mainstream Church, and joined others who were similarly discontented, under the steeple of the churches of England. It is there that, like Paul the apostle, they tapped into people who were silent to the church and by the church. Just like the millennials today, they were without a voice, disconnected and not an integral part of the worshipping community of their time. They loved Jesus, but had a problem with the church.

A provocateur among our lay advisory committee invoked the notion that our Lord Jesus Christ was, by today's standard, also a millennial. He too was a non –

conformist. Jesus' personality traits bear some resemblance to the millennials as described above. Jesus provoked and influenced the spiritual and political center of the society of his day by tapping into the discontentment on the fringes. However, given that Jesus is Lord, it was felt that we should not factor him into this part of the discussion. It was nonetheless unanimously agreed that it would be morally untenable if, after identifying this malady, as it exist today, we should not act to heal the rift thereby attempting to reconnect and retain the millennials' participation within our worshipping community. Additionally, our lay advisory team felt a deep compulsion to capitalize on the mega-potential that latently resides within them.

Our team deduced through the writings of Dan Kimball⁵² that the drastic drop-out rate and the failure to attract young adults within our churches is a lamentation that is repeatedly echoed within the religious square and among theologians and the church's elites. The churches' resolve to address this malady is yet forthcoming. It is theorized that most emerging generation do not have a basic understanding of Christianity through the lens of the Holy Bible. Among young adults, there is an openness to practices and worship a plurality of deity from among the pantheon of Gods. Unlike other generations, the religion of millennials lacks relevance; spirituality to them is relative. So too is the voice of anyone advocating the philosophies or tenets of these religions.

It is touted that in a Post-modern era, "Christians are now the foreigners in a post-Christian culture."⁵³ Dan Kimball argues that "our current reality is that established

⁵² Dan Kimball, *They like Jesus but not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 30.

formats of worship and prevailing spiritual practices and norms are an illusion that have been undermined by the onslaught of a new age religion.”⁵⁴ Even the notion of Christian Orthodoxy is replaced by a new form of modern day aestheticism.⁵⁵ This type of worship rebuffs the norms of the conventional church. In the current street vernacular, it must embrace a “100%” lifestyle on the part of the worshipper. By “100%” it is meant that things are to be real, simple, and void of frivolity and hypocrisy; it is to be true to its core.

Through the lens of research done by the Barna Group, it was discovered that churchlessness in our society has risen from 30% in the year 1990 to 43% by the year 2014.⁵⁶ The Barna group argues that perceptions, beliefs, behaviors, choices, experiences, expectations and hopes have shifted and consequently contributed to a seismic shift in Christendom. Apparently, this is responsible for the significant change in the mores of the American society. A survey conducted in 2014 by the Barna Group,⁵⁷ showed that a full representation of church and unchurched adults will be as follows:

- People that are purely unchurched, having never attended a church service is 10% of our population.
- Individuals that are de-churched or having attended the church but are now on hiatus are 33%.
- Those that are minimally churched whereby attendance is restrictive to high service but with no full commitment to membership are 8%.
- The actively churched are 49%.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 183.

⁵⁵ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us, How the Neighborhood Church is Transformed*, (New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins Publisher, 2006).

⁵⁶ George Barna & David Kinnaman, *Churchless- Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*, (Fedd and Company, Inc., 2014), viii.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 6.

The work of the Bana group informed our understanding of the major shift that is happening within society at large. These shifts may be a potential reason for the absence and disconnection of millennials among us. The Bana Group⁵⁸ contended that the rise of secularization, technological innovation, especially digital media, and an adjustment in self-perception have contributed to a drastic shift in the attitude of people toward church.

This attitudinal shift crosses the “generational divide” and annexes itself to the churchless generation. It is further compounded by the expansion of this churchless generation who are now raising children with the same ideals. “Church going is slowly but incontrovertibly losing its role as a normative part of American life.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Ibid., “*Our Cultural Moment - What is Different about Our Time,*” 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

CHAPTER 3

Theological Analysis

They are Different, but We Must Get to Know Them

At its inception, just the consideration of what this project entails seemed daunting. It was evident that to lead this project, there must be a personal resolve to influence change at Grace United Methodist Church. The project leader must be a prophetic leader who possesses the capacity to lead spiritually and strategically. This project requires a person who possesses a non-anxious presence; that person must be able to hear the voice of all affected individuals within our worshipping community and develop consensus and understanding to bring about change. It will be important to create a safe physical and emotional environment where individuals will feel comfortable to voice their issues and also to address their own personal concerns and to ascertain how it informs their feeling about our community. Questions as to why have the beloved community become fractured and, even more so, why isn't anyone speaking to this malady or attempting to address it would be asked. Responses to these questions must encourage dialogue rather than create friction. The negative fallout that we have experience from this situation is that our millennials have removed themselves from the worshipping community. Having done so, they have not been challenged or pursued.

System theory proponents claim that communities such as Grace United Methodist Church are inundated with anxiety. "The leader will need to challenge the congregation, anxious souls as they may be, to use anxious times as a springboard for

change, learning and different functioning. What is at stake may be the very vocation to which God has called and gathered these people together – their ministry and mission.”⁶⁰ “The ability to defuse and debrief anxiety and create hope by separating the problem, teasing out the ‘saturated part of the story from the healthier, functional parts of the story’ is mission critical to eradicate the ‘stuckness’ of the interlocked system for which the current situation may be symptomatic. Assessing ages, stages, and life cycle stressors of the people within the system; identifying stressed triangles; noticing where the system is stuck or deadlocked in power struggles helps parties to see power struggles as fruitless and destructive. It encourages them to give them up and seek alternatives. It also enables one to enact tension-reducing actions that might restore calm and good sense.”⁶¹

The Individual who will take on this initiative must be proficient in identifying, tracking, validating, and addressing the crisis pain. That person must also be able to engage and convince the leaders of the church to assume responsibility for the outcome of the investigative analysis.

Although this project does not utilize a narrative system approach, the principles for problem resolution, as postulated by Dr. William Presnell,⁶² serve to inform a reasonable path to uncover the issue and find a solution while remaining self-differentiated as a leader. The cues that this writer find necessary as we attempt to

⁶⁰ Peter I. Steinke, *Congregational leadership in Anxious Times. Being Calm and Courageous no Matter What*, (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2006), 14.

⁶¹ Dr. William Presnell, lecture, Drew University, March 2015.

⁶² Ibid.

diagnose this quagmire is “staying self-differentiated and non-reactive as you listen to the multiple stories that will emerge” as to the cause for the millennials’ absence among us. The ability to coach people within our Lay Advisory Team and the general Grace United Methodist Church’s worshipping community on “how to relate to others in self-differentiated ways and solve problems rather than do battle will emerge as mission critical to our success.”⁶³ As a prophetic leader the ability to take and analyze notes of systemic issues such as stressed triangles, cutoffs, fusion, failed communication, and abuse, over- and under-functioning will be important in outlining a solution to this malady. As suggested by Dr. Presnell:

Framing the situation theologically, at least for yourself, unbalance the stuck system by joining the symptom or using self-differentiated statements, see if you can help tease apart the problem part of the system story from the healthier and more hopeful story. Watch for sparkling moments that are moments of Kairos, when hints of a new and more hopeful future emerge. Help bring this out and encourage it. Define it as a moment of grace. Work with the team, to co-author a new and preferred story that may be emerging. Lead a visioning process. interweaving biblical/faith stories, reviving useful pre-crisis coping behaviors, exploring resources for support and learning while prescribing and contracting for constructive behaviors, future work and following up with contacts.⁶⁴

This will be mission critical to assuring resolution to this dilemma and to reconnect the millennials to Grace United Methodist Church.

⁶³ Dr. William Presnell, lecture, Drew University, March 2015.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

To speak of difference or to attempt to develop an explanation as to why millennials are disconnected from our worshipping community must justifiably start with a commitment to understand who they are. There are three rational positions from which we could respectfully and justifiably understand the millennials within our beloved community; these positions are understood through biblical, theological, and social lenses. While most of the prior chapter did elucidate the social rationale, as we endeavor to know the millennials, the following narrative will attempt to establish and explore a biblical and theological basis to further understand the millennial generation.

An examination of millennials through a biblical lens must explore imagery advanced by Jesus Christ himself. These images are those of the Good Shepherd and the sheep, the ten pieces of silver, and the redemption of the prodigal son, as found in the Bible. Incidentally, by today's standard, the prodigal son would fit the profile of a millennial as was presented in the prior chapter. By looking through the lenses of these biblical images, we could better understand the peculiar mores of this group of seventy eight million individuals called millennials that currently live among the beloved community. They are sitting in the abyss of a rift that has disconnected them from the worshipping community and the church. This group is currently silent and non-participatory; our efforts must work to change that.

We must get to know them – The Lost Sheep

Jesus said "I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep. But he that is a hireling, and not the shepherd whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catches them, and

scattered the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep.⁶⁵

The parable of the Good Shepherd underscores a biblical and theological rationale for pursuing an understanding of Jesus' role in leading and caring for his sheep. It models his expectation as to how his disciples must reach out for the least of these. Biblical scholars posit that the imagery presented by the metaphor of a shepherd is a common Old and New Testament biblical theme. It exemplifies certain "heart qualifications," that is, of a Godly leader who demonstrates tender, sincere, intimate, loving attentiveness to their flock. They guide, correct, protect and feed their flock. The Good Shepherd is contrasted to a hireling who receives pay for his job but has no heart for the flock. His dedication to the flock is only up to the point that it benefits him. The hireling never takes time to care for them, to love them, far less to know them.

The Biblical narrative shows the Good Shepherd engages the sheep out of a labor of love and in spite of himself. He gives his life for the sheep and leads them wisely. Unlike the hireling who leaves when the process of care becomes taxing, troublesome and demands understanding and mercy, the Good Shepherd stays committed to the sheep.

The Bible speaks of the Good Shepherd through the lens of John's gospel as a leader that knows them. They know him by virtue of his commitment to them. The shepherd has the simplest but most intimate connection to the sheep. He has voice recognition among the sheep. He is authenticated and knows of them by his actions. He is the door; he gives them life and will give his life for them. This is the shepherd who envisions that all sheep, even those that "are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and

⁶⁵ (John 10:2 – 13, [Kings James Version])

they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (Jn. 10:16 [KJV]). They all shall be engrafted into his fold.

The gospel of Matthew⁶⁶ corroborates John’s acclaim of the importance of this imagery as we consider pastoral care to the beloved community and more specifically the millennials. Jesus obviously sees the sheep metaphor as associated with the nation of Israel.⁶⁷ Through the lens of Matthew’s gospel, Jesus’ mission in life is primarily to this nation. He makes no effort to hide his commitment and passion to “Jewish nationalism;” he laments that his people are lost. He warns that we should “beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matt. 7:15 [KJV]). Sheep appear to be passive and gentle. They are not monolithic in appearance or mannerism. Like our millennials, even with a dissenting philosophy, they are a positive group of individuals among the beloved community. Individuals who are mal-intended see the assumption of the sheep’s identity as the best disguise to infiltrate and destroy the beloved community.

In light of this information, Jesus asks this question in response to his critics:

What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, rejoice with me. For I have found my sheep which was lost.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ (Matt. 7:15, [KJV])

⁶⁷ (Matt.10:6 [KJV])

⁶⁸ (Luke 15: 4-6 [KJV])

It is in the light of these narratives and Jesus' question that we could suggest that every sheep is important to Jesus. We, as leaders among the beloved community are mandated by Jesus to protect, guide and seek out his sheep as we nurture them.

Responsibility to our task transcends our own biases. Jesus expects that we engraft the sheep into the beloved community, with the understanding that his directive is not a request but a command. It starts with our knowledge of Jesus the Master, and seeing the sheep through his eyes, in spite of their flaws. To that end, Jesus says to the apostle Peter:

Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my Lambs. He saith unto him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, feed my sheep. He saith unto him again the third time, Simon, son of Jonah, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, feed my sheep.⁶⁹

The frustration of Peter's response is fully commensurate with the intentionality of Jesus' question and his command. In theological circles, the fact that Jesus questions Peter's love three times is important and merits exploration. It is generally accepted that the love Jesus spoke of is known as "Agape love;" this love is unemotional and unconditional. Jesus' question of Peter's love to the sheep was to correct Peter's response which indicated that his love, as professed of them to Jesus, was out of common interest, an emotional association as to a brother (*phileo*). Jesus, through what appeared to

⁶⁹ (John 21:15-17, [KJV])

be the insistency of his questions, was provoking Peter to embrace a higher ideal of a love that was unconditional. That is obviously what it will take to love those who are on the fringes; those who do not subscribe to the established ideals, norms or mores of society as we know it. It is a perfect picture of the millennial generation that we are endeavoring to understand.

Having established the type of love that is imparted unemotionally, but logically and dispassionately, Jesus instructed Peter to feed the lamb. The Lambs are obviously defenseless and totally dependent on the shepherd. The negative colloquial expression that sheep are dumb is amplified, as if on steroids, when young ones (lambs) are factored into the equation. Feeding the lambs requires a degree of humility and a pastoral heart that looks beyond their fault. Their fractured nature, abnormal habits and incessant drive to violate all established boundaries requires patience and empathic caring. Jesus' mandate is to feed them! To be effective in this job, one must get to know them.

Jesus' second iteration to Peter, to feed his sheep, reinforces his mandate with detailed precision. The word "feed" emerges from the Greek lexicon as the word *Poimaino*; it means to shepherd and implies "the whole office of the shepherd, guiding, guarding, folding of the flock as well as leading it to nourishment."⁷⁰ The flock is not limited to the sheep who are usually obedient but also include the lambs, the goats, the dogs, and the hirelings. Evidently, Jesus' mandate to Peter is that his responsibility is to tend to all living creatures within the flock, regardless of their peculiar foibles or behaviors. Peter had to be dispassionate and unbiased as he mastered the art of knowing

⁷⁰ Spiros Zodhiates, Th.D. *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible, Lexical aids to the New Testament*, (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1991), 1750.

his flock. It is in Peter's knowing the flock that a true expression of Jesus' love for his sheep is revealed; so too, it is in us getting to know the millennials that we would mirror Jesus' mandate and better understand how to reconnect them to the believing and beloved community.

We must get to know them – The Lost Coin

The Lost Coin focuses our attention on the value of every life and relationship. It focuses our attention on the power of redemption and the jubilation vested in the reconnection of one individual who was degenerated, disenfranchised or marginalized. Finding the lost coin celebrates the power of redemption! The Amplified Bible best describes this account in the book of Luke;⁷¹ it states:

Thus I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one, especially wicked, person who repents (changes his mind, abhorring his errors and misdeeds, and determine to enter upon a better course of life) than over ninety-nine righteous persons who have no need of repentance. Or that woman, having ten silver drachmas (each one equal to a day's wages), if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and look carefully and diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it; she summons her (women) friends and neighbors, saying, rejoice with me for I have found the silver coin that I have lost. Even so, I tell you, there is joy among and in the presence of the angels of God over one (especially) wicked person who repents (change his mind for the better, heartily amending his ways, with abhorrence of his past sins).

The moral of the story places significant value on the coin that was lost. It celebrates the reunion with the owner and the added value it brings to the nine coins that

⁷¹ (Luke, 15: 7- 10, [Amplified Bible])

were safe. Only through reconciliation of the lost one is the community of ten made whole. As with the other parable presented by Jesus, the efforts of the shepherd and so too the efforts of the owner of the coin made reconciliation possible. By working diligently to find the lost, and that is without blaming the lost, they were able to reestablish the beloved community. What is significant within this narrative is the effort that is vested in finding the lost coin. Jesus presents this woman as caring; she understands and values her possessions. She sees it as an extension of herself. This is the fruits of her labor; it's a representation of her self-worth. To lose it is to lose part of her tangible value which is equated to one day's work. Her action in retaining that value is to light a candle, sweep the house and "seek diligently" to find the coin. The power is in the 'seeking.'

The notion of seeking is to acquire something that is lacking and not yet found. It is understood that given that it is missing, it is impossible to be "self-actualized" until it is found and reconnected to the whole. While the text suggested that the sheep got lost naturally, the coin seemingly got lost accidentally. Regardless of the circumstance, there was always a diligent effort to reunite them to their community.

We must get to know them – The Lost Son

Thomas Nelson,⁷² the great biblical commentator will also suggest that the parable of the "Lost Son" reinforces a basic priority of Jesus' ministry and message that we must emulate as we endeavor to reconnect the millennials to our beloved worshipping community. The notion of exercising patience, pliability and understanding for a

⁷² Thomas Nelson, Inc., New Kings Study Bible, Second Edition, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1985).

dissenting voice is telecasted through the narrative of this parable. The parable amplifies the malady of a generational divide and the ensuing sociopolitical and economic pressures that fractured a family and tested the fiber of their relationship and their love for each other. It also attests to the power of mercy and love folded in a redemption story, even when the more rebellious of two youths appeared undeserving.

The parable of the Lost Son⁷³ provides a great segue as we attempt to understand the reason why the millennial constituents are choosing not to become an integral part of the beloved community. It might even suggest what it takes to attract them back into the believing community.

Jesus delved into the mind of a young man. By today's standard, the young man will be considered a millennial amidst the "generational divide." He was the younger of two brothers. His personal priority seemingly was materialistic; he was driven by a selfish sense of entitlement which was supported by an indulgent father. An obvious flaw in this young man's personality is that he was conceited, cavalier, opinionated and self-determined; he rebelled against the rule of law, the ideals of family and society. Gathering all that he had, he moved to the fringes of society to explore and shape his own destiny. As with any journey that has its genesis in relativity, flawed ideals and distorted philosophical premises, the vicissitudes of life disrupted that journey and brought it to an abrupt end.

Jesus' proclamation that "when he came to himself," can be inferred as an emotional and mental experience that catapulted the lost son to a different level of maturity. It was at that point that he sought reconciliation through repentance. The most

⁷³ (Luke; 15:8-10, [Kings James Version])

important part of this story is that the son who got lost willfully could be redeemed. The imagery of a compassionate father models the attitude and posture that must be assumed in reconciling those persons who are different or sitting on the fringes. As with the father, our attitude should reflect undying hope. It must be one where we are expectantly waiting with open arms and love. Our message of reconciliation is vested in the initial contact of forgiveness and our continual action of love and acceptance. These gestures of goodwill open the dialogue. It is proof positive that the father was thinking of the son and is ready to engage a nonjudgmental discourse. The parable ends with the thought: “But it was to make merry, to revel and feast and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and is alive again! He was lost but now is found!”⁷⁴

The Maxwell Leadership Bible⁷⁵ emphasizes that Jesus prioritized the need to seek and save all that were lost or estranged. Jesus told “memorable stories illustrating his priorities. He repeated three accounts that all underscored the priorities; he spoke of familiar people and situations.” This was designed to reinforce his message of seeking and saving the lost.⁷⁶ As with the sheep, this commitment must extend to the reuniting of millennials within the worshipping community. It is mission critical to the viability of the beloved community. The success of the prodigal son’s reconnection to his family was predicated on the father knowing the values and love that he had imparted to his son. It

⁷⁴ (Luke 15:32, [Amplified Bible])

⁷⁵ John C. Maxwell, Tim Elmore 2nd edition, *The Maxwell leadership bible*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publisher, 2007), 1284.

⁷⁶ (Luke. 15:4-32, [Kings James Version])

was also annexed to the hope that the power of these values will one day return him to his home and the acceptance and celebration of a forgiving and beloved community.

CHAPTER 4

A Literary Review

Millennials: A Macro View of Who they are

Any attempt to narrow the focus or address the problem of disassociation and disconnect of the millennials at Grace United Methodist Church will be untenable unless a macro overview of millennials at large precedes the more parochial focus of this project. Assessing millennials at large and ascertaining if there are any similarities with the focus group at Grace United Methodist Church will be a more prudent approach on this journey to reconnect them to our worshipping community. Additionally, gleaning from other research and a larger body of work on this issue will provide greater clarity, reliability, and intellectual depth to the project, thereby authenticating it as a bonafide initiative.

Our Lay Advisory Team (LAC) examined the work of Thom and Jess Rainer;⁷⁷ as part of our initial attempt to obtain a broader understanding of the millennial constituents who live within the continental United States of America. In their words:

Millions of young people take drugs, have careless sex habits, and are affected by the worst of the pop culture. Many millennials live in poverty, have absentee parents, and face a life of little hope. Thousands commit crimes and thousands are victims of crimes. We understand that, in any generation, horrific stories can be found and told. But we are not looking at all the variant pieces of a generation as much as we are examining its center of gravity and its trends. From this higher level perch, we can view a generation with optimism.

⁷⁷ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials, connecting to Americas largest Generation*, (Nashville Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011).

Millennials are young, educated, technologically savvy, casually dressed, not religious, working, and most unmarried. The population of brown and black people currently account for 40% of the millennial constituents within the continental United States of America.⁷⁸

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons⁷⁹ describe the millennials as challenging the rules, innately skeptical, undertaking unique and personal journeys, but irreverent and blunt. They describe them as preferring casual and comfortable rather than stuffy and stilted. They are eclectic in their lifestyle and are non-committal with their religious preferences.

Douglas Main⁸⁰ writing in Live Science magazine, describes millennials as “Generation Me” and noted that in the public square, “There is a spirited, if not tiresome, debate about whether Millennials are self-entitled narcissists or open-minded do-gooders.” Generally, however, among millennials, there seem to be more of an emphasis on the self than in previous generations, and is one reason why this group has been called “Generation Me.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials, connecting to Americas largest Generation*, (Nashville Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 5.

⁷⁹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UN Christian, what a new generation really thinks about Christianity...and why it matters; Ground breaking Research from the Barna Group*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 19.

⁸⁰ Douglas Main, Who Are the Millennials? July 9, 2013 08:49pm ET.

⁸¹ Ibid.

In an exposé on millennials, Leah A. Reynolds,⁸² presented her views to a target audience of “for profit corporations.” Her narrative is summarized below for a comprehensive overview of this millennial generation and lends to our comparative assessment of how this generation is perceived across several professional disciplines and industries. Her summation is as directly quoted below:

Demographics:

- No definitive agreement on birth years; experts say somewhere between 1978 and 1995; most say 1981 to 1993
- Children of Baby Boomers
- Younger siblings of Gen Xers
- Largest generation (75 million) after the Boomers (80 million), compared to the Gen Xers (40 million)
- 38% of millennials identify themselves as “non-white”
- Positioned in history to be the next “Hero generation”

Characteristics:

- Techno-savvy
- Connected...24/7
- Self-confident
- Optimistic
- Hopeful
- Independent
- Comfortably self-reliant
- Determined & Goal oriented
- Success driven
- Lifestyle centered

⁸²Leah A. Reynolds, *Generational Change and Total Rewards Communication*: (Deloitte Consulting LLP, Copyright 2005).

- Diverse
- Inclusive
- Global-, civic- and community-minded
- Pulling together
- Service oriented
- Entrepreneurial

Beliefs:

- Education is good
- Integrity is admirable
- Parents are role models

Defining life experiences:

- Grew up basking in “The Decade of the Child”—children on a pedestal vs. “children should be seen and not heard”
- Fathers became more involved in parenting
- Came of age during a time of incredible change and scandal within modern organizations
- Most “hovered over” generation ever in our country; unprecedented parental supervision and advocacy

Defining life events:

- Columbine High School
- 9-11
- Enron, WorldCom, etc.
- War in Iraq
- Nuclear threat from North Korea
- Emerging nations—China, India Impact of technological advancement...
- Never experienced life without computers
- Reverse accumulation of knowledge—the younger you are, the more you know
- All information is a click away; so is the competition
- The world is a click away

Millennials at work:

- Work well with friends and on teams
- Collaborative, resourceful, innovative thinkers
- Love a challenge
- Seek to make a difference
- Want to produce something worthwhile
- Desire to be a hero
- Impatient
- Comfortable with speed and change
- Thrive on flexibility and space to explore
- Partner well with mentors
- Value guidance
- Expect respect

Reynolds (2005), on describing the millennials, presented the following reputable summation of professional quotes⁸³ about them; these quotes capture the professional sentiments of industrial and intellectual moguls. It surmises how these millennials are perceived:

The Millennial Generation will entirely recast the image of youth from downbeat and alienated to upbeat and engaged—with potentially seismic consequences for America (Neil Howe and William Strauss, “Millennials Rising.)”
 “Boomers have given them the confidence to be optimistic about their ability to make things happen, and Xers have given them just enough skepticism to be cautious...If you want to remember just one key word to describe Millennials, it’s realistic (Lynne C. Lancaster and David Stillman, when Generations Collide).”
 “They know the way things go down and are no longer naïve about the workings of the world and the intentions of businesses and other organizations (Peter Sheahan, *Generation Y: Thriving and Surviving with Generation Y at Work*).”
 “Although they are better educated, more techno-savvy, and quicker to adapt than those who have come before them, they refuse to blindly conform to traditional

⁸³ Leah A. Reynolds, *Generational Change and Total Rewards Communication*: (Deloitte Consulting LLP, Copyright 2005).

standards and time-honored institutions. Instead, they boldly ask, ‘Why?’ (Eric Chester from “Employing Generation Why?”)

“They combine the teamwork ethic of the Boomers with the can-do attitude of the Veterans and the technological savvy of the Xers. At first glance, and even at second glance, Generation Next may be the ideal workforce—and ideal citizens (Ron Zemke, Claire Raines and Bob Filipczak, *Generations at Work*).

Across several professional disciplines and industries, it is agreed that this generation is different, but loaded with possibilities that continue to reveal its seismic potential for the future of humanity. Our Lay Advisory Committee also agreed that, as presented above, it is these uncharacteristic values and behaviors which defy the norm and invoke a conundrum for our committee. Given a different generation, all the socioeconomic incentives and conditions are there to incentivize and connect this generation to the church. Yet, as presented, attendance and participation of this millennial constituency within our church community is nonexistent, or at best, disconnected.

Millennials: A Macro View of What Makes Them Tick!

The experts advance that understanding what make millennials tick must be examined through ‘trifocal’ lenses. One must understand what they believe, what they think, and how they act. Thomas and Jess Rainer⁸⁴ writing about millennials postulated that key incentives to millennials are the ability to remain connected to their family. “Family values may well become one of the main distinguishing marks of the millennials,” since “this generation desires close family relationships, and will make the efforts to keep their families connected.”⁸⁵ Parental involvement seemingly must be deep

⁸⁴ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, *The Millennials, connecting to Americas largest Generation*, (Nashville Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 31.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

and intrusive in order to be satisfying to millennials. Problem resolution and career plans are only actualized through the guidance and input of parents.

Throughout my research, I discovered that Millennials retain the uniqueness of their identity but function best in diversity on all key relational issues. Race, gender, religion, age, and lifestyle become mute as they easily bridge those divides. It is effortless to them since it is who they are. With that mindset, there is this strong belief among millennials, of a future with possibility, inevitability and predictability in their capacity to succeed. They unintentionally embrace the responsibility to make a difference in the world. This is realized in service to others.

The experts on the millennials' perspective, Thomas and Jess Rainer⁸⁶ argue that while they demonstrate altruistic ideals, they are not workaholics and will not compromise leisure and family to excel in any environment. They are quite open to mentors and do understand the power of mentors in their lives. To that end, millennials are described as teachable especially in negotiable forums where their voices are heard. It is important to them to be respected and to be given the opportunity to thrive intellectually and socially. Millennials are recognized as ardent communicators utilizing all available communication platforms. Unlike any other generations, their pliability and sophistication as communicators have redefined the codes related to human interaction and basic etiquette. Another peculiarity among millennials is that financial management appears to present the greatest challenge to most of them.⁸⁷ While money authenticates

⁸⁶ Thom S. Rainer and Jess W. Rainer, "A Millennial's Perspective," *The Millennials, connecting to Americas largest Generation*, (Nashville Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 2.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

and assists in actualizing them, it is the relationship factor that is the most positive driver and motivator among millennials.

Millennials: A Macro View of How They See the World!

As a team, our quest to understand the millennials was challenged considerably. The determination of our Lay Advisory Committee to plow through these macro underpinnings was fueled by my insistence, prodding and appealing about the importance of being well informed. It is only through in depth information that we could assure the best of impact as we aim to understand and reconnect our millennials to our worshipping community.

Our tenacity as a group fueled hope among the team. This synergy broke through the veil that covered this dysfunctionality that existed among our Grace community. Our quest was to stimulate ministry and rewrite our missional code. Our team understood that we had to tap into this new synergy and allow it to fuel this fire of reintegration. When a team is wired correctly, there is collaboration which supports and drives a desire to do more and to reach more people. There is a sense of strong identity to a mantra that says that the community cares for people, and now we are prepared to care for the missing millennials. The emerging diversity and inclusion attest to the fact that tolerance, discernment and longsuffering undergird a deeper spirit of love. In our dynamic setting, there seems to be room for all and a new synergy that tempered the turbulence that is common when confronted by such a tough issue of reintegrating people with strong wills, divergent opinions and fractured trust.

I must confess that Stetzer and Putman⁸⁸ had a great impact on the tenacity of the group as they communicated that: “We are to see the unchurched through three different sets of lenses that include people, population segments, and cultural environments.” It is a process! This appealed to us since it references the emergent generation more specifically, the millennials. “It is about seeing that our work as the church is not complete until God’s kingdom has come home to every tribe living within a given context.”⁸⁹ The process involves an embrace of the call of God, exegeting the community, examining ways God is working in similar communities, finding God’s unique vision for your church and adjusting that vision as you learn the context.⁹⁰

David Kinnaman,⁹¹ suggests that our millennials live in a new technological, social and spiritual reality which “can be summed up into three words; access, alienation and authority:”

- Access is defined as “the changing means and methods of communication and finding information - the digital tools of access - are one of the reasons the next generation’s context is discontinuously different from the past.”
- Alienation is understood to be that cultural shift that leaves teens and young adults feeling separated from the “⁹²structures that undergirds our society.” It

⁸⁸ Stetzer, E. and Putman, D., *Breaking the Missional Code: Your church can become a missionary in your community*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 11-15.

⁸⁹ Stetzer, E. and Putman, D., *Breaking the Missional Code: Your church can become a missionary in your community*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 11-15.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 21-28.

⁹¹ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me. Why Young Christians are leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Baker Books, Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 39.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 44-45.

is rooted “in the massive social changes that began in the 1960s” it is “the drama of dislocation unfolding in the Mosaic generation; a generation gap that is bigger today than ever but it is also a continuation, a deepening of the rifts introduced by the youth culture of the 1960.”

- Authority is being redefined through a broader lens. “The next generation is growing up in a culture in which the authority of the Christian community and obedience to Scripture are much less present in their developmental experiences. Mosaic Christians face an environment in which Christianity’s authority has been greatly diminished in both obvious and subtle ways⁹³.”

It is through that prism that we understand that people’s world view is shaped by “a complex set of background factors that include their perception, their experience, the power of the media, their political agenda, our personal judgement and biases.”⁹⁴ It is therefore difficult given the complexity of opinions among this maddening crowd to pin them down on a set world view.

Gleaning from the internet which has a collection of thoughts, commentaries and articles on how millennials see the world, it was revealed that generally they are portrayed as progressives and liberals. Millennials, as a group, do have an opinion across the spectrum of all things that affect humanity. They are generally viewed as inherently narcissistic; a learned value imposed on them by their “helicopter Baby Boomer parents⁹⁵” or an inherited trait nestled into their DNA through the comfort and access

⁹³ Ibid., 51.

⁹⁴ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UN Christian, what a new generation really thinks about Christianity...and why it matters; Ground breaking Research from the Barna Group*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 29–30.

⁹⁵ Baby Boomers – A generation defined by the boom in U.S. births following World War II. Researcher uses birth years ranging from early 1946- 1964. They are within the 51-69-age range and are defined as community oriented, industrious and values driven. There are about 71 million within the continental U.S.A.

afforded them by society. Should these assumptions be true, it would be justified to suggest that millennials' view of the world might best be summarized through an identification of things that are most important to them. These things we discussed above as we defined who they are.

Millennials: A Macro View of How They See the Church!

The United Methodist Church was birthed through the joining of hands of Bishop Ruben H. Muller, representing the Evangelical United Brethren Church, and Bishop Lloyd C. Wicke of the Methodist Church at the constituting General Conference in Dallas Texas⁹⁶ “The Church shares a common history and heritage with other Methodist and Wesleyan bodies. The lives and ministries of John Wesley (1703-1791) and of his brother Charles, marks the origin of their common roots⁹⁷.”

According to the historical records, organized Methodism in America began as a lay movement. It evolved as responsive and pliable to the changing times, both politically and religiously. To that end, it supplanted other faith groups as the religion of the masses. The story is told of the effectiveness of circuit riding preachers and lay pastors who knitted the church into a connectional system. The hymn “And are we yet alive to see each other’s face”⁹⁸ served as the mantra of sacrificial service among young men that committed their lives to itinerancy; who in doing so worked ardently, mirroring the practice of Wesley to consolidate and expand their ministries. The United Methodist

⁹⁶ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 9.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *The United Methodist Hymnal, Book of United Methodist Worship*, (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 553.

Church has developed a rich legacy of being on the cusp of change. Compared to other denominations, the church's history attests to a responsiveness to sociopolitical changes: the abolition of slavery, the suffrage movement, the evolution of women from prophetic to episcopal leaders are part of the great legacy of this great church that demonstrates her responsiveness to change.

The Wesley's journey is not unique in that they followed in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul, their father in the faith. He too was a young adult, propelled by a fervent desire for the Jewish faith. Motivated by his personal zeal and commissioned by the higher Jewish religious echelon, he persecuted the early Christian Church⁹⁹ until he himself became a defender and an advocate for the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is presumed to be thirty three years of age at the inception of his Christian ministry;¹⁰⁰ and by our standard, he was a millennial!

The Wesley brothers built a church that is now challenged by changing cultural mores. Their motivation in antiquity was fueled by disenchantment with the status quo. The records show that their actions rebuffed the thinking of the Church of England. Stetzer and Putman¹⁰¹ best described that thinking as "far thinking and far-reaching about international missions but failing to reach the people in the shadows of their steeples." Currently, an elusive part of our missional quest is a failed service to our millennials who

⁹⁹ (Acts 9:1-31, [King James Version])

¹⁰⁰ Janet Meyers Everts. 1995, *The Apostle Paul and his times: Christian History Timeline*, Boone, IA, Christianity today.

¹⁰¹ Stetzer, E. and Putman, D., "Transition to Missional Ministry," *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 5.

seemingly are disenfranchised, disengaged and sitting at the edge of our worshipping community. The actions of the United Methodist Church today is replicating and fueling the same reaction among our millennials.

This lethargic posture assumed by our millennials might not be the direct response of a failing United Methodist Church. It might be the reaction to a culture shift of opinion toward the church at large. There is a tsunami of negative perceptions that have certainly influenced the world at large; it must be factored into our discussion since it also impacted on our great United Methodist Church.

With this in mind, our committee remained focused on understanding these millennials. This was important if we are to continue in our attempt to reconnect them to our beloved community. The question that arose among our team was that on a macro level, what does the data say about how millennials view of the church within the continental United States of America?

Dan Kimball¹⁰² speaks of the Emerging generations (18-35yrs old) as leaving the church to be disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ! He posits that there is disenchantment with the methodology used in the teaching of disciples of the church. This has served to negate a positive perception of the church. In his words, emergent generations' view of the church is understood through the lens of things they wonder about; they wonder if:

- What they have been taught of community is really Biblical community?
- What they have been taught of evangelism is the right way to think about and share the gospel of Jesus?
- Why isn't the church speaking of the Kingdom of God?
- "Why most Christians don't take interest in social justice."

¹⁰² Dan Kimball, *Emerging Worship, Creating Worship Gathering for New Generations*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004), xii.

- “Why preaching has turned the beautiful and mysterious story of God and man into self-help guru.”

It is because there is not a response in action or words to these questions that our young adults are disillusioned with their perception of the church and are leaving the church. They love Jesus, but not the church!

David Kinnaman¹⁰³ advances that there are six themes that summarize the emergent (18-35yrs old) generation’s view of the church; they see us as:

- “Hypocritical - saying one thing and doing another – and they are skeptical of our morally superior attitudes. They say Christians pretend to be something unreal, conveying a polished image that is not accurate. Christians think the church is the only place for virtuous and morally pure people.”
- “Too focused on getting converts. Outsiders wonder if we genuinely care about them. They feel like targets rather than people, they question our motives when we try to help them ‘get saved,’ despite the fact that many of them have already tried Jesus and experienced church before.”
- “Anti-homosexual. Outsiders say that Christians are bigoted and show disdain for gays and lesbians. They say Christians are fixated on curing homosexuals and on leveraging political solutions against them.”
- “Sheltered. Christians are thought of as old fashioned, boring and out of touch with reality. Outsiders say we do not respond to reality in appropriately complex ways, preferring simplistic solutions and answers. We are not willing to deal with the grit and grime of people’s life.”
- “Too political. Another common perception of Christians is that we are too overly motivated by a political agenda that we promote and represent politically conservative interests and issues. Conservative Christians are often thought of as right-wingers.”
- “Judgmental. Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others. They say we are not honest about our attitudes and perspectives about other people. They doubt that we really love people as we say we do.”

¹⁰³ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me. Why Young Christians are leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 27-28.

While these views are “candid, irreverent and brazen,”¹⁰⁴ these views that must be answered in demystifying the current disconnect among millennials. It is these views that must also be assessed against the opinions of millennials within our worshipping community at Grace United Methodist Church.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 28.

CHAPTER 5

Hard to love but can't afford to lose them

Our View

It might be safe to theorize that sometimes, as Methodists, “we tend to think that true missional engagement is not necessary in our paganized, secularized, spiritualized North American culture.¹⁰⁵” As part of a connectional, itinerant system, Grace United Methodist Church struggles to conceptualize mission outside these prescribed lenses. We ardently service all the missionary needs as stipulated to us by the global ministerial arm of the United Methodist Church. We further endeavor to discern other needs abroad that we could potentially ascribe individual ownership and could feel a bit closer to God as we service these needs. What about under our steeple? What about those who are among us, but silently sitting on the fringes, waiting for the moment when they are confirmed and then go off to college? This seems like the moment of their liberation since, once they leave, they do not seek to be reconnected as worshippers within our believing community.

The concept of mission has evidently been lost in translation and our young millennials do not seem to receive it. Within my ministry setting, our current malady could only be solved on a new paradigm which postulates that “missional thinking focuses on doing mission everywhere. It focuses us to see our geographical context

¹⁰⁵ Cardoza-Orlandi, C. F, *Mission an Essential Guide*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2002), 13.

through the lenses of people, groups, population segments, and cultural environments¹⁰⁶”

We must do mission everywhere and best from home first. We must focus on the young adults of Grace UMC, St Albans. Our lackluster approaches to confront difficult issues and especially this malady must be remedied since this is the lynchpin to reconnect the millennials to our beloved community. Our work on this project is the genesis of a new missional culture that we must embrace at Grace United Methodist Church.

Yes, millennials are hard to love! By just reading about them catapults us into a conundrum of uncertainty. As a church, do we really want to know them? Do we have the sagaciousness and tenacity as part of this project to comparatively assess the millennials among our worshipping community? Do we have the temerity to ask the hard questions and to be brave enough to ascertain if the attitude and reasons that our millennials at Grace United Methodist Church are failing to connect or return to our worshipping community is the same as is evident in the public square?

Who is our Focus Group?

The young adults at GUMC¹⁰⁷ who are referenced in this narrative are about forty two individuals that live within a two-mile radius of the church. Another two dozen should be added as millennials who are currently at colleges outside the state of New York or living beyond the two-mile radius of our church.

These GUMC young adults have families within the church and have grown up as part of the community at GUMC. They attended Sunday school and have graduated from the ‘Epworth Choir’ (5yrs – 12yrs) through the ‘Wesley Choir’ (13yrs – 17yrs). As

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Acronym that will be used hereafter to refer to the Grace United Methodist church of St. Albans, NY 11412.

active participants within our community, they were part of the Methodist Youth Fellowship (18yrs – 26yrs) and were fully involved in church including mission outreach to foreign lands.

These mission outreach events are sponsored as scholarship from other committees within GUMC. It is usually awarded to the young adults as part of a competitive process. While the award of these scholarships is a positive initiative, it somehow is translated as a rite of passage to these young adults and a reward for consistency in ministry as teenagers. Once these awards are distributed, the young adults go off to college; about 90% of them are not returning to become a viable part of our worshipping community. Our GUMC community has unfortunately accepted this gradual exodus as the norm and so too have our young adults; they have embraced the same narrative as the norm. As a result, our retention rate among our young adults is abysmal. Outside of the standard lamentation of our congregation, we have not done much to correct this.

The general consensus of our Lay Advisory Committee is that the disposition of our millennials at GUMC is not unlike the descriptions that we presented about millennials at large earlier in our narrative. They are complicated to understand! While they are at times loving and respectful, they do temperamentally ‘shape shift’ and morph into individuals that are quite impetuous, narcissistic, and self-serving. We have noted that unless their needs and voices are heard, they respectfully divorce themselves from agenda or activities that do not service their emerging needs. These young adults are not unlike other neighborhood millennials, except for their professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They dress the same and speak the same language. In a relaxed forum, it will not

be uncommon to hear the vernacular of the streets with some expletives that will be followed by immediate contrition and open verbal repentance. Thank God!

Commitment to discipleship is waning among them. Attestation to their faith as handed down to them by their parents is seemingly as tentative as their attendance and engagement within our worshipping community. Our unscientific analysis also shows that the millennials at GUMC are not unlike the millennials that we have described earlier in this narrative. The stark similarities among this group, regardless of geographical location, ethnic or gender divide is mind boggling. Apart from expected variation in their physical characteristic, their peculiar idiosyncrasy, language of their time, and their culture all unite to make them a phenomenal force that are synergistically aligned. A radical symbiosis of humanity that has morphed into a group called millennials. They too are here, present with us at Grace United Methodist Church.

Hard to love but can't afford to lose them

What makes them tick? – Our Techniques and Experiment of Discovery

As pastor of Grace United Methodist Church, it was obvious to me, even before I took charge of the congregation, that we had a problem. On assignment to the 'Charge'¹⁰⁸, my first 'worshipful experience' preceded my actual appointment start date; it was the funeral of a young adult.

While the experience was a mournful one, the sentiment of love was impressive and overwhelming. There was an incredible show of support. Hundreds of people gathered with an excess of one hundred millennials. At one point, over three dozen millennials

¹⁰⁸ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 159, 2012.

stood at the front of the church as they celebrated the young man's life. They were his personal friends and members who had grown up as part of the GUMC Community. Two Sundays later, as I assumed pulpit responsibility, there was a significant bump in regular attendance. Obvious to me was this absence of millennials. Compared to what was seen at the funeral, they were not there. The Malady of Parochialism at this local church called GUMC became my reality; hence, the aforementioned narrative became important to me: to gather our GUMC community and to ascertain the reason(s) why the millennial constituents are choosing not to become an integral part of our church community. Further, it beckoned me to question: What will it take to attract them and retain them as part of our worshipping community?

We acted urgently, knowing that willful inertia around this malady would only render us victims of this emergent phenomenon that, within our circle of influence, everyone is speaking about, but doing nothing! The opportunity to undertake this issue was timely as I was pursuing a post graduate degree that required a ministry focus that could be identified and resolved as part of a worshipping community initiative. This problem of how to reach millennial young adults was ideal and encapsulated my passion and the sentiment of our GUMC's leadership who felt the pressure of this malady, but could not intelligently speak to it, far less to resolve it. Prudence prevailing, and in an effort to heighten sensitivity and awareness on the issue and among our worshipping community, it was necessary to take the congregation on a journey of self-discovery.

The GUMC worshipping community is upwardly mobile. Minimally, most of the members have a high school diploma or its equivalent. A large number of members in our congregation are college graduates, with a professional subset of educators. This is

considered an asset to us as a church and a great strength among our human resources for ministry. By tapping into this strength, we were able to corral the input of the educators to take the church on a six week journey of discovery by looking at the “generational divide” especially as it relates to how each generation’s world view is tempered by the era in which they were born.

The educators were supposed to challenge our individual perception of community and also to awaken the church’s consciousness of the peculiarity of our generational response to worship and the peculiar mores of each group. Lastly, among this worshipping congregation, which is in excess of three hundred worshippers on a given Sunday, they must endeavor to identify and group the generations that were present. How many silent, boomers, Gen-xers, millennials or Generation Z were present within our worshipping community?

This experience was a powerful one, done within the worship experience and utilizing the advantage of a ‘technologically smart’ worship sanctuary. The PowerPoint presentations and interactive medium snatched the attention of worshippers and jolted them into a present reality that, although we were primarily an African American congregation, we were not monolithic in our experiences and perceptions of the world. We also understood that there were unique differences among us that were influenced by the generational divide. Our appreciation of music, sermon content and delivery, even the worship space, were nuanced based on our peculiar idiosyncrasy that was uniquely carved by the era we were born.

The congregation mentally masticated the information. After eight weeks of teaching and interaction, the highlight of the journey was an activity where each

individual within the congregation personally identified their generation. They spoke of the uniqueness of their generation and celebrated the uniqueness of others. They were given small flags that identified their generation by a unique color. The Yellow flags represented the Silent generation, the Grey identified the Boomers, Red was used for Gen-Xers, Orange for Millennials, and Pink for Generation Z (see appendix VI).

Each generation responded to a roll call of the generations and later was invited to play together in a sand box that was placed at the front of the sanctuary. This activity of identification and self-discovery was celebratory and enlightening. There was somewhat of a juvenile overtone when people laughed as they appreciated each other playing in the sand box. At the end of this experience, the facilitator asked the question as to which color was missing. It was evident that among the three hundred plus flags in the sand box, there were hardly any orange flags. They were noticeably absent!

This was significant, in that it was the first stage of a general sense of heightened awareness of this malady among the congregation. It was from that moment that most of my preaching referenced the absence of this generation and the adverse impact it will have on the longevity of our church if it was not addressed expeditiously. That realization presented the opportunity to segue into an initiation of the project that will enable us to identify the crux of the problem and reconnect our millennials to our GUMC's congregation.

The project started with a series of meetings to inform the congregation of the intended project and to gather personnel to staff a Lay Advisory Committee. The Lay Advisory Committee (LAC) was a group of twelve laypersons with representation from the congregation. This committee was generationally and sexually divergent with 50% of

committee members being Millennials. They worked with me, the Doctor of Ministry candidate, to research, plan and execute all aspect of this professional project.

Our Lay Advisory journal documented the formation of the LAC and the exploratory journey of initial contact with our millennials:

Our Lay Advisory Team was fully functional by September 2015. We met on several occasion utilizing alternative communication media; this made our team relationship building and development easy. After three months, our team was fully coalesced into a functional entity on a mission of discovery. We understood our assignment to determine why the Millennials were not in church and what could be done to reconnect them to GUMC. The group consisted of 12 members all in different generational age groups: Silent, Baby Boomers, Generation -X and Millennials. Our role was to ascertain through data and feedback what factors were keeping them away and what was needed to bring them back. A prayer team of 8 was also formed to pray daily for the LAC team, the millennials, and the church as a whole.

Our role was also to hold Pastor Sylvester accountable: to help gather information, review and be knowledgeable, and to lead us on research of the millennial generation; this will enable us to better understand them. Resource materials were gathered and divided among the committee for our edification and to ensure we were knowledgeable about the topic as we pursued this part of discovery. Pastor Sylvester always seemed knowledgeable and conversant with information that he gave to us or that which we added to the reservoir of information on the millennials. Power point presentation was also utilized; this was a sophisticated addition to our learning process. One thing that was non-negotiable to us as a group was that conclusions and attempts at finding resolutions will only be done when we have methodically gathered, synthesized and analyzed all pertinent information regarding the millennials.

We attended a half- day retreat at the church, where we developed five goals that will provide direction and clarity and also function as a unit of measure for our committee as we endeavor to calibrate our journey or determine, if indeed, that we had achieved our objectives. Our committee identified two locations that we visited to conduct our focus groups. Decision around the development of focus groups evolved out of Pastor Sylvester's leadership. It was also necessary to assure reliability of the project and to tap into the thought processes of the millennials while once more reestablishing some level of familiarity with them.

In November, we formally met with GUMC's worshipping community. This was part of our agreed process to share information, involve the congregation, and bring awareness to them about the absence of the Millennials among our worshipping community. We also agreed to host two other informal church forums and to conduct, minimally, two exploratory sessions with millennials from the GUMC worshipping community prior to establishing a questionnaire, or including another church for any type of focused discussion.

On Saturday December 5th, Pastor Alpher Sylvester, Pastor Benny Custodio, Antoinette Martin, Mother Pansy Keys and Jacqueline Lane met with the millennials whom were once very active at Grace UM Church. Fourteen millennials were formerly invited and were in attendance. Additionally, millennials belonging to our LAC also were in attendance as part of the focus group. They wanted their voices to be heard aside from being members of our team.

Project Goals

The Lay Advisory Committee identified five goals that would be mission critical to accomplish this project. They were as follows:

Goal I. Understanding the Project

Utilize every forum and information that is accessible to the Committee to understand and authenticate the problem.

The Committee utilized the Percept Report, the First View and Mission Impact documents. The information was shared among members to assure understanding of the project and the potential scope of the project as a collaborative journey. It must be noted that Focus Groups were used in the initial phase of the project and before the design of any questionnaire. It was convened to participate in a guided discussion about the reason for the absence of millennials from our church community. Their feedback provided useful information to organize salient questions as we expanded our research and scope while delving into the reason for the millennials absence.

To negate potential bias with our findings, the focus group was expanded beyond the Grace Church community. It solicited the opinions of millennials from the Kings Highway United Methodist Church's (KHUMC) community which has a viable and comparatively larger millennial constituent. The synthesize and analysis of information gathered assured greater reliability in the design of the questionnaire.

Additional forums enabled us to assure that we were establishing a true social basis for pursuing the project. It divided the responsibility between the Lay Advisory Committee members to ensure that the project remained theologically and biblically sound.

Goal II. Data Gathering and Fact Finding:

Conduct research on the intricacies of “the survey methodology” and design a pertinent survey instrument to gather information as to why the millennial constituents at Grace United Methodist Church were choosing not to become an integral part of our worshipping community.

Our targeted interviewees were primarily millennials. Utilizing the focus group forum, we attempted to ascertain what was required to attract them.

Goal III. Data Analysis to Uncover Findings:

Quantify the data gathered and identify a prevailing dominant narrative or trend in response to why millennials of GUMC do not return to the worshipping community.

The Committee members worked together to analyze the data collected. The task was to identify dominant themes from among the survey responses.

Goal IV. Development of A Plan:

Develop a comprehensive plan based on the information gathered that will identify and itemize critical ingredients needed to reconnect with our millennials at GUMC.

Utilizing the information garnered from the responses from the millennial questionnaire, the Committee itemized the main and recurring themes of suggested ingredients that would arouse millennials’ participation in worship services at GUMC.

Goal V. Implementation of the Plan:

Design and conduct a pilot worship service that will incorporate the desires of the Millennials. Assess outcomes to formulate a next steps agenda for sustaining the plan.

Based on information gathered, we structured and designed a worship experience to gain the interest of our millennial constituents and to anticipate a higher retention rate in the time allowed. This worship service was designed to reflect their desired worship style. We anticipated that this plan will augment our effort to further integrate our millennial constituents within our worship community and experience.

Hard to love but can't afford to lose them

How they see the World – Their Wish List!

Stetzer and Putman are convinced that spiritual leadership is ratified through deep spiritual formation. The spiritual and professional maturation for a pastor as a leader is tried and tested when confronted by voices that speak truth to power from the margin. Inevitably, the placidity of established community becomes emotionally turbulent when these voices herald their discontent.

To be an effective leader one must become a change agent, a translator who bridges the rift and heals the divide. Such a metamorphosis is evident in Paul the apostle's transition as he followed in the footsteps of a young carpenter of Nazareth named Jesus, who was the Christ. The Biblical accounts posit that at the age of thirty, Jesus joined a revolutionary movement alongside John the Baptist. They preached a new gospel advocating remission of sin through water baptism and exclusive of temple sacrifice. They refocused people's attention to a spiritual journey that involved personal seeking of the Kingdom of God rather than a corrupt temple system.

Their outlandish and revolutionary message echoed the sentiment of the masses. Their leadership was transformative; it rebuffed the religious establishment and its associated power structure. Their youthful zeal challenged the sociopolitical system of their time. Their influence was curtailed, only by an unlikely alliance of religious and political elites. This resulted in their death. They paid the ultimate sacrifice in communicating and responding to the 'wish list' of the masses.

So too, Paul the apostle's maturation was spirit-led and responsive to the voices from the margin. These voices screamed discontentment with the status quo and begged for liberation to be true spiritual worshippers. The words that Jesus spoke and Paul penned as part of the New Testament are the compilation of responses to complaints of ailing humanity. It was the antidote to the venom of a dysfunctional church that was poisoning humanity. Like Jesus, Paul had his finger on these ailments. Unlike the establishment, their ministries serviced the needs and responded to the voices of the masses of their time.

Responding to the voice of the masses, especially through messianic lenses usually results in the prophet paying the ultimate sacrifice. Responding through prophetic lenses however, means that ministries recently discounted as non-impactful take on new significance as we seek to be missionaries within our local ministry context. We are forced to be less apathetic and more intentional in breaking our community missional code so that we could be effective missionaries and serve those who God has assigned us to win for his kingdom.

As a committee, we embraced a prophetic mantle as we engaged our millennials. Our LAC's journal documented that:

It was an eye opening and a radical learning experience for us, as well as them. What became evident was that these young adults do have a genuine love for their God, their church and that they hold as sacrosanct the values that were instilled in them while they grew up as children at GUMC; they echoed their appreciation for all those that contributed to their maturation. These millennials had a family reunion. They reminisced about growing up at Grace and touted that their friendship with each other continues even though they are not at Grace any more. We the Silent, Baby Boomers and Gen-xers were told about “Bedside Baptist.” This was their way of saying to us that they do not attend church and the extent of their religious experience is now at their bedside.

Our LAC attempted to guide the discussion and adhere to a list of questions that the committee deemed necessary in validating the process. These questions were the same questions that were asked of Kings Highway UMC, and sought responses to before compiling a survey questionnaire for millennials at large. The following is a summation of the initial dialogue at GUMC:

Grace UM Church Millennials Meeting - 12/5/15

Facilitator: We started unpacking the “generational divide” in our worship service and found out there were few Millennials that are worshipping with us. This means that your presence as a member is not felt. You are absent; our vision for the church’s future is bleak. On this trajectory, the Church can die. You were here once and left. We need to reconnect with you; so this forum is exploratory to find out why you are not here?

Question #1: Why are you not in Church?

Responses:

- What we were being taught wasn’t what was being practiced.
- What we gave to others wasn’t what was given back to us
- The older generation was not setting a good example.
- The people in the church are hypocrites.
- The pressures of society and life are difficult to manage. Things such as job situations, life changes have made it difficult to be so committed.
- If the ‘drive’ (meaning a synergy between their personal needs and what the church will do as ministry for them) was still there we would make it our business to be here.

Question #2: What issues turned you away from the church?

- We were not being fed
- Church became boring
- We did not feel the presence of God at the church
- The church was too political; this took away from a true church experience
- We find that we can connect better with outside people than church people

- Some of us millennials visited other churches but most of us, if we are not working are doing ‘Bedside Baptist.’

Question #3: How can we reconnect with the youths today?

- Just do it!
- We need our ‘drive’ (meaning a synergy between their personal needs and what the church is willing to do as ministry for them) back to be able to help others
- The church has a responsibility to find innovative ways to reach them; ways that are new & dynamic.
- Society and times are changing and the church is not changing. It is static and non-appealing.

Pastor Custodio, as part of the dialogue, informed them that it is a biblical fact that the New Generation was the one who made it into the Promised Land of Canaan. Mother Pansy Keys added that the road back “starts with a desire that you will act on; Life is not what you would always like it to be. Take advantage of the pluses and do not focus on the negatives.”

At the end of our meeting I could see a connection was made with Pastor Sylvester and the Millennials. This was important and probably the first step to reconnect. He was a new pastor that they had not experienced. They left expressing a desire to give it a try at being active again within Grace United Methodist Church. They said Pastor was LIT (living in truth) which is a good thing.

On Friday December 11th, our LAC journeyed to Kings Highway United Methodist Church (KHUMC), Brooklyn N.Y., where Rev. Charmaine Lashley is the pastor. It was there that we hosted a second meeting with millennials. Hosting an event required the availability of refreshment as an incentivizer; also, acknowledging that there were no time constraints. We must engage the moment understanding that a focus forum presents a level playing field where much unexpected things and expressions could be evident at any given moment.

The young adults at KHUMC are much more active in their church. They cited their metamorphosis as happening over time, and because their pastor has been with them

for ten years. They also gave credit to their Pastor for making sure the Holy Spirit is active in their church. They informed us that Spirit-led churches attract them. “Real recognizes real!” Our dialogue with them revealed that they too had similar thoughts on the questions presented. Their responses were rambunctious and uncompromising.

Kings Highway UM Church Millennials Meeting - 12/11/15

Question #1: Why are the Millennial choosing not to become an integral part of our worship community?

Responses:

- Hypocrisy. Older church folks often live a double life, lead a double life. They grow up in the church, are on different committees in the church but are often not doing good things. Millennial are not being an integrated part. They may come on those special Sundays, Christmas Sundays, Easter Sundays. They reason as to why they should come to church if ‘believers’ are doing the same things as they are doing? It’s a double standard. Secondly, If the church says welcome all, but when I come to church you talk about what I’m wearing or spend another 30 minutes talking about my tattoo; then, we find it difficult to be integrated, you’re there, but not part of the community.
- Slighted. If millennials have an idea, the older people turn down the idea and turn them off.
- Belonging. I come into the church I look a certain way. They shake my hand, the way they greet me, and already I feel that I don’t belong. Belonging is important. There has got to be somebody, some design to let people know that they belong. Signs, how the church is, the feeling of I could be a part of what’s going on here. There needs to be something to say what did you get here? There’s a sense of I want to make sure this is not your last time coming here.
- Inclusiveness. When you come into the church the first thing you get is judgment. But you don’t get judged outside. We don’t allow the Holy Spirit to come in and do his job. Inclusiveness. We need to let it be, “Hey, that’s who you are, come in!”
- Boring. Teenagers have a misconception of what church is, like they don’t think that church is a place they can go and have fun. There is a misconception that you have to dress strictly.

Questions #2: What issues turned you away from the church?

- Cultural Shift. There has been a drastic cultural shift. To this generation, the most enticing deception is that this is a generation of inclusiveness. Older people think that they have to meet young people where they are. They try to be cool, like young people. What will entice young people is a church that is spirit lead. Real recognize real. They come at you with

Jesus is real. But they think they need to be cool like they think young people are cool.

- Experiential. The church is a civic experience instead of an experiential relationship with God.
- Misconception. There is a misconception on the validity of other world religion and competition with the world.
- Demystification of God. The music industry has transitioned people away from God. Young people feel they don't need a relationship with God to get what they have or need. The establishment has demystified God.

Question #3: How can we reconnect with the youths today?

- Find the balance. Let the young people play their music. Let the older people have their worship style and find the balance.
- The church, the Methodist Church like things a certain way. A certain structure, they're not really flexible. Like the usher board. They're not giving up their positions, it's very traditional. If you want to bring in the millennial, you have to break tradition. Part of being flexible is trying, making room for new things.
- Blending. Don't get rid of all of the hymns, because they are powerful, but make room for new things.
- Millennials think the church is too extra. They think they have to change their lifestyle, understanding that we don't choose, Jesus chooses.
- Poor teaching. One of the things that keeps people out because they don't teach. It wasn't church that was being taught to me, I was taught to have a relationship with God. It's not all completely about church, but it's a relationship that God is seeking with you. The teaching and the word that is being presented are important to having the millennial come. If they can personalize it and it becomes real. The realness of the experience. If you have this ideal worship service, people still don't come.
- Testimony. This is a big deal even for the leaders of the church. Not to be in their business but to know, "but God." To know that God brought them through.

It was evident from the narratives that the millennials at GUMC and at KHUMC were similar in their opinions and experiences. They were significant similarities, from their view, as to the reasons and situation that have caused millennials to disappear from our United Methodist Churches. The opinions of other millennials, exclusive of these focus groups, were sent to this writer. These external surveys reflected the interest of the researcher in gathering information from other millennials on this topic. Their responses

also demonstrated their desire to have their voices heard. Their responses were as follows:

Question: What will be required to attract Millennial to return to church?

- Image problem. The church has to change its image. People are brainwashed into to thinking a certain way about the church.
- Mutual attraction. One of the most attractive things for Millennial is if millennials could be attractive to each other. We want to have conversations, our experience cannot be relegated to going out into the community to give out tracts.
- Engagement. Make the environment easy to be tapped into. Responsibility. When other millennials come into our worshipping communities, they should see other millennials setting the atmosphere for change. Let the millennial run things.
- Spirituality. Have an intercessory team to attract them Spirit-to-Spirit, not personal.
- Strategy. Get them into a worship experience with tangible things that are germane to their existence and then let the community enter into prayer for ways to keep them.
- Community appeal. The church has to be a community center for all activities and then when that happens, people will buy in and attend church; this starts from the young because they possess a culture of following.

The responses from the above groups of millennials opened some windows to their views about their Church experience. More importantly, these millennials revealed through their wish lists of additions, modifications and exclusions, areas that need to be considered in order to bring them back into the fold. We cannot afford to lose them!

CHAPTER 6

The Road to Developing the Millennials' Wish List!

Data Gathering and Fact Finding

After the focus groups had met, our LAC was ever cognizant that the road to complete this project will be tedious and mentally demanding to all parties involved. It was agreed that a stop gap measure to keep the millennials engaged was to incentivize them to GUMC's worshipping community by giving them the opportunity to spearhead one of our Sunday worship services. This was a home coming event, an 'olive branch' which was meant to reactivate the millennials' passion and to hardwire them to the GUMC community. It was critical to have their presence and their voices heard as we endeavor to build a survey tool and to broaden the work of understanding this malady and further to reconnect and retain them as part of the GUMC community. The expectation and excitement that led up to this service and their presence within the worshipping community added fuel to their passion and their voices as to how they would like to re-enter and assume a place of significance with a voice of significance at GUMC.

This writer's manual recorded the process for data gathering and fact finding. It is documented as follows:

The Preparation: The LAC embarked upon a two prong strategy to conduct data gathering and fact finding. The committee endeavored to understand survey methodology and the appropriate tools that were necessary to conduct a survey. Secondly, the LAC endeavored to understand, analyze and then synthesize the results of the focus group into a usable survey tool. This tool should assure reliability in data gathering for the purpose of this project. A third step to the preparatory process was that our millennials had to be incentivized to provide their email addresses and that of two other friends who potentially would be

interested in completing the survey. Our commitment to make the survey short and user friendly was somewhat an incentive to the millennials within our purview; notwithstanding, we were limited by this free data gathering platform as to the length of the survey.

The results of the questions from the focus groups, when collated by the LAC were lumped into five categories. Each category was supported by questions that will prompt respondents to provide unbiased answers to the questions.

The Testing: The survey tool was developed utilizing the “Survey Monkey” data gathering platform. This automated platform is computer based, user friendly and free. The automated system guided the assigned members on the team as to the best survey tool based on the scope of our project and the data gathering initiative. Our survey tool evolved as a combination of yes or no responses, Likert scale responses and multiple choice responses. This design, in the opinion of the LAC, was sufficient to solicit the responses needed to analyze and obtain information around this dilemma and also to find a solution to fix it.

The tool was initially surveyed in a test environment among the LAC and a few other Baby Boomers and the friends that they had solicited to help. We noted that the responses were slow and some categories were left out, especially if the questions were assumed to be too verbose. This enabled our team to ‘tweak’ the tool in preparation for a live survey.

Next Step: The survey tool, after being fully vetted for reliability was prepared to be transferred into the public domain. We had a compilation of seventy two names and email addresses of potential respondents that were submitted by millennials interviewed at our focus groups. Our committee had stipulated that to ensure integrity of the data, only millennials should complete the survey. They were now partnering with us to expand the survey; they too wanted to ascertain what the general consensus around these questions was. They now had a vested interest in the responses.

Our LAC team had determined that the survey would run for two weeks. We would utilize the telephone to call and impress upon those millennials within our purview to urge their friends to complete the survey. Beyond data gathering, our data analysis will position us with concise information which will provide the needed impetus to develop a plan that will further identify and itemize critical ingredients needed to reconnect with our millennials at GUMC.

How Millennials View the Church

Overcoming the barriers - The point of disconnect

Words emanating from the survey of our GUMC's millennials created some confusion and concern to our LAC. We have found that a rational articulation and understanding of their struggles came through the writing of noted scholars who have taken time to reconcile their concerns. Our GUMC millennials in response to the survey as described above postulated that:

The church should be the place where you can come and be creative even as broken as we all are. We believe that the Methodist Church changes pastors whenever they wanted. A lot of us left when the church changed pastors. People moved! Some millennials went away to college. We feel conflicted by the responsibility trusted on us for the succeeding generation. We went to other churches, but we always come back. As conflicting as this is, that's all that we feel that we have to give, just the gift of presence.

To understand this complex statement which they all seemed to affirm but which remained somewhat elusive to the LAC, we found it necessary to turn to Reggie McNeal¹⁰⁹ in his book, *The Present Future*, says that “we are witnessing the emergence of a new world... The phenomenon has been noted by many who tag the emerging culture as post-Christian. The point is the world is profoundly different than it was at the middle of the last century, and everyone knows it. But knowing it and acting on it are two different things. So far the North American church largely has responded with heavy infusion of denial, believing the culture will come to its senses and come back around to the church.”

The broad narrative thus far has documented a major disconnect with the millennials and the church at large. The findings of our LAC is that at GUMC, there is a major disconnect and obvious points of contention that have driven our millennials away

¹⁰⁹ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six tough questions for the church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 2.

from the worshipping community. The data that we objectively collect will suggest reasons “why” this continues to happen within our community.

Our team summarized the millennials’ viewpoint presented through the focus group. Our finding is that their view is a facsimile of David Kinnaman’s¹¹⁰ summation of the broad reasons that emergent generation offered for dropping out of the church.

According to Kinnaman, “they find the church to be:¹¹¹

Overprotective. The impulse toward creativity and cultural engagement are some of the defining characteristics of the mosaic generation that most obvious. They want to reimagine, recreate, rethink, and they want to be entrepreneurs, innovators, starrers. To mosaics, creative expression is of inestimable value. The church is seen as a creativity killer where risk taking and being involved in culture are anathema. How can the church peel back the tamper resistant safety seals, making space for imaginative risk taking and creative self-expression, traits that are so valued within the next generation?

Shallow. Among mosaics¹¹², the most common perception of churches is that they are boring. Easy platitudes, proof texting, and formulaic slogans have anesthetized many young adults, leaving them with no idea of the gravity and power of following Christ. Few young Christians can coherently connect their faith with their gifts, abilities and passions. In other words, the Christianity they received does not give them a sense of calling. How can the church nurture a deep, holistic faith in Christ that encompasses every area of life?

Anti-science. Many young Christians have come to the conclusion that faith and science are incompatible. Yet they see the most helpful role science plays in the world they inhabit – in medicine, personal technology, travel, care of the natural world, and other areas. What’s more, science seems accessible in a way that the church does not; science appears to welcome questions and skepticism, while matters of faith seems impenetrable. How can the Christian community help the next generation interact with science positively and prophetically?

Repressive¹¹³. Religious rules – particularly sexual mores – feel stifling to the individualistic mindset of young adults. Consequently they perceive the church as

¹¹⁰ Kinnaman, David. *You Lost Me, Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church And Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011), 91.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹¹² Mosaic is the term, according to David Kinnaman, that defines teenagers’ ages: 18yrs. – 29yrs.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 93.

repressive. Sexuality creates deep challenges for the faith development of young people. How can the church contextualize its approach to sexuality and culture within a broader vision of restored relationships?

Exclusive. Although there are limits to what this generation will accept and who they will embrace, they have been shaped by a culture that esteems open-mindedness, tolerance and acceptance. Thus Christianity's claim to exclusivity are a hard sell. The want to find areas of common ground, even if that means glossing over real differences. How can the Christian community link the singular nature of Christ with the radical ways in which he pursued and included outsiders?

Doubtless. Young Christians (and former Christians too) say the church is not a place that allows them to express doubts. They do not feel safe admitting that faith doesn't always make sense. In addition, many feel that the church response to doubt is trivial and fact focused, as if people can be talked out of doubting. How can the Christian community help this generation face their doubts squarely and integrate their questions into a robust life of faith?¹¹⁴

How Millennials view the Church

A future like -The Process and Final Worship Experience

Dianna Butler Bass¹¹⁵ postulates that a trinity of vitality gives shape to “the new village church.” This church possesses all the synergistic elements of a vital ministry where growth compliments mission in fruitful ways. Her Trinity of vitality is explained as the place where tradition, practice and wisdom intersect and informs a believer on their journey which results in community outreach and mission that is pliable and responsive to the needs of changing communities. Authentic growth, with integrity, touches and triggers personal transformation which results in action of service. Tradition not traditionalism enables believers to recover the practices of the early church. These practices then offer them a way that the contemporary or emerging church can use and

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 94.

¹¹⁵ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us, How the neighborhood church is transformed*, (New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins Publisher, 2006), 45-49.

find meaning. Practice not purity assures a robust transformative expression of being in relationship with God. It models the “spirit of liberality, emphasizing acceptance instead of doctrinal purity and diversity rather than uniformity.”¹¹⁶ Lastly, “wisdom not certainty enables people, even in the face of ambiguity to find answers.” Where these types of synergies exist, churches reinvent themselves and never die. A new “missiology” evolves, where “sharing a joyful experience of Jesus, and reaching out to strangers; “where, “how you do church became subordinate to why you do church.”¹¹⁷

Vital congregations are seemingly defined as growing congregations where lives are transformed and meaningful personal relationships are evident. Liberality sets the tone for civil and spiritual discourse. Spiritual practices focus on love for other people and are driven by notions of hospitality, justice, diversity, beauty and healing. Spiritual formation is ratified in opportunities for discernment, contemplation, reflection and testimonies. Diana Bass¹¹⁸ suggests that Jesus’ followers, known as people of the way, were recognized by what they did – practicing hospitality and forgiveness. Through the numerous examples cited in her book, she suggests that “practices invite weary nomads to join the journey to find home, to create a different kind of village.” This village is created around practices and services. Community outreach and mission naturally flows out of these villages and where these basic services exist there are people and there is growth.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Harold Percy, *Your Church Can Thrive, Making the connections That Build Healthy Congregations*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 11.

¹¹⁸ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us, How the neighborhood church is transformed*, (New York, N.Y.: Harper Collins Publisher, 2006), 7.

Stetzer and Putman ¹¹⁹ challenge us to “break the code” wherever we are, abandon our preferences, minister to meet the needs of the people, proclaim a faithful gospel that is culturally relevant and that connects. This “breaks the code within our mission field and finds effective ways to reach the people to whom God has sent us. Breaking the code leads to breakthrough!”¹²⁰ Our christology, ecclesiology and missiology must align so that equilibrium is reestablished to our church’s growth and our church’s health. Evidence of this sparkling revelatory experience became part of GUMC’s narrative. For all the reason listed above, a new transformative synergy was evolving within the GUMC’s community. A new missional code was being birthed; the nature of which we will summarize in the evaluation chapter (nine) to this thesis. This “breakthrough” promised to obliterate blindness to community, other races and other approaches. It will lend to a more relevant and effective missional agenda for our churches and their local communities. That local denominational church is connecting as a viable entity to their local communities through these means of grace. They are living and imparting life to individuals and to community because faith is lived out by preaching the gospel. This is mission and by offering hospitality and paying attention to worship and people’s spiritual lives, they continue to stimulate revival and growth.

Our LAC was now understanding and positioning to offer the millennials access and voice via an informed process. The outcome of our data analysis will determine the

¹¹⁹ Stetzer, E. and Putman, D., “Transition to Missional Ministry,” *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community*. (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 31-42.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

salient ingredients that will help in the design of a worship service exclusively planned to meet the needs of the millennials.

Church growth and sustainability is annexed to viable mission and vision and evidently an extension of faith development. Sustainable church growth comes out of disciples making disciples. Community outreach and mission services naturally flow from churches that are viable. It is a product of the transformation of pilgrims that have embarked on a journey of deep spirituality and attitudinal changes. It stands to reason, that qualitative changes within believing communities serve as the driver for increased and sustainable quantitative growth. It has its genesis in a clear vision statement which is preceded by a keen understanding of one's ministry setting. Secondly, designed systems and programs that act as a conduit for the transformational church to stubbornly focus on the gospel's ability to change people's life ¹²¹and, lastly, the manifestation of life to the vision through laity participation where worship, community and mission comes alive, are natural parts of the visioning process for ministry.

While this project is taking on a life of its own, I am ever cognizant that I am new to this "charge." My focus continues to be to understand, support and encourage the ministry and the people involved. I have been able to provide administrative oversight and to stimulate congregational awareness, encourage additional support and challenge the key players to broaden their scope and service the goal of reaching all God's children. This project focus enables me to refocus GUMC on their commitment to mission and evangelism.

¹²¹ Ed Stetzer, and Thom S. Rainer, *Transformational Church*, (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 10.

While there was some angst on my part, as we developed the project, I find that I am driven by a deeper urge and a broader vision to win the millennials back to our community at all cost. I do understand that there is a spiritual component to this journey. Our responsibility for the project's success obviously starts with me as the spiritual leader. It hinges on my ability to engage spiritual warfare as we utilize every practical means necessary to win the millennials for Jesus Christ. Interpreting the needs of the millennial constituency and responding to their needs is mission critical to ministry success. An ability to synthesize, articulate and orchestrate an effective response to identifiable challenges facing them would reverse this malady that defines our churches' relationship with our millennials. It would potentially lead our church to bridge the divide that currently exists.

The potential for a formidable strategy that translates into becoming a spiritual beacon to our millennials is given added impetus by the information that will be gleaned from the data we gather. We must consider the changing demographic landscape of our community. Additionally, we must embrace the opportunity to ride a wave of transformative leadership that will focus on true mission and evangelism to our young adults. Lastly, as a response to a prophetic insight that, "as for such a time as this," it is possible through Christ's Spirit to undertake such an endeavor.

CHAPTER 7

Embracing a New Reality

The project team became increasingly aware of the fact that church growth starts with a qualitative assessment of the people in community who are learning to live to the glory of God. If they become excited about Jesus, their actions will morph into quantitative growth. According to Stetzer and Putman¹²² “We are to see the unchurched through three different sets of lenses that include people, population segments, and cultural environments:” It’s a process! “It is about seeing that our work, as the church, is not complete until God’s kingdom has come home to every tribe living within a given context.”¹²³ The process involves an embrace of the call of God, exegeting the community, examining ways God is working in similar communities, finding God’s unique vision for your church, and adjusting that vision as you learn the context.¹²⁴ Harold Percy¹²⁵ defines four distinctive types of congregational growth; it involves: 1) “numerical growth which measures the addition of warm bodies; 2) maturational growth which refers to the transformation of people’s faith and lives; 3) organic growth which refers to the congregational corporate life and the synergy that connects all systems and communication, and 4) incarnational growth, which has to do with the ministries of service and outreach offered by the congregation. It is through these lenses and processes

¹²² Stetzer, E. and Putman, D., *Breaking the Missional Code: Your church can become a missionary in your community*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 11-15.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 21-28.

¹²⁵ Harold Percy, *Your Church Can Thrive, Making the connections That Build Healthy Congregations*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 22.

that congregational growth connects to mission intentional ministries and the creation of vital congregations. This is what it takes to reclaim our millennials and retain them as active participants at GUMC worshipping community.

As a LAC team, having now acquired a better understanding of the project and completed the data gathering, it was time to analyze the data. Records of my journal document the process as follows:

Transitional Details: The compilation of data gathered at the focus forums was a remarkable exercise of team work. As pastor and leader of the team, I was fully resolved to organize a journey that will stimulate equity among all of our community. As with all organization or communities where humans are gathered, there is a political dynamic that if not monitored and controlled evolves as a latent structure of evil or the “Royal Consciousness¹²⁶” that promotes inequities. This is usually driven by human’s tendency to be conceited, ambitious and selfish. This attitude, if not checked, tends to classify people and treat them inhumanely while setting up hierarchy of power to maintain their influence and affluence. Our committee was fully resolved to avoid these pitfalls while on our journey of enlightenment.

A review of my journal¹²⁷ reminded me of the significant time we spent, as a committee, navigating through the myriad of information and finally paring it down to what was considered objective and non-bias open ended questions. In spite of the multiple personalities involved in the activities, each endeavored to make a significant contribution to the process. The voice of Mother Pansy was the “Silent”¹²⁸ voice of reason that stilled the room whenever she spoke. Peculiar to her generation was the way in which she contributed. Most of her statements or commentaries were presented as questions. She always caused us to stop and ponder before a response. Personally, I wondered if was by virtue of respect and

¹²⁶ Brueggemann, Walter. “*Royal Consciousness: Countering the Counterculture*,” *The Prophetic Imagination*, Second Edition, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 200), 2.

¹²⁷ According to prospectus, as part of the evaluation process, This Doctor of Ministry candidate will keep a journal reference of the information of the project and its progress.

¹²⁸ Silent – Refers to individuals born between 1925 and 1945; As a result of “McCarthyism (a period where a campaign, against so called communists, by Senator Joseph McCarthy prevailed),” they were very cautious, worked hard and were quite religious. They were labeled as withdrawn, unadventurous and cautious but ambitious, and achievement, power/status oriented.

high regard for her, she was always afforded a respectful response among us. The ensuing result however was that everyone listened and her words tilted the direction of most of our discussion.

The Boomers and Gen-Xers were agreeable, but at times very combative. This synergy stimulated excitement and kept the adrenaline flowing especially when we were at a crossroad on issues or doing memory recall on information gathered at our focus forums. Their strong and opinionated positions created a firestorm as they brought their intellect and experience to bear on questions, design and structure of the final questionnaire. Our deliberations were guided by prayers and fueled by a spirited quest to find answers.

Our Millennials were present and opinionated but somewhat subdued. Their faces told a tale of inquisitiveness and apprehension, probably, since this survey was about their generation. They evidently were cognizant and understood the value of their presence to the process. In their own words, they had “to represent!” This meant that there was an obligation to their “millennial community” to have their voices heard on issues that will define and affect them, especially if they would be reconnected to our GUMC community. On occasions, in spite of their commitment to this project, they were challenged in their attendance, since other things jockeyed for attention. Their reasoning and responses were processed through a weird logical sequence which eluded this writer; this too, may be a result of the peculiarity associated to the generational divide. Even now as part of the process, our generational view of the project and the process was nuanced by our perception of the world and our peculiar idiosyncrasies. The project, nonetheless, moved along.

Embracing a New Reality

This is what it takes to win them

Our committee charted the operational course of this project. We now had several hours behind us, all vested in the development of this project. As stated in the last chapter, we had successfully surveyed millennials and had a number of responses. To better understand the responses, let us first be cognizant of the questions:

The questions defined: After several attempts our team settled on five key indicators that must be questioned if we are to obtain the information needed to reset our relationship with the millennials’ constituent. The key indicators flowed out of discussions among the focus groups and surfaced as critical to our hypothetical question that asked “Why are the

millennial constituents at Grace United Methodist Church choosing not to become an integral part of our community, and what will be required to attract them?” The indicators were structured as follows:

- Indicator 1. Millennials purported that they choose to disassociate themselves with their churches for the following reasons: please rate how these reasons appeal to you?
- Indicator 2. Identify only five critical elements of the worship service that appeals to you and must be present in each worship service?
- Indicator 3. Rate how these different types of worship experiences appeal to you (1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest)
- Indicator 4. Responses from our focus groups’ respondents stated that millennials are affected and react to the following: Please rate your responses.
- Indicator 5. Discussion at our focus group revealed that the following potential reasons will incentivize millennials to return and participate in their worship communities. Please rate your responses?

The questions that followed were driven by the premise that millennials are responsive and pliable to differing worship styles. The intent of the questions was to ascertain, first, what elements of the worship experience contributed to the disassociation of millennials within their congregations. Secondly, what are the dissatisfiers, and if the suggestion made by our focus groups could serve to reclaim and reconnect the millennials to their church.

The question that was attached to each indicator was generated through the responses of our focus groups. To that end, this survey tested if millennials at large shared the same opinions of our focus group. If so, we might surmise that the reasons for our millennials disassociation with the church as suggested by our focus group were accurate, rational and justified. This will also assure reliability of the survey.

The questions were designed to be user friendly with a simple check off as a response. We were careful not to invite written responses since we thought that this might be a deterrent to the full completion of the survey by the respondents.

It is important to note that each of the five (5) indicators were further elucidated by key questions as outlined above and further, a unique survey methodology for each indicator was used to gather the responses. A description of each indicator and the expected responses are documented below:

- Indicator 1: Millennials purported that they choose to disassociate themselves with their churches. They were asked to please rate either strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree, to each of the six questions within this category so that we may ascertain how these reasons appealed to them. Please see appendix one (1), indicator 1.1, for the key questions to this indicator.
- Indicator 2: Probed the five critical elements of the worship service that would appeal to millennials and must be present in each worship service. The indicator asked that respondents check off one of three responses to each of the ten critical elements that must be present within a worship service. The three response scales were: very important, somewhat important, and no importance. Please see appendix one (1), indicator 1.2, for the key questions to this indicator.
- Indicator 3: Asked that respondents rank between five worship styles, with one being the lowest and five the highest to indicate which worship style is most important to them. The indicator rates how these different types of worship experiences appeal to the millennials. Please see appendix one (1), indicator 1.3, for the key questions to this indicator.
- Indicator 4: Informed us that responses from our focus groups' respondents stated that millennials are affected and react to specific elements within a worship service. They were requested to check off one of three responses: agreed, disagreed, and not applicable (N/A) to each of the ten critical elements that must be present within a worship service that will attract and reconnect them to the community. Please see appendix one (1), indicator 1.4, for the critical elements to their responses.

Indicator 5: Asked that respondents rate their responses as strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree to each of the eight potential reasons that will incentivize millennials to return to community. Please see appendix one (1), indicator 1.5, for these potential reasons.

Our next step was to analyze the responses and extrapolate potential solutions to the problem. This might enable us to offer suggestions as to a worship pattern that might be applicable to any setting as we attempt to reconnect these millennials to their worshipping communities.

Embracing a New Reality

This is what it takes to keep them

Our GUMC story is not unlike the church of Acts (Acts 6:42; 15:36-41) in its infantile stage where leaders are elected and a community of oneness exists alongside bickering, infighting, stealing, and undermining (Acts 5:1-33), the Apostles remained hands off. They elected deacons to attend to the fracas (Acts 6:1-7). Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, “tweaked” his church and gave the Apostle the gumption to confront the “Royal consciousness” while also remedying their flaws (Acts 15). Through this “cocoon” of brokenness, the church was morphed into a beautiful butterfly of hope and possibility. This is the same type of hope that our LAC envisioned for our GUMC community.

A systematic approach of problem identification, data gathering and fact finding through verbal and written reports preceded any final outcome or decisions within the early church. The apostles always objectively analyzed the problem or conflicts. Where human relationships are central to the issue, it is the most plausible thing to do. They methodically, and aided by prayers, unpacked the issues, teased out the problem and

systematically provided a process whereby the problem could be resolved. Acts 15 demonstrated that a critical “holy conference,” that heard the multiple narratives attached to the issues happened at Jerusalem.

The modeled biblical approach utilized the most effective tools of the day. Since they were inhibited by the limitation of technology, they traveled great distances, gathering face to face where each party was allowed the opportunity to present their cause. The Biblical account shows evidence that the apostles were sensitive to the emotion of the community around the issues. “They worked tirelessly to understand the troublesome congregational concerns and to facilitate new, more functional stabilities.”¹²⁹ The use of this approach for assessing and restoring the health and functioning of any entity is mission critical and would certainly be applicable to the Grace United Methodist Church.

Our LAC had the advantage of improved technology for data gathering, analysis and synthesis of the results. Once the issue was quantifiable, these tools also enabled us to model several viable options based on the data that could potentially aid in rectifying the problem. Our survey questions were quantifiable and had the benefits of a technologically innovative platform. We were able to reach a larger audience in a short time frame. We ran the survey for two weeks and the results were only extrapolated and analyzed after all members of the LAC were present.

¹²⁹ Savage, Carl and Presnell, William, “Learning form the Story of The Faith Community,” *Narrative Research in Ministry, A Postmodern Research Approach for Faith Communities*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Wayne E. Oates Institute, Indian University Press, 2008), 3.

Results

The survey was sent to seventy two millennials via the Survey Monkey internet platform. There were thirty seven (51.3%) respondents within a two week time frame. Accessibility to each response was possible; however, an aggregated assessment was much better for the purpose of this project. The results were analyzed by looking at the answers to questions associated with indicator one (1) which are found in appendix 2.1; it enabled us to determine the reason for disassociation of millennials and how we could potentially reconnect them to our beloved community.

Based on the response to the questions related to indicator one (1), our LAC summarized that busyness was overwhelmingly the most significant reason that influenced the millennials' disassociation with our worshipping community. Hypocrisy among our worshipping community was a major disincentive and rated highest as a "strongly agreeable" dis-incentivizer. All other indicators provoked different levels of dissent (see Appendix 2). The church itself appeared to maintain significant value to our millennials. The survey also revealed that issues related to human behavior and negative attitudes were major dis-incentivizers, and mostly contributed to the disconnect that existed among the millennials and the church.

The results of Indicator two which describe how to incentivize millennials to return and connect to GUMC (2) are found in appendix 2.2. As the data unfolded, it was evident to our LAC that there were five critical elements of worship that were important to millennials at large. The preached word superseded worship and praise or prayer. Music slightly edged out the reading of scripture as having greater preference to

millennials; however, cumulatively, more individuals placed a higher premium on the scripture more than any other category.

The data seemed to suggest that drama in service and dance were important but had no true value added benefits to our millennials. Surprisingly, there was somewhat of a proclivity for the hymns. Apparently, millennials were not very different in appreciation of basic Christian values and worship structure. The appeal to the scripture and the preached word were discernable. The penchant for a more fluid delivery milieu is somewhat symptomatic of their emotional state. They want most things to be delivered quickly, concisely and powerfully.

The results from Indicator three (3) is found in appendix 2.3 and presents five worship styles and ranked how these worship experiences appealed to our millennials. Our analysis revealed that high liturgical or traditional worship styles created major dissonance for millennials. It might be indicative of earlier revelations of the apprehension millennials felt toward orthodox Christianity. They loved Jesus, but not the church, its representatives or worship styles that reminded them of that church that they ran away from.

The data showed a proclivity toward a blended service; it demonstrated that they were desirous of a mixture of the old with the new. It also validates our research that showed the premium they placed on mentorship and parental involvement. This too must be tempered by assuring freedom to their voice and expression. A blended service maps a course but allows for a potpourri of experience that validates everyone as a person of equal worth.

The results of our fourth (4th) Indicator is found in appendix 2.4; it questioned if millennials are affected by and reacted to specific elements found in a worship service. Our LAC found that our respondents favorable concurred that the demands for a change to their lifestyle by the church had a significant adverse effect on them and consequently evoked a negative reaction. They fail to come to church. Their trek to college resulted in relocation and a change of lifestyle. They were divided on the notion of feeling judged within the beloved community, or the church not facilitating a realness to their experience.

Their general impression is that while the church does not favor inclusiveness, it does offer a Holy Spirit experience and attempts to teach life application and how to have a relationship with God. Evidently more effort is needed in this area. While they value their pastor, that individual is not the end all of their faith experience. Their responses showed that a premium is placed on their overall independence and their ability to formulate a response about issues affecting them, and the development of their own opinions around those issues.

The results of the fifth (5th) Indicator which rated the potential reasons to reconnect the millennials is found in appendix 2.5. Our LAC noted that relational issues are seemingly more important to our millennial than logistical issues. Removing judgmental attitudes were rated as highly significant. To them, eradicating this issue makes the community “100%.” An exciting worship experience guided by the presence of the Holy Spirit in an atmosphere that nurtured acceptance, pliability and flexibility rated high as an incentivizer for our millennials to reconnect.

The worship experience must be fun filled. Respondents were resolved although not compelled, since it rated lower on their list of priorities, that the church is still the best thing that should be packaged and promoted as a viable entity for spiritual renewal. The worship style, time, and pace must service the worshipper and not leave the worshipper as servant to these elements.

CHAPTER 8

After the Survey

Holding Our Breath So That We May Breathe Again

As we debriefed our findings, there was a sense of joy and a sigh of relief. At first glance, this sense of jubilation was welcoming. However, as the leader, my feeling was that the information that we had just synthesized had cut to our gut and latently there was a discomfort that would need to be unpacked, surfaced and dealt with before forging ahead. It is customary within our worship setting to look to the hymns for respite when our emotions become overwhelmed, and especially when it is masked. The voices of our fathers in the faith usually attend the wounds through the medium of the hymns.

The hymns provide solace, emotional relief and mental respite on several levels. They soothe our spirits and use the therapy associated with music to help heal the wounds that are covered under the scab of pretense. I knew that the moment was not ok! The results of the survey questioned our character, spiritual integrity and common sense. The facts associated with this abnormality were right before our eyes and we refused to see them and own them. To navigate through it and find a place of relief and a solution to this malady needed the hymns. It was within this context that the words to the great hymn “The Church’s One Foundation”¹³⁰ was iterated among our team (see appendix 4).

¹³⁰ The United Methodist Hymnal, “Samuel John Stone,” *Book of United Methodist Worship*, (Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000), 545&546.

To our LAC, true meaning emerged from the notion that the gathered church shall never perish even when confronted by schisms and heresies that have devastating potential. God is a silent listener and attentive to the cry of this malady within the gathered community. There is an assurance of peace. As part of the vision, the church and all the perplexity that emerges when humanity is gathered together shall be nullified in the arms of that “mystic sweet communion with the Holy Spirit.” This is such a moment where God is using our intellect and our redeemed humanity to write a new narrative.

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons¹³¹ best sums up our predicament: “what will we do? How will we respond to what young generations think of us? Christ followers must learn to respond to people in the way Jesus did.” These scholars posit that to change the perception and “reverse the problem of unchristian faith, we have to see people, addressing their needs and their criticism just as Jesus did. We have to be defined by our service and sacrifice, by lives that exude humility and grace. If young outsiders say they can’t see Jesus in our lives, we have to solve our “hidden Jesus” problem.”¹³²

These scholars “suggested four insights that can help us move from being unchristian to being known as Jesus followers, enabling us to more accurately represent Jesus to skeptical outsiders. These perspectives stem from the way Jesus lived.”¹³³ They posit that in the face of criticism, firstly, we should *respond with the right perspective*.

¹³¹ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UN Christian, what a new generation really thinks about Christianity...and why it matters; Ground breaking Research from the Barna Group*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, Baker Publishing Group, 2007), 203.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 204.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

This means that we should not react in kind, but objectively address criticism through dialogue, scripture, story and when warranted, with silence. The issues should not define us nor should it be the medium that formulates the response. Neither should we be oblivious to the latent intent associated with the issue. “Like Jesus we have to learn to respond to criticism appropriately and with the proper motivation. Negative responses should not debilitate us; nor should we shy away from tough decisions or unpopular positions. But we should consider whether our response to cynics and opponents is motivated to defend God’s fame or our own image.”¹³⁴

Secondly, influence people by *connecting with them*. Like Jesus, we are called to build connection and change people’s lives. We must live the Christian message and be transparent about it. Our lives must reflect the content of the book that they probably won’t read – the Holy Bible. Our lives is what they will read and experience. This is a sure medium of the testimony of God’s grace and his unfailing Love. “As it was for Jesus, our most important influence comes in the midst of our everyday relationships. Spiritual depth develops slowly, one life at a time. Living life together, learning to become the people Christ intended, being real about our faults – and our continual need for Jesus’ grace – are powerful antidotes to unchristian faith among a new generation.”¹³⁵

The third insight suggests that we should be *creative*. This must flow from our ability to communicate and express ourselves in novel ways. Expressing “the gospel with a gravity and buoyancy that catches the attention of a skeptical and disinterested

¹³⁴ Ibid., 206.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 208.

audience”¹³⁶ is vital as creative individuals. Our message must have relevance for our audience and assure that it bridges the context of our environment and the era that we live within. We must utilize unconventional media to win amidst the sea of information that flows in this hyper technologically innovative age.

Finally Kinnaman and Lyons suggested that our focus should be on *servicing people*. “To look more like Christ followers, we must cultivate deep concern and sensitivity to outsiders. This is what Jesus did.”¹³⁷ We must “emote” well and at all times.

As matured Christians who are on a mission to win back our millennials, our every effort should genuinely reflect our quest to move beyond understanding them to deliberately acting to reconnect and retain them. Our young adults must see us deliberately endeavoring to change our response and attitude toward them. We must be “rejecting self-preservation and insularity and embracing true concerns and compassion for others.” It is “one crucial means of making faith relevant, real and lasting.”¹³⁸

Action - The Worship Experience

After the survey was done and the information gathered, another meeting was set at which time the millennials expressed the desire to have a worship service designed and set by them. They envisioned this as a continuation of their direct involvement in the spiritual life of the church. I figured that it somehow vindicated them and will bandage their old sores. It also served to authenticate their voices and their desire to be taken seriously as valued contributors and bona fide GUMC worshippers. To me, it

¹³⁶ Ibid., 209.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 210.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 213.

authenticated the project, the process, and the suggested notion that giving the millennial unbridled access will reconnect and retain them. Risky as this may seem, I argued that it was a new era that required a new approach.

On Sunday January 31st 2016, the Millennials had another attempt at a second leading role in the worship service. It was done with the gathered community at the 9:45 A.M. service. They were given significant latitude in the planning process; yet, they were under the supervision of the worship team. Most of the structural functions and the key elements of the worship experience were supervised or subsidized. It was a dress rehearsal that directly telecasted to them that should they be able to play in this sand box, then, they could lead the game by creating their own sand box. I must attest that as pastor this move was strategic and enabled me to balance the reality of a functional church where the inability to establish equilibrium amidst the politics and economic undercurrents could devolve into a turbulent and explosive situation. To win, we had to be nimble as we forged ahead.

The millennials adopted the name LIT Ministries (Living in Truth Ministries) and began a journey to brand themselves as responsible young adults that love God and respectfully have a significant contribution that could change other people's lives, including those who were entrenched and matured within our Grace United Methodist Church. Our community were all blown away by that service. The millennials showed that they were a force to be reckoned with. They demonstrated their uncanny ability to blend the old with the new and to create seamless transitional points that even when they tinkered on the edge, our congregants applauded it. The spoken word, a mime

presentation of the scriptures, an unusual punctuation, at an inopportune time, within the service was excused and embraced.

As pastor, I found that there was not much to be done, for the healing was initiated in a service that fostered a life of its own. At my closing remarks, my role was to stimulate the possibility associated with what everyone “felt” in the moment; it should be our “status quo.” Under the watchful eyes of the LAC, I highlighted the powerful attributes of this worship experience. I focused on the feeling of renewed life within the sanctuary. I highlighted that the intersection where this happened was where all were given respectful and equal access and voice to bring their offering of worship to the altar. I expressed heartfelt appreciation for the gifts and graces of every one that participated and also celebrated their leadership.

My mantra that “every successful thing rises and falls on leadership” enabled me to single out every significant participant and celebrate them. In my mind’s eye, I was lifting the bar and setting the stage for the millennials to reconnect and stay while embracing the responsibility of another service. We were on our way!

After that service the millennials expressed a desire to have their own service done, not in the church itself, but they wanted to identify a separate venue within the church’s campus. They vocalized that that they now understood the elements, as extrapolated from our “project survey” and that adherence to these elements was critical to their success. They vouched that all these element would be presented in the worship event. They wanted freedom to present an experience unique to their generation and directed to their God. It was their opportunity to bring this project to a climax. They felt

they were entitled to this opportunity since this project was focused on their reconnection and retention within the GUMC community.

Permission was gladly given and project effectiveness was underway. God be glorified since our fifth goal was the implementation of the plan - to address the spiritual needs of the Millennials and to include a pilot worship service and formulation of next step agenda that will focus on sustaining the plan. This goal is reiterated as follows:

Based on information gathered, we will structure and design a worship experience to gain the interest of our millennial constituents and to anticipate a higher retention rate in the time allowed. This worship service will be designed to reflect their desired worship style. It is hoped that this will augment our effort to further integrate our millennial constituents within our worship community and experience.

This goal was about to be implemented.

On May 1st, 2016, their first afternoon service took place in the May Tolland Fellowship Hall at GUMC campus. The turnout was phenomenal. Sixteen millennials from GUMC were present along with about 9 invited millennials. A significant cross section of GUMC and a lot of our church's members came out to support them and to be a part of a new diverse worship service, again, that was to be enjoyed by all (see notes on the service planning in Appendix 3).

The Service: The LAC was well aware of the emotional, intellectual and human capital that were expended to move this project to this stage of completion. We noted among ourselves that to the congregation, while there was a heightened sense of anticipation, they were engaging the moment as the fulfillment of an expectation. The millennials were however, pumped up and ready to engage. There was a clear sense of ownership and a high degree of intentionality in their actions that were not present before.

This writer noted that the millennials were intentional at welcoming everyone into the worship space. Hospitality was evident as the young greeters engaged us within the narthex of the church and then directed us down to the May Tolland Fellowship Hall where the worship experience was to be consummated. The ushers were important in guiding us toward our seats since the worship space was relatively dark except for peripheral lightings and a strobe light. As one will find in a club, the light illumination was enough so that individuals were interacting with comfort and were able to clearly recognize someone within close proximity. The light illumination was dark enough to hide any glaring personal or physical maladies. The fellowship was enthusiastic and loud. The worshippers' voices were competing against each other and the flow of contemporary worship music from the turntable of a resident Disc Jockey (DJ). A blend of well-modulated high worship and praise flowed from the speakers strategically located throughout the room. This writer noted that worshippers were swaying to the music and were just as engrossed in their conversation as with the music. It was evident that sublimely, they were engaging worship and praise in an uncommon and uncanny way. Already, one mandatory element of the worship experience as mandated by the project survey results was being serviced.

The generational divide was well represented and all individuals were at ease and cordial to each other. The hospitality coordinator, Taylor Gillard, held command of the space and maintained excitement as she worked the crowd greeting every one and assuring their comfort. The de facto millennial leadership was actively involved in the process and were modeling to us exactly how church leadership should engage hospitality within our service. They were mingling, greeting, assuring each individual's comfort and

setting the tone for a loving worshipful experience. There was an evident sense of “belonging;” the result of a magic that their actions had created.

There was no formal introduction at this point in the service, but as if to warm up the gathered community,¹³⁹ there was an “open mic flow.” This allowed individuals to come to the mike and speak their hearts, howbeit reverently! The spoken word, trivia questions, riddles that evoked interaction, defined the moment. There was a fluidity to these activities; it was as if it replicated activities that they knew within their social space. They were morphing those activities into this worship experience. It was a language unknown to mainstream worshippers but evidently gaining traction and acceptance as it was introduced here at GUMC.

This writer, as methodical as he is, noted a third step to an unwritten program. There was an official welcome to everyone. This indicated that there was a more formal structure that will address the presence of those five elements that must be within the worship experience as our research had identified.

Prayer followed the welcome. The prayer was for the service and for the people; it invited Jesus to be present and to be part of the worship experience. It addressed the anxiety that was present and asked God to provide grace and guidance. It was heartfelt and potent as through the prayer the concept of FUBU, (For us, by us) was introduced. God was asked to give credence to this concept and to authenticate it through his blessings.

A unique addition to the service was an activity called “Millennial Facts.” Facts regarding millennials were interspersed throughout the worship experience. These facts

¹³⁹ Our millennials did not want the word congregation to be used.

were provocative and true; it left us all stunned and thinking. It led to open discussion and group interaction within the service. A special song or dance preceded or followed these “factual” moments and was presented before the preached word.

While the structure of the service was different, the flow was commendable. A major point of trepidation was when a twenty minutes break was allowed for fellowship, which included finger foods and drinks served in the midst of worship and the DJ’s offering of a well-blended musical milieu. Against my quiet angst, it was incredible the way the concentrated and focused worship was reintroduced into the overall experience. It was matter of fact, and as if the structure was the norm. The scripture verses that were to become the focal point of the preached word was randomly placed under the seats of the gathered community. Each person that found a scripture was allowed to read and say what it meant to them before the word was preached. This provided such a phenomenal segue to the preached word.

Evidently, we were speaking a new language and giving birth to a new experience that was in hypostasis for some time. It was different, relevant, creative, and powerful. This service did not replicate our conventional worship experience; it was faithful in delivering all the prescribed elements and simultaneously added so much more to the voice of these millennials within our community. The integrity of the preached word, high worship and praise, prayers, music and scripture was always evident. The integration and uses of a variety of media by the millennials to assure delivery of these elements to the worship experience must be commended.

CHAPTER 9
Was the Project Successful?
Evaluation of the Project

The ability to write a conclusion or to evaluate a work in progress is always challenging. The data gleaned from the project usually provides a dispassionate lens by which we could objectively ascertain project success. There are two questions that frame the evaluation and reflection of this project. While the voice of active participants usually best inform the process and provide some understanding of the project, a more focused discussion of the changes in individuals and the community of faith that was observed will be more pertinent. My thoughts, as the writer, researcher and project leader must also be documented. The voice of the LAC is equivalently pertinent and powerful as we attempt to document the transformation in individuals, the faith community and the wider community in discerning and reflecting on the work of God through this project.

This writer proposes that a systematic and comprehensive approach to achieve the above mentioned goal will be to summarize the project by examining: Firstly, what was the problem and how did this project address it? Secondly, was there a good practice, information or experiences that were derived from the project? The third step examines how the project has affected the church's life and the surrounding Saint Albans community.

The survey methodology was fully described in chapter seven (Embracing a New Reality). The survey process was described in chapter six (data gathering and fact finding); it elucidated the process that enabled us to summarize the responses of thirty seven respondents via the internet. It also documented the survey design and the outcome (chapter seven, “Embracing a new Reality – Results”).

What was the Problem?

This project attempted to address concerns within our congregation about our young adults between the ages of eighteen to thirty five. They are usually referred to as “the Millennials.” Attendance and participation of this millennial constituent within our church community were relatively non-existent, at best, disconnected. The purpose of the project was to ascertain the reason(s) why the millennial constituents at Grace United Methodist Church were choosing not to become an integral part of our church community and what will be required to attract them. The scope of the project was limited to identification of factors affecting our millennial constituents and the creation and pilot of a mechanism to reconnect them to Grace United Methodist Church.

How did this project address it?

Our project was a grassroots effort at the local church level that corralled the passion of twelve individuals representing every age group across the generational divide. Over six months, they worked tirelessly to understand and then to operationalize a process that will assure reliability of information gathered on the problem and then motivate our church to be active participants in resolving the malady associated with the absence of millennials within our worshipping community. The LAC acted urgently, knowing that willful inertia around this malady would only render us victims of this

emergent phenomenon that, within our circle of influence, everyone is speaking about, but doing nothing! The opportunity to undertake this issue was timely as this writer was pursuing a post graduate degree that required a ministry focus that could be identified and resolved as part of a worshipping community initiative. This problem of how to reach millennial young adults was ideal and encapsulated my passion and the sentiment of our GUMC's leadership who felt the pressure of this malady, but could not intelligently speak to it, far less to resolve it.

Our LAC team utilized the lenses of biblical images, to better understand the peculiar mores of seventy eight million individuals called millennials that currently live in our country. We narrowed the scope to better understand how we could affect change at GUMC. Our LAC, through data gathering and group feedback ascertained what factors were keeping them away and what was needed to bring them back. We considered that our millennials were sitting, like other millennials, in the abyss of a rift that have disconnected them from the worshipping community and the church. This group was for the most part, silent and non-participatory; our efforts were geared to change that.

A part of the project our LAC met with GUMC's worshipping community. This was part of our agreed process to share information, involve the congregation and bring awareness to them about the absence of the millennials among our worshipping community. We also agreed to host two other informal church forums and to conduct, minimally, two exploratory sessions with millennials from the GUMC worshipping community prior to establishing a questionnaire, or including another church for any type of focused discussion.

Our team motivated by the demands of the project, reached out to millennials that were members of GUMC but were not currently functional within the believing community. We were able to incentivize the millennials to initially connect by giving them a platform to speak to issues that affected them and contributed to their departure from the GUMC community. The authenticity of the project enabled us to carve out a safe space and an impartial process where their voices were heard and there were guarantees that something will be done about this malady.

The project offered several focus forums for non-judgmental dialogue. It also guaranteed follow up on the issue since the project had accountability mechanisms built in that guaranteed some understanding of and an outcome to the problem. Continual feedback among established church membership and the estranged millennial's constituency made the process and the project reliable in the minds of all participants.

Next, the project was driven by data gathering and analysis. Continuous feedback enabled all active participants to methodically look for solutions to the problem. The project provided three rationales to incentivize participants to resolve this malady. These rationales also assured continuity and dedication among our GUMC believing community. The rationales were:

The Biblical Rational – This included the development of an understanding of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the reintegration of the prodigal son and his brother into the beloved community as it relates to our millennials.

The Theological Rational – This included the examination of the “beloved community.” We examined the conflict between traditional and emergent

worship as the point of contention that has morphed into the proverbial “worship war.”

The Social Rational – This included an analysis of the divergent social views that are peculiar to five generations that are currently represented within our worshipping community: the Silent, the Baby boomers, the Gen-Xers, the Millennials or Generation Y and Generation Z. The project examined how the divergent views impacted and shaped expectation and practices that may have adversely affected the participation of millennials. Extensive research on these groups provided insight of the peculiar mores and idiosyncrasies of millennials as our focused generation.

The project also offered all participants, and particularly the millennials, a major objective that they can achieve as a community that was determined to rectify this important issue. The objective was the planning and execution of a worship experience; an experience that incorporated expressions that defined the preferences and peculiar idiosyncrasies of the millennial constituents associated with Grace United Methodist Church’s worshipping community.

Lastly, the project utilized data to objectify and drive the discussion. The gathering, quantification and analysis of data gathered throughout the project alleviated unnecessary angst that sometimes serves to inhibit progress. Chapter six of this narrative showed how our GUMC participants embraced a new reality and became active participants in data gathering. The data findings associated with the project, and the meaningful way in which it was objectively communicated by our LAC, invited our GUMC community to change. The responses to the results became tempered, and they

were more cordial toward each other. Even when dealing with this difficult issue of “change,” they persisted toward the final goal stipulated by the project. This goal is iterated in Chapter 8 (After the Survey: Action – A worship experience).

Practice, Experiences or Information Derived from the Project

Practice

The data suggested that an effectual worshipful experience will be an exact entry point to reconnect our millennials and to stimulate positive synergy for the journey ahead. It informed us that our millennials are lovers of God. They love Jesus and the beloved community. They just did not like what we have made of the church. Success in reconnecting them was vested in our commitment to learn from the data and implement the values learned. It must be noted that the data revealed that our values as a worshipping community were intrinsically embedded in their psyche. They were committed to reaffirm their connection to community but on their own terms. They intrinsically valued their independence and yearned for a respectable response to their concerns.

Experiences

The data revealed that millennials wanted a blended worship experience that allowed them to feel the “Holy Spirit” in dynamic rather than prescriptive ways. This resonated with Diana Butler Bass’ commentary that “our historic respect for the mind and the intellect is a strength and a virtue, but when pushed too far or too single-mindedly, it becomes a vice. Worship becomes arid, abstract and disembodied. For the Hebrews, the

heart was the center of the human being. It represented not only the emotions but the whole person – intellect, emotions, will and senses.”¹⁴⁰

The results of this study reflected that God is not “static but dynamic,” hence, worship must be dynamic, surreal and mysterious. The theologian, R. Kevin Seasoltz wrote that:

The experience of God’s mystery is discovered above all when we are conscious of God’s presence and have centered our lives on God. That experience flourishes in a climate of hospitality, of welcome in which people are present to one another as the body person they are, as members of the body of Christ, comfortable with one another, gathered together with one another.... An attractive beauty in all that is said and done, used or observed is the best way to facilitate the experience of mystery, for God is not only goodness and truth; God is also beauty. We should be able to sense a transcendent reality in everything that is seen, heard, touched and smelled in the celebration.¹⁴¹

Our millennial yearning for God is a community that invites their liberty to expressively embrace this transcendent God who is not restricted by theology, polity, governance or finance. Worship moves beyond the walls and the colored lines.

Information

The data showed that once liberated, our millennials will have no inhibition to once again embrace community and sacrificially place their gifts and graces on the altar of reconciliation. They yearned to be subservient within the worship experience to the Holy Spirit and only the Holy Spirit. This does not negate structure, instead it liberates each generation to be part of a quilt of different colors. It moves all beyond a generic

¹⁴⁰ Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity for the Rest of Us, How the neighborhood church is transformed*, (New York, N.Y., Harper Collins Publisher, 2006), 176.

¹⁴¹ R. Kevin Seasoltz, *A sense of the sacred: theological foundations of Christian Architecture and art*, (New York and London: continuum, 2005), 343-344.

Christianity to a community of vitality where tradition, practice and liberality flows into the most dynamic experience our church could provide.

The data also revealed that five elements, when present in a worshipful experience, will assure spiritual gratification and fulfillment to our millennials. The presence of these elements will also assure the success of the goals associated with this project. The elements are in order of priority:

- 1) The power of the preached word must be present at all worshipful experience.
- 2) High worship and praise should begin, direct and anchor the experience. It ought to be a passionate expression of deep love for a merciful God who forgives our wretchedness and allows us access in spite of ourselves to worship him. This finding strongly implies that worship with reckless abandonment, radical liberality and profound holiness of unbridled worshippers was preferred, with the understanding that they will not be criticized or berated for their gifts of worship as their reasonable service to their God.
- 3) Prayer allows and models an effectual mode as they communicate with the holy. It allows petition and pain to saturate the communication channel, uninterrupted. It cannot be scripted and mundane but liberating and alive.
- 4) Music complements all other worshipful elements that are offered in the sacred space and is often considered as non-negotiable. However, it assumes a lower place of prominence among millennials. For some people, music anesthetizes the emotion and serves as an appendage that, at times, has no value added benefits to the worship experience. For others, music can liberate the psyche to engage God fully.
- 5) Scripture guides the path and assists in understanding things that are important to humankind in their quest to know God. It provides answers to philosophical, theological, sociological differences, to name a few. It is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for instruction, reproof and rebuke that the person who loves God will be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. So says the scripture, and while the data does not speak to it, the millennials verbally indicated that they do agree with the power of the scripture to effect change.

All of these elements were present within the worship experience, therefore by the standards established by the data, the project achieved its initial purpose, which was to ascertain the reason(s) why the millennial constituents at Grace United Methodist

Church were choosing not to become an integral part of our church community, and further revealed what will be required to attract them. The millennials were reconnected to community.

Experientially, this project also created a process of enlightenment within our GUMC community and evolved to offer a better medium for dialogue and incorporation of the young adults' gifts and graces as viable participants within our worshipping community. The project also assisted in bringing awareness to and shifting the attitudes across the "generational divide." Through its literary narrative, the project was able to heighten awareness of, and enable the GUMC community to look for meaningful ways to annex itself to the churchless generation. Our GUMC community is now fully aware of the potential for this malady to be further compounded by the expansion of this churchless generation who are now raising children with the same ideals. Our GUMC community is now able and motivated to own their responsibility to turn the tide that says that "church going is slowly but incontrovertibly losing its role as a normative part of American life."¹⁴²

Evaluation of the Journey and the Pilgrims

The Project Effect on the Churches' Life and Surrounding Saint Albans Community

The remarks was made by this writer that yes, millennials are hard to love! The literature that defined them propelled us into a conundrum of uncertainty. As a whole church, do we really want to know them? Do we have the sagaciousness and tenacity to comparatively assess the millennials among our worshipping community? Do we have the temerity to ask the hard questions and to be brave enough to ascertain if the attitude

¹⁴² Ibid., 21.

and reasons that our millennials at Grace United Methodist Church are failing to connect or return to our worshipping community is the same as is evident in the public square?

The answer could be summarized in examining the effects of this project on the participants that were actively involved within our church and the community at large.

Our LAC

The analysis associated to the project survey was inadvertently writing a new dominant narrative, that is:

There is a cost to redemption. Our millennials are absent because our churches have failed to offer different access points and to be pliable and flexible in hearing their needs. Likewise, the church's failure in creating medium for expression of creativity or reciprocating an authentic response to their community allows them to find comfort living on the fringes. We have failed to recognize or credit them for inculcating our values only because they have repackaged it and demanded that it services them on their own terms. They still love to worship, but the atmosphere of worship must be inclusive and pliable. Forms and structure still inform their movements but a higher premium is placed on the man rather than the brick and mortar. Liberality to love Jesus, to fall in and out of love with God as part of the maturation process is non-negotiable and will be exercised without constraints or apology. To reconnect with them is to learn their code and to assure equanimity as we share our space on their terms. The reality is that they don't need us, we need them.

As a team we were hearing the voice of "numbers" and decoding the unwritten message heretofore communicated by our millennials, but unread. An array of "Survey Monkey" charts, (see appendix 3), amplified the conglomeration of voices that were "messaging" us. This was the point at which leadership was to be tested. The courage and soundness of the LAC would be examined for cracks since the truth of this narrative will test our resolve to be faithful and committed to speak truth to the entrenched older leadership structure of the church, and be forthrightly committed to rectify identifiable

obstacles and assure that we have accomplished the goal to reconnect the millennials to our worshipping community.

The LAC's Sentiments

Based on the survey results, our LAC moved to develop a plan that synchronized the data outcome with the spiritual needs of the millennials and to include a worship service that reconnected and attempted to retain them within our worshipping community. We were cognizant that strategies that will effectively address this quagmire of millennial absence must be both short and long term in nature.

On a short term basis, intense effort in developing a healthy and viable worshipping experience was evidently mission critical. Restructuring of our administrative governance to give them representation on leadership and governance committees within the church are plausible considerations. By altering the existing administrative structures, millennials can have a place at the table to share their interests and become active participants and contributors, thereby making our system a bit more pliable and responsive to their needs.

Intense discipleship for spiritual maturation and quality of lifestyle with focus on reconciliation became an essential component in this project. Learning to give in love among our worshipping community translated into a renewed commitment to give and to heal as a community. Millennials were disenchanted with the judgmental attitudes of worshippers and yearned to be accepted for who they were. The findings that they loved God, had high premiums on family life, and were conscious about the larger community and societal lifestyle issues, opened doors for reconciliation. Capitalizing on these attributes and bridging them with established community activities as opportunities for

fellowship was considered to be meaningful. Millennials needed their voices heard and their feelings of acceptance in and belonging to the church community acknowledged. Creating an environment of mutual respect and honor within our worshipping community while utilizing each opportunity to teach, authenticated our ability to care while transforming the minds of our people and releasing their potential to serve in mission to the people just beneath our steeple.

On a long term basis, we recognize the need to invest in family life with a specific focus on reconciliation type initiatives. Assuring individual maturation and a deeper attentiveness to roles and accountability could serve to strengthen the beloved community. The Church is now challenged to create opportunities to heal brokenness through open and honest dialogue in order to address some of the maladies within our community. We were not deceived to think that by identifying and communicating the problem, it will go away. A robust educational ministry that services the needs of the millennials, but also gives them opportunity to service other youths is an option that was considered to go a long way to influence healing. As a formidable strategy, and given the dynamics of our current worshipping community, this might translate into building a church within a church. Our resolve must be to reclaim and reconnect the millennials using all methods and strategies within the boundaries of Christian love and justice..

A need for spiritual, structural, administrative and relational revitalization has become mission critical to our survival. A focused effort to give our young adults a permanent and significant voice as an extended church was considered the best viable strategy. On a macro level, our committee was realistic that the process could entail an alternate concentration on the development of a renewed mission, vision, values,

practices, and worship style. A renewed emphasis on giving our youths a pivotal role as the face of our community is positioned to evolve as the main reason for existing within our beloved GUMC community. This strategy is a better indication of our commitment to the long term retention of this millennial constituent. Once we reconnect them; we are endeavoring to retain them. This assures our success.

The Pastor's Heart

As a pastor, I seize on this opportunity to explore a new frontier where ministry, as in the book of Acts¹⁴³ could grow exponentially. This project presented an opportunity to envision and to develop a place where the focus of an intimate relationship with God becomes priority and a deep *spiritual formation* informs and directs how we live out our individual lives and in ministry with each other. This place could be a place on the frontier that would be a church of the future that has no walls. Individuals are not constricted or constrained by established orthodox parameters but are free to live out their Christianity unbridled, guiltless, and free of religious dogma and practices; God is actualized rather than intellectualized. This space does not eradicate the foundation of Methodism, as we know it, but introduces a charismatic experience where the Silent, Boomers, Gen-xers and Millennials have a chance to be heard and to live out their faith among an accepting community. It bridges the old with the new merging values and expectations that often appears at odds with each other because they do not understand each other.

¹⁴³ (Acts 6:7, [King James Version]), “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Through this project, our church is afforded the opportunity to build on the gifts and strengths of its members, creating a collective process of discernment, whereby all our leaders could discern God's will for the present moment and based on the current needs of the community it serves. The question would be: Where is God moving this community of Faith and how do we negotiate a path to live out His will? Our emphasis will be an active faith expression where doing faith become as critical as having faith. To that end, a space of mutual respect where faith is supported and nurtured through simple but effective liturgy, where practical needs are met, where everyone feels a sense of ownership, and where so much is happening that life and excitement abounds is ideally realistic. Values such as love, inclusivity, faith, respect and sacrifice would be the central ingredients to our existence as a Christian community.

This project provided an opportunity to assure transformational leadership to our community. It enabled our community to be ever cognizant of the opportunities and experiences for people to encounter Jesus Christ so that transformation may occur; to be imbued with God's Spirit so that people, prayers, music, committees, community and ministries reflect his will. This project assured that ministry advanced our mission. It became relevant and synchronized to our community's needs creating a spiritual environment where ambiguity and change only served to motivate and summon people to deeper sensitivity around their faith, love for God, and love for humanity.

The Church

As a church, our tenacity as a group fueled hope among the team. The cooperation created through this project broke through the veil that covered the dysfunctionality that existed among our GUMC community. Our quest hereafter, is to stimulate ministry and

rewrite our missional code. Our team understood that we had to tap into this new synergy and allow it to fuel this fire of reintegration. Grace United Methodist Church, Saint Albans will evidently be forced to change and provide a new track for spiritual formation and maturation. Our community would undoubtedly be stretched to consider other forms of worship experiences, primarily blended and contemporary worship. This will be critical for stimulating personal growth and spiritual formation for the millennials that we are trying to reclaim.

Our journey, hopefully, will culminate into a shared vision with our millennials. As a church, we will continue to find novel ways in creating a climate where the gospel could be heard and felt through outreach and mission services with them and for them; where millennials will be proud to invite their friends and celebrate community. This is generally the atmosphere where churches have learned to celebrate the good news of the gospel in their worship and in their service of community outreach and mission.¹⁴⁴ Should we as a church be able to accomplish this feat, then we will be the project that we have undertaken, and the model of a process for addressing these specific needs. This will set us apart as a spiritual beacon to our community, and potentially among our United Methodist churches.

Our Millennials

As iterated before, Jesus' proclamation that "when he came to himself,"¹⁴⁵ was a statement that described an emotional and mental journey that thrust the lost son to a different level of maturity. It was at that point that he sought reconciliation through

¹⁴⁴ Harold Percy, *Your Church Can Thrive, Making the connections That Build Healthy Congregations*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 83.

¹⁴⁵ (Luke 15: 17 [KJV])

repentance. The most important part of this story is that the son who got lost willfully could be redeemed. The imagery of a compassionate father models the attitude and posture of the church that must be assumed in reconciling those persons who are different or sitting on the fringes. As with the father, our attitude should reflect undying hope. It must be one where we are expectantly waiting with open arms and love. Our message of reconciliation is vested in the initial contact of forgiveness and our continual action of love and acceptance. These gestures of goodwill open the dialogue. It is proof positive that the father was thinking of the son and is ready to engage a nonjudgmental discourse. The parable ends with the thought: “But it was to make merry, to revel and feast and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and is alive again! He was lost but now is found!”¹⁴⁶ Did we model it? Did we create an environment of equity or equality? Our gain is dependent on our understanding that in our GUMC environment some individuals need more care than others. Equity provides the same level of care to all but equality meets the “specific” need of each individual to get over the wall. Did we as a church achieve this?

We dare to envision that this project has had the immediate potential to reset ministry to be driven by an evangelism emphasis that is locally mission oriented; this is a different narrative to what we have known in the past. As part of the reintegration process, our millennials embraced the task to be to others what they would like the community to be to them. With focused attention on spiritual, relational, social, economic advancement and empowerment, we endeavored to change and enrich our GUMC community. This we collaboratively believed must become the DNA of our

¹⁴⁶ (Luke 15:32, [Amplified Bible])

ministry and reconciliation efforts. The millennials have verbally attested to the fact that on returning to us, they are infected to feel the same. This journey has impacted their lives, changed their worldview and their environment. The majority of the millennial participants (75%) understand that church demands a change in lifestyle, and more than half of them (56%) believe the church is still the best place to address their needs. With a vision realized and a commitment resolved, no sacrifice seems too large or too small for the name of Christ and the glory of the gospel of the kingdom that He preached.

Through this project, and by their high involvement within the GUMC community, the millennials have embraced the notion that our journey will not be to fashion a new ecclesiology, but to find a space of comfort where people of all ages could relate, assimilate and respect different expressions of interaction with God. They expressed their views on We will not limit His ability to meet us wherever we are. Our strength as a believing community is revealed in the profound impact of this project on the participants and success of this initiative. The millennials yearned for flexibility in the church and worship experiences; they now have an ongoing service on the third Sunday of each month where they hold their space sacrosanct as they invite us in to worship as guests and to participate in their presenting their oblation to God, their way!

The Community

Our Saint Albans' community are attached and engaged in the affairs of the church via our Civic Block Association. They are active participants in the life of the church and are able to comment on issues such as this project. The general sentiment is that this reintegration of millennials into the life of the church was a good initiative. It stimulated a great feeling to see the millennials take charge and lead a worship service

worthy for all to enjoy and feel God's presence. Before a capacity crowd of about four hundred and thirty worshippers, they challenged the congregation to accept them as they were. They presented themselves and their friends as the generation that is with us today; they were not the church of tomorrow. Some wore dread locks with outlandish clothing styles and piercings in some conspicuous places. The spoken word lamented their pain of being ostracized for their looks and the ways they identified as gay, straight, eclectic or ascetic. They proclaimed that they love Jesus and wanted to be accepted for who they were. They called for a time of reconciliation during the service that was very well received. They were ecstatic to see that our church was evolving to be more reflective of the community that surrounds us.

Evaluation of the Outcome

Through this project, teamwork and collaboration emerged as critical to all our practices in ministry. A clear sense that commitment, openness, community and accountability both spiritually and temporally were critical to our continued success. It was also evident that in every worship setting, there should be an opportunity through small groups to share stories and to engage different age groups, acknowledging and searching for that thing that resonates with them. Advocacy for a stronger engagement in social justice and community activism as part of our worship experience and Christian responsibility; efforts to help individuals understand their gifts and their role in caring for others and contributing to the church became apparent to our community especially when there was a spiritual encounter. Finally, the need for a feedback loop that gets the

response from the people we are servicing will be mission critical to ensure inclusion and to tweak the process and the journey within this faith community.

Implications for the Future

It might be construed that communities such as Grace United Methodist Church are inundated with anxiety. As dictated by Peter Steinke: “Leaders will need to challenge the congregation, anxious souls as they may be able to use anxious times as a springboard for change, learning and different functioning. What is at stake may be the very vocation to which God has called and gathered these people together – their ministry and mission.”¹⁴⁷ Reinforcing this notion of dealing with anxious church communities, Dr. William Presnell summarized it best:

“The ability to defuse and debrief anxiety and create hope by separating the problem, teasing out the ‘saturated part of the story from the healthier, functional parts of the story’ is mission critical to eradicate the ‘stuckness’ of the interlocked system for which the current situation may be symptomatic. Assessing ages, stages, and life cycle stressors of the people within the system; identify stressed triangles; noticing where the system is stuck, or deadlocked in power struggles help parties to see power struggles as fruitless and destructive. It encourages them to give them up and seek alternatives. It also enables one to enact tension-reducing actions that might restore calm and good sense.”¹⁴⁸

This project provides a blueprint for problem resolution, and invites other individuals who will take on this initiative to be proficient in identifying, tracking, validating, and addressing the crisis pain. That person must also be able to engage and convince the leaders of the church to assume responsibility for the outcome of the investigative analysis.

¹⁴⁷ Peter I. Steinke, *Congregational leadership in Anxious Times. Being Calm and Courageous no Matter What*, (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2006), 14.

¹⁴⁸ Dr. William Presnell, lecture, Drew University, March 2015.

Although this project did not utilize a narrative system approach, the principles for problem resolution, as postulated by Dr. William Presnell,¹⁴⁹ serves to inform a reasonable path to uncover the issue and find a solution while remaining self-differentiated as a leader. The cues that this writer find necessary as we attempt to diagnose this quagmire of millennial absence is “staying self-differentiated and non-reactive as you listen to the multiple stories that will emerge” as to the cause for their absence from the church community. The ability to coach people within our Lay Advisory Team and the general Grace United Methodist Church’s worshipping community on “how to relate to others in self-differentiated ways and solve problems rather than do battle”¹⁵⁰ was not [fully] explored, but could well emerge as mission critical to our success. The findings from this project, could therefore invite others to consider this as an area for future research.

As a prophetic leader the ability to take and analyze notes of systemic issues such as stressed triangles, cutoffs, fusion, failed communication, abuse, and over-under-functioning will be important in outlining a solution to the maladies facing today’s churches. Again, we are reminded of the words of Dr. Presnell:

Framing the situation theologically, at least for yourself, unbalance the stuck system by joining the symptom or using self-differentiated statements, see if you can help tease apart the problem part of the system story from the healthier and more hopeful story. Watch for sparkling moments that are moments of Kairos, when hints of a new and more hopeful future emerge. Help bring this out and encourage it. Define it as a moment of grace. Work with the team, to co-author a new and preferred story that may be emerging. Lead a visioning process. interweaving biblical/faith stories, reviving useful pre-crisis coping behaviors,

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

exploring resources for support and learning while prescribing and contracting for constructive behaviors, future work and following up with contacts.¹⁵¹

As a Church, for too long we have failed to recognize or credit millennials for inculcating our values only because they have repackaged it and demanded that it services them on their own terms. We now realize that they still love to worship, but the atmosphere of worship needs to be inclusive and pliable. Forms and structure still inform their movements, but a higher premium is placed on the man, rather than the brick and mortar. To reconnect with them is to learn their code and to assure equanimity as we share our space on their terms. This should chart the United Methodist Church's direction for the future if we are to remain viable in religious circles. The reality is that they don't need us, we need them.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY QUESTION: RECONNECTING MILLENNIALS TO THE CHURCH

INDICATOR 1.1

Millennials purported that they choose to disassociate themselves with their churches for the following reasons: They were asked to please rate how these reasons appealed to them?

- Reason 1. They became busy on Sunday with no added incentives by the church as a community to a reason for them to attend
- Reason 2. The church divorced us! We are here but without a voice or access; we are not part of the community?
- Reason 3. Hypocrisy! What is taught is not what is practiced
- Reason 4. Millennials appreciate older generations' endeavor to communicate on a level we could understand. This however is perceived by us to be patronizing and offensive. It is a disincentive for us to be part of the church community.
- Reason 5. The church has ceased to be a medium for creativity. It fails to be a haven for brokenness or a bridge for the generational divide!
- Reason 6. The church fails to offer different access points to worship (time, Location, Medium) it fails to be responsive or to experiment with different worship styles.

INDICATOR 1.2

Identify only five critical elements of the worship service that appeal to you and must be present in each worship service? The ten critical elements are:

- Element 1. Hymns
- Element 2. Worship and praise session
- Element 3. Scripture reading
- Element 4. Music
- Element 5. Dance ministry
- Element 6. Prayer
- Element 7. Preached Word
- Element 8. Drama within the service
- Element 9. Communion
- Element 10. Testimonies

INDICATOR 1.3

Rate how these different types of worship experiences appeal to you. The five worship styles were:

- Worship style a. Traditional worship (a style that embraces longstanding rituals and hymns).
- Worship style b. Contemporary worship (a style that embraces technology and musical choices for a younger generation).
- Worship style c. Blended worship (a style that reflect a combination of traditional and contemporary elements in worship).
- Worship style d. Emergent worship (a style that embraces a worship

experience that is solely dependent on the Holy Spirit's guidance).

- Worship style e. high liturgical (a style that is filled with rituals and archaic liturgical forms).

INDICATOR 1.4

Responses from our focus group respondents stated that millennials are affected and react to the following: Please rate your responses. The ten critical elements are:

- Element 1. Church is "too extra."
- Element 2. Church demand a change of lifestyle.
- Element 3. Church does not teach life application of Scriptures.
- Element 4. Church fails to show how to have a relationship with God.
- Element 5. Church does not facilitate a "realness" to the experience.
- Element 6. Church fails to offer inclusiveness
- Element 7. A standard church experience leaves one feeling judged.
- Element 8. A church experience continues to disallow the movement of the "Holy Spirit."
- Element 9. Frequent changes of pastors = changes of culture and experience = compromised continuity of my spiritual experience.
- Element 10. Going away to college = relocation = staying relocated = no return to community.

INDICATOR 1.5

Discussion at our focus group revealed that the following potential reasons will incentivize millennials to return and participate in their worship communities. The eight potential reasons are:

- Reason 1. Having tasted of “the world,” the church is still the best thing. It fills the void.
- Reason 2. An exciting worship experience with a meaningful pastoral presence is a major “incentivizer.”
- Reason 3. Packaging and promoting the “fun” in church could be a major “Incentivizer.”
- Reason 4. Advocacy for flexibility in the worship (not just traditional) experience could be a major “incentivizer.”
- Reason 5. Flexibility in the worship style and the time we congregate for worship.
- Reason 6. Creating an atmosphere of belonging, inclusiveness and empowerment.
- Reason 7. Removal of judgmental attitude.
- Reason 8. Allowing the presence of the Holy Spirit without restraints.

APPENDIX 2

RESPONSE TO SURVEY QUESTIONS

DETAILED ANALYSIS TO INDICATOR 1.1

Millennials purported that they choose to disassociate themselves with their churches for the following reasons: They were asked to please rate how these reasons appealed to them? It's reflected in the following ways:

- Where it was hypothesized that millennials choose to disassociate themselves with their churches, because they became busy on Sunday with no added incentives by the church as a community to a reason for them to attend, 62.16% of respondents agreed with 13.5% strongly agreeing. Only 24% objected to this hypothesis.
- Where it was hypothesized that millennials choose to disassociate themselves with their churches because, the church divorced us! We are here but without a voice or access; we are not part of the community? 43% of respondents agreed and 19% strongly agreed. Only 38% objected to this hypothesis.
- Where it was hypothesized that millennials choose to disassociate themselves with their churches because, Hypocrisy! What is taught is not what is practiced? 46% of respondents agreed and 38% strongly agreed. 16% objected to this hypothesis.
- Where it was hypothesized that millennials choose to disassociate themselves with their churches because, older generations endeavor to communicate on a level we could understand. This however is perceived by us (millennials) to be patronizing and offensive. Because of these attitudes, it has become a

disincentive for these millennials to be part of the church community. 41% of respondents agreed and 19 strongly agreed. 40% objected to this hypothesis.

- Where it was hypothesized that millennials choose to disassociate themselves with their churches because, the church has ceased to be a medium for creativity. It fails to be a haven for brokenness or a bridge for the generational divide! 49% of respondents agreed and 19 strongly agreed. 32% objected to this hypothesis.
- Where it was hypothesized that millennials choose to disassociate themselves with their churches because, the church fails to offer different access points to worship (time, location. Medium) it fails to be responsive or to experiment with different worship styles! 54% of respondents agreed and 22% strongly agreed. 24% objected to this hypothesis.

DETAILED ANALYSIS TO INDICATOR 1.2

Identify only five critical elements of the worship service that appeal to you and must be present in each worship service? Analyses to these critical elements are reflected in the following way:

- Where Hymns were suggested, 50% of our respondents found it to be somewhat important; 35% identified that it was Very important while 15% assigned no importance to it.
- Where Worship and Praise Session were suggested, 94% of our respondents found it to be very important. 6% identified that it was somewhat important. Consensus on this response was incredibly high.

- Where Scripture reading was suggested, 84% of our respondents found it to be very important. 16% identified that it was somewhat important. There were no dissenting responses.
- Where Music was suggested, 89% of our respondents found it to be very important, while 11% identified that it was somewhat important. Where Dance ministry was suggested, 42% of our respondents found it to be very important, while 58% identified that it was somewhat important.
- Where Prayer was suggested, 91% of our respondents found it to be very important, and 9% identified that it was somewhat important. Consensus on this response was very high.
- Where the Preached Word was suggested, 94% of our respondents found it to be very important, and 6% identified that it was somewhat important. Consensus on this response was very high. Where Drama within the service was suggested, 22% of our respondents found it to be very important, 44% identified that it was somewhat important, and 33% assigned no importance to it.
- Where Communion was suggested, 53% of our respondents found it to be very important and 47% identified that it was somewhat important. Where Testimonies were suggested, 76% of our respondents found it to be very important, 19% identified that it was somewhat important, and 33% assigned no importance to it.

DETAILED ANALYSIS TO INDICATOR 1.3

Rate how these different types of worship experiences appeal to you. The responses were reflected in the following way:

- Where the worship style was a traditional worship (a style that embraced longstanding rituals and hymns), 91% of respondents rated it below acceptable (-3) while 9% considered it to be meaningful.
- Where the worship style was contemporary worship (a style that embraces technology and musical choices for a younger generation), 68% of respondents considered it to be meaningful, 32% rated it below acceptable (-3)
- Where the worship style was blended worship (a style that reflect a combination of traditional and contemporary elements in worship), 93% of respondents considered it to be overwhelming meaningful, 8% rated it as average (3).
- Where the worship style was emergent worship (a style that embraces a worship experience that is solely dependent on the Holy Spirit's guidance), 61% of respondents considered it to be below average (3), while 39% rated it as average or above (3+)
- Where the worship style was high liturgical (a style that is filled with rituals and archaic liturgical forms), 97% of respondents considered it to be below average (3). It was just not an option

DETAILED ANALYSIS TO INDICATOR 1.4

Responses below are from our focus group respondents that states that millennials are affected and react to each element in the following way:

- Where it was suggested that Church is “too extra,” 31% of respondents agreed but 54% disagreed, and 14% found the question did not apply since the need to be at church neither affected them nor did it create a reaction from them.
- Where it was suggested that Church demand a change of lifestyle, 75% of respondents agreed, but 22% disagreed and only 3% found the question did not apply.
- Where it was suggested that Church does not teach life application of scriptures, 42% agreed, but 56% disagreed, and 3% found the question did not apply.
- Where it was suggested that Church fails to show how to have a relationship with God, 25% of respondents agreed, but 64% disagreed. Results also showed that 11% found the question did not apply since church neither affected them nor did it create a reaction from them in regards to this question.
- Where it was suggested that Church does not facilitate a “realness” to the experience, 44% of respondents agreed and 47% disagreed. Also, 8% found the question did not apply since church neither affected them nor did it create a reaction from them in regards to this question.
- Where it was suggested that Church fails to offer inclusiveness, 53% of respondents agreed but 33% disagreed. On the other hand, 14% found the question did not apply since the issue did not affect them or illicit a reaction from them in regards to this question.

- Where it was suggested that a standard church experience leaves one feeling judged. 44% of respondents agreed but 39% disagreed. Also, 17% found the question did not apply since the issue neither affected them nor created a reaction from them in regards to this question.
- Where it was suggested that a church experience continues to disallow the movement of the “Holy Spirit” to do his job, 31% of respondents agreed and 61% disagreed. Conversely, 8% found the question did not apply since the issue neither affected them nor created a reaction from them in regards to this question.
- Where it was suggested that frequent changes of pastors = changes of culture and experience = compromised continuity of my spiritual experience, 47% of respondents agreed and 31% disagreed. On the contrary, 2% found the question did not apply since the issue neither affected them nor was it important to their spiritual journey.
- Where it was suggested that going away to college = relocation = staying relocated = no return to community, 55% of respondents agreed and 19% disagreed. Also, 25% found the question had no relevance or influence on their decision.

DETAILED ANALYSIS TO INDICATOR 1.5

Discussion at our focus group revealed that the following potential reasons will incentivize millennials to return and participate in their worship communities. Responses to the eight potential reasons are analyzed below:

- Where it was suggested that respondents having tasted of “the world,” felt that the church is still the best thing as it fills the void, 55% of respondents strongly agreed; 33% agreed; 8% disagreed; and, 3% strongly disagreed.
- Where it was suggested that an exciting worship experience with a meaningful pastoral presence is a major “incentivizer,” 69% of respondents strongly agreed; 31% agreed.
- Where it was suggested that packaging and promoting the “fun” in church could be a major “incentivizer,” 58% of respondents strongly agreed; 31% agreed; 11% disagreed.
- Where it was suggested that advocacy for flexibility in the worship (not just traditional) experience could be a major “incentivizer,” 64% of respondents strongly agreed; 25% agreed, and 11% disagreed.
- Where it was suggested that flexibility in the worship style and the time we congregate for worship is of major importance to our respondents, 50% of respondents strongly agreed; 44% agreed; 3% disagreed; and, 3% strongly disagreed.
- Where it was suggested that creating an atmosphere of belonging, inclusiveness and empowerment was important as an incentivizer to our millennials, 69% of respondents strongly agreed; 28% agreed, and 3% strongly disagreed.
- Where it was suggested that the removal of judgmental attitudes are of major importance to our respondents, strongly 72% of respondents strongly agreed; 25% agreed; and, 3% disagreed.

- Where it was suggested that allowing the presence of the Holy Spirit without restraints within the worship experience is of major importance to our respondents, 69% of respondents strongly agreed; 31% agreed.

APPENDIX 4

NOTES ON THE SERVICE PLANNING

The Service Planning: The millennials provided a broad overview of what their brainstorming and planning session looked like:

- *Everyone will be welcomed into the space by Greeters (Ms. Taylor Gillard responsible)*
- *There will be an Open Mic flow (Mr. Albert Lane responsible)*
- *Welcome everyone (All responsible & A. Duggan will lead)*
- *Pray for the service*
- *Introduce the Service and its' concept which is FUBU, (For us, by us, Mr. William Bostick responsible)*
- *Millennial Facts (C. Perez & T Perez responsible)*
- *Song (L. McLean)*
- *Millennial Facts*
- *Dance (T. Martin)*
- *Millennial Facts*
- **Millennials' Facts will be interspersed throughout and will lead to open discussion, group interaction and the preached word. (No desire to use the word 'Congregation' to describe the people who are gathered)*
- ***Louis McLean called me from Jamaica at about 9:30p.m.*
- *He shared that he knew the meeting was this evening. He said he will be back on Saturday and will be in church on Sunday. He said he would touch base with the group and he offered the following songs as suggestions:*
- **** Songs to be interspersed as a worship progress*
 - *"Bless the Lord, oh my soul"*
 - *"Faithful"*
 - *"My God is Awesome"*

APPENDIX 5

HYMN 546 UMC HYMNAL

THE CHURCH IS ONE FOUNDATION

1. The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

2. She is from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation,
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy Name she blesses,
Partakes one Holy Food,
And to one Hope she presses,
With every grace endued.

3. The Church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish,
Is with her to the end:
Though there be those who hate her,
And false sons in her pale,
Against or foe or traitor
She ever shall prevail.

4. Though with a scornful wonder
Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed:
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
Their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping
Shall be the morn of song!

5. 'Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore;

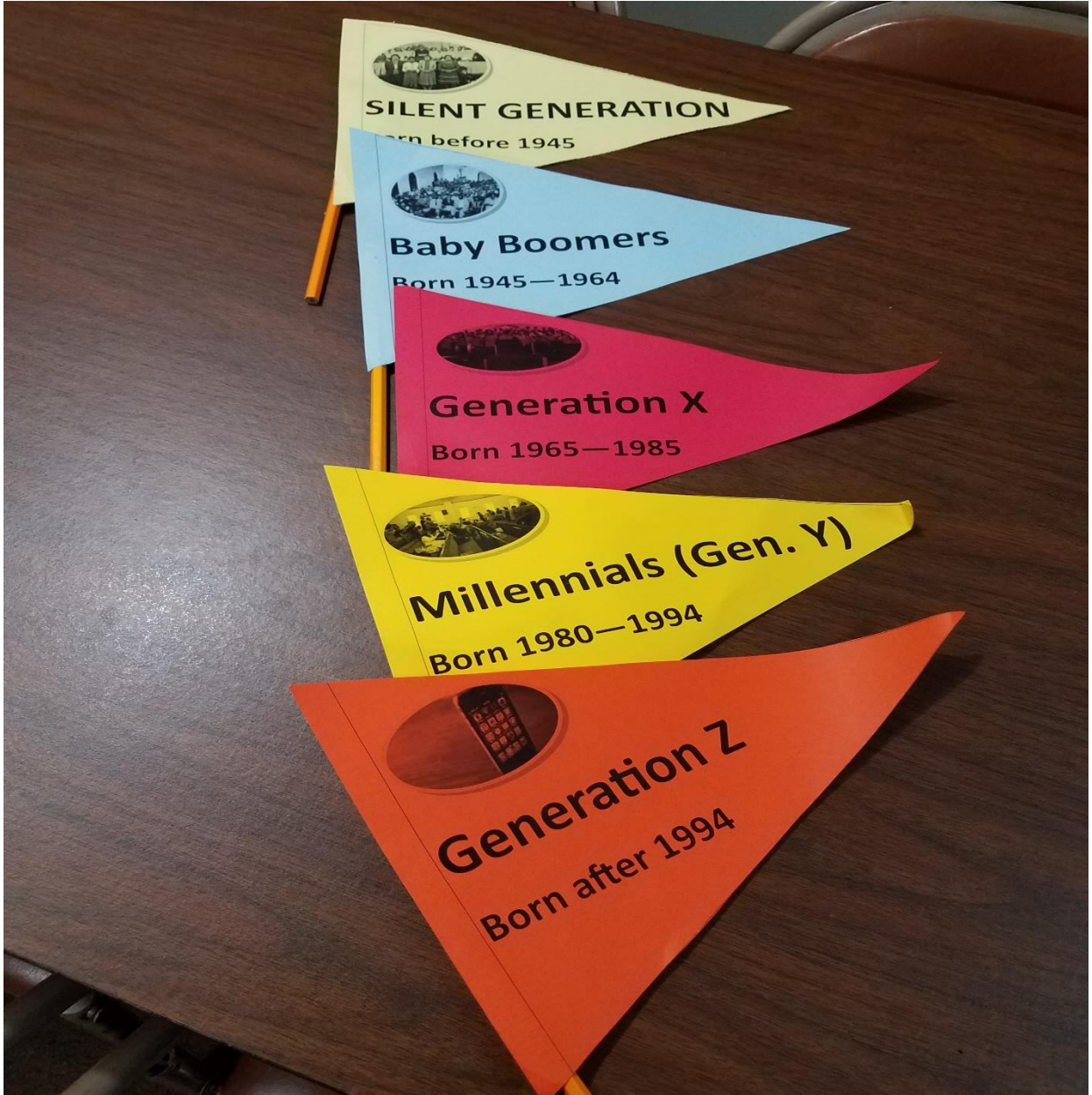
Till, with the vision glorious,
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest.

6. Yet she on earth hath union
With God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won,
With all her sons and daughters
Who, by the Master's Hand
Led through the deathly waters,
Repose in Eden land.

7. O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with Thee:
There, past the border mountains,
Where in sweet vales the Bride
With Thee by living fountains
Forever shall abide! Amen.

APPENDIX 6

GENERATIONAL FLAG IDENTIFIERS



ILLUSTRATIONS

FIGURE 1 RECONNECTING MILLENNIALS

Survey Results 3.1

Reconnecting Millennials

Q1 MILLENNIALS PURPORTED THAT THEY CHOOSE TO DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES WITH THEIR CHURCHES FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS: PLEASE RATE HOW THESE REASONS APPEAL TO YOU?

Answered: 37

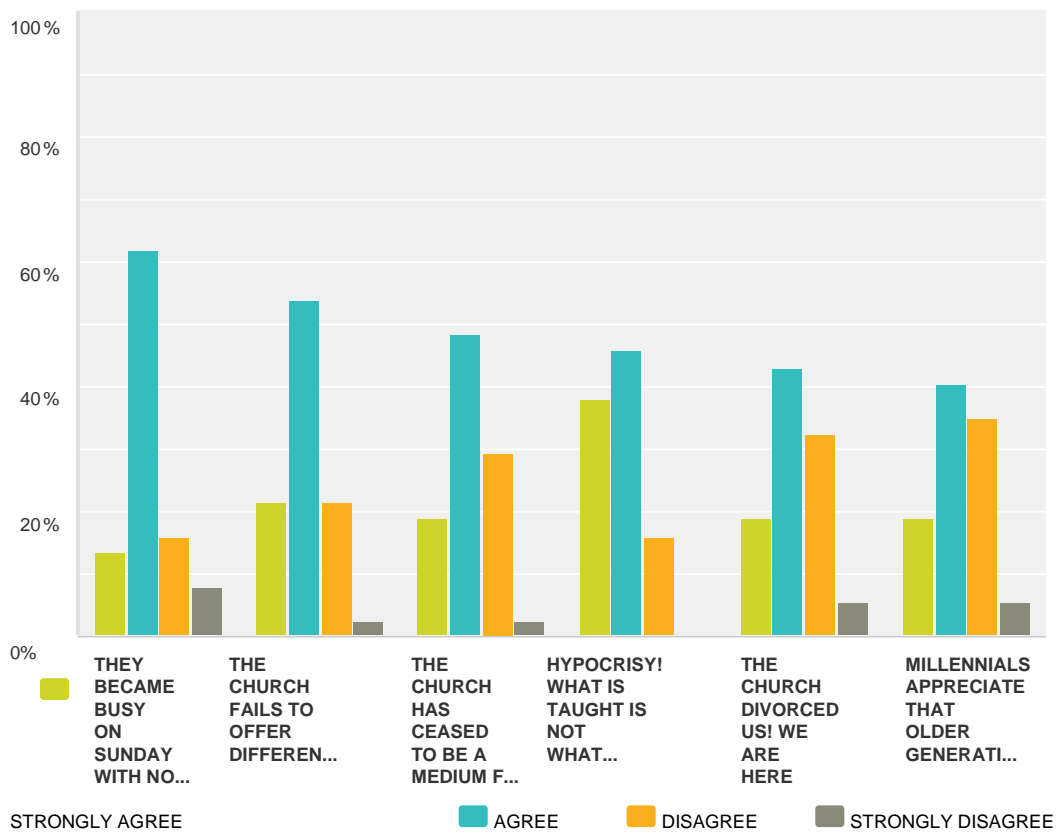


Table 1
Survey Results 3.1

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	Total	Weighted Average
THEY BECAME BUSY ON SUNDAY WITH NO ADDED INCENTIVES BY THE CHURCH COMMUNITY AS TO A REASON FOR THEM TO ATTEND.	13.51% 5	62.16% 23	16.22% 6	8.11% 3	37	2.19
THE CHURCH FAILS TO OFFER DIFFERENT ACCESS POINTS TO WORSHIP (TIME, LOCATION, AND MEDIUM). IT FAILS TO BE RESPONSIVE OR TO EXPERIMENT WITH DIFFERENT WORSHIP STYLES!	21.62% 8	54.05% 20	21.62% 8	2.70% 1	37	2.05
THE CHURCH HAS CEASED TO BE A MEDIUM FOR CREATIVITY. IT FAILS TO BE A HAVEN FOR BROKENNESS OR A BRIDGE FOR THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE!	18.92% 7	48.65% 18	29.73% 11	2.70% 1	37	2.16
HYPOCRISY! WHAT IS TAUGHT IS NOT WHAT IS PRACTICED.	37.84% 14	45.95% 17	16.22% 6	0.00% 0	37	1.78
THE CHURCH DIVORCED US! WE ARE HERE BUT WITHOUT A VOICE OR ACCESS; WE ARE NOT PART OF THE COMMUNITY.	18.92% 7	43.24% 16	32.43% 12	5.41% 2	37	2.24
MILLENNIALS APPRECIATE THAT OLDER GENERATIONS ENDEAVOR TO COMMUNICATE ON A LEVEL WE COULD UNDERSTAND. THIS HOWEVER IS PERCEIVED BY US TO BE PATRONIZING AND OFFENSIVE. IT IS A DISINCENTIVE FOR US TO BE PART OF THE CHURCH COMMUNITY.	18.92% 7	40.54% 15	35.14% 13	5.41% 2	37	2.27

Survey Results 3.2

Q2 IDENTIFY ONLY FIVE CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE WORSHIP SERVICE THAT APPEALS TO YOU AND MUST BE PRESENT IN EACH WORSHIP SERVICE?

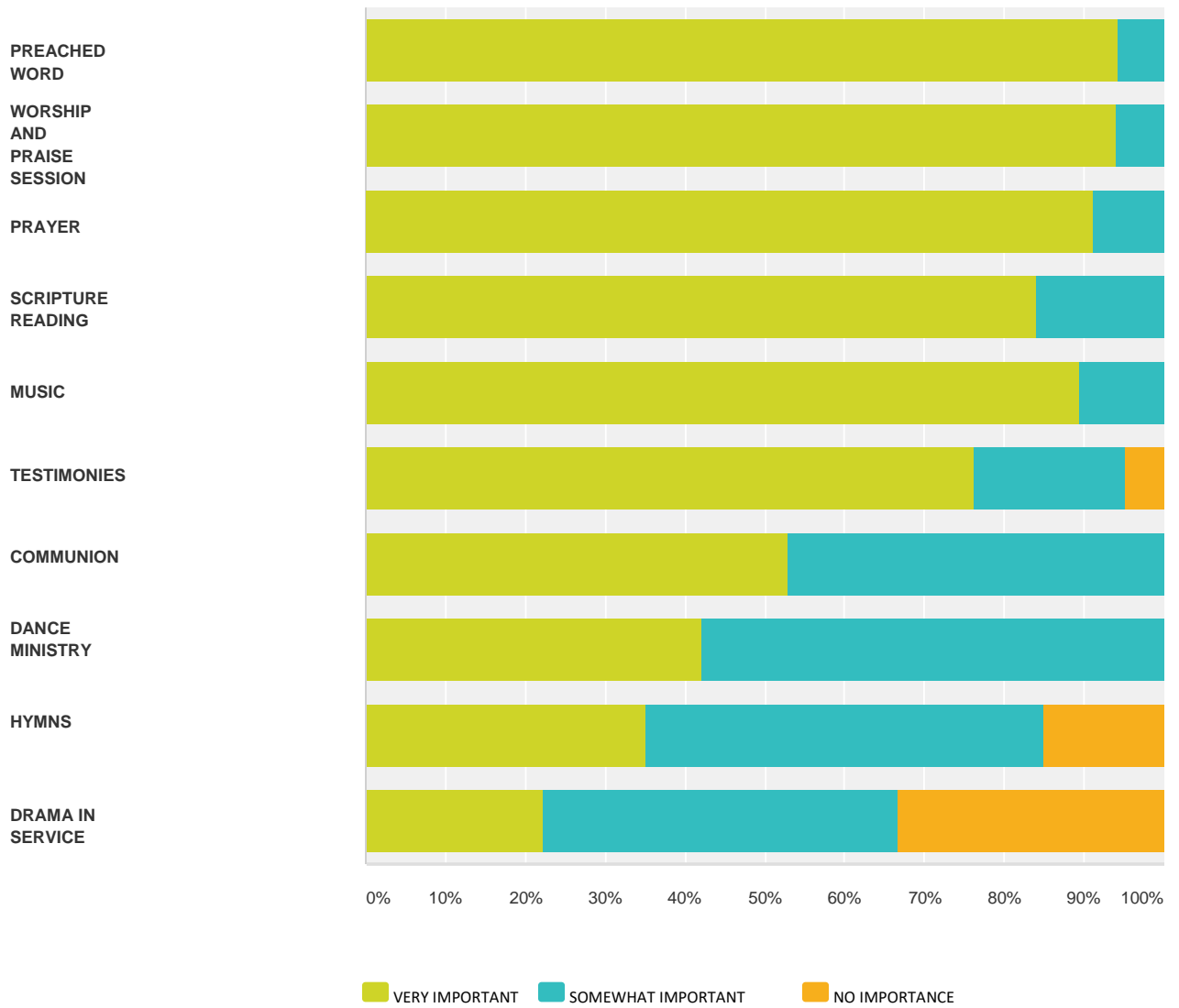


Table 2
Survey Results 3.2

	VERY IMPORTANT	SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	NO IMPORTANCE	Total	Weighted Average
PREACHED WORD	94.29% 33	5.71% 2	0.00% 0	35	1.06
WORSHIP AND PRAISE SESSION	93.94% 31	6.06% 2	0.00% 0	33	1.06
PRAYER	91.18% 31	8.82% 3	0.00% 0	34	1.09
SCRIPTURE READING	83.87% 26	16.13% 5	0.00% 0	31	1.16
MUSIC	89.29% 25	10.71% 3	0.00% 0	28	1.11
TESTIMONIES	76.19% 16	19.05% 4	4.76% 1	21	1.29
COMMUNION	52.94% 9	47.06% 8	0.00% 0	17	1.47
DANCE MINISTRY	42.11% 8	57.89% 11	0.00% 0	19	1.58
HYMNS	35.00% 7	50.00% 10	15.00% 3	20	1.80
DRAMA IN SERVICE	22.22% 4	44.44% 8	33.33% 6	18	2.11

Survey Results 3.3

**Q3 RATE HOW THESE DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORSHIP EXPERIENCES
APPEAL TO YOU
(1 IS THE LOWEST WITH 5 BEING THE HIGHEST)?**

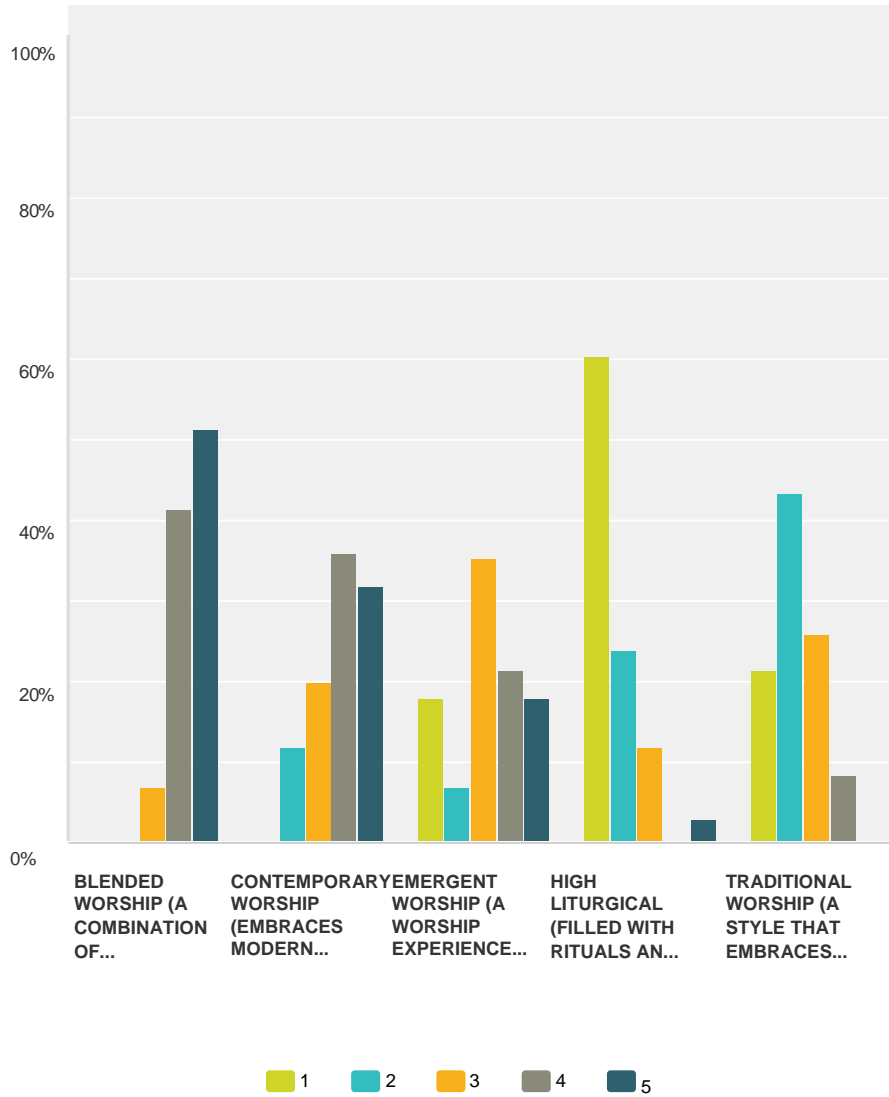


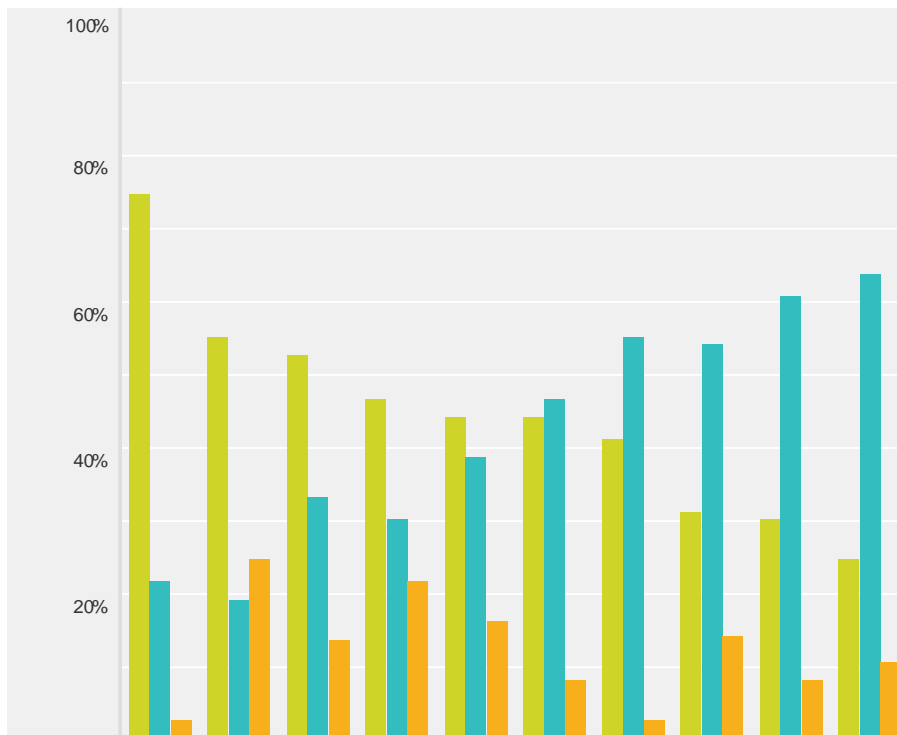
Table 3
Survey Results 3.3

	1	2	3	4	5	Total	Score
BLENDED WORSHIP (A COMBINATION OF TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY ELEMENTS IN WORSHIP)	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	6.90% 2	41.38% 12	51.72% 15	29	1.55
CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP (EMBRACES MODERN TECHNOLOGY AND MUSICAL CHOICES FOR A YOUNGER GENERATION)	0.00% 0	12.00% 3	20.00% 5	36.00% 9	32.00% 8	25	2.12
EMERGENT WORSHIP (A WORSHIP EXPERIENCE SOLELY DEPENDENT ON THE SPIRIT'S GUIDANCE)	17.86% 5	7.14% 2	35.71% 10	21.43% 6	17.86% 5	28	2.86
HIGH LITURGICAL (FILLED WITH RITUALS AND ARCHAIC FORMS)	60.61% 20	24.24% 8	12.12% 4	0.00% 0	3.03% 1	33	4.39
TRADITIONAL WORSHIP (A STYLE THAT EMBRACES LONGSTANDING RITUALS AND HYMNS)	21.74% 5	43.48% 10	26.09% 6	8.70% 2	0.00% 0	23	3.78

Survey Results 3.4

Q4 RESPONSES FROM OUR SURVEY STATED THAT MILLENNIALS ARE AFFECTED AND REACT TO THE FOLLOWING: PLEASE RATE YOUR RESPONSE

Answered: 36



AGREE

DISAGREE

N/A

Table 4
Survey Results 3.4

	AGREE	DISAGREE	N/A	Total	Weighted Average
CHURCH DEMANDS A CHANGE OF LIFESTYLE	75.00% 27	22.22% 8	2.78% 1	36	1.23
GOING AWAY TO COLLEGE = RELOCATION = STAYING RELOCATED = NO RETURN TO COMMUNITY	55.56% 20	19.44% 7	25.00% 9	36	1.26
CHURCH FAILS TO OFFER INCLUSIVENESS	52.78% 19	33.33% 12	13.89% 5	36	1.39
FREQUENT CHANGES OF PASTOR = CHANGES OF CULTURE AND EXPERIENCE = A COMPROMISED CONTINUITY OF MY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE	47.22% 17	30.56% 11	22.22% 8	36	1.39
A "STANDARD" CHURCH EXPERIENCE LEAVES ONE FEELING JUDGED	44.44% 16	38.89% 14	16.67% 6	36	1.47
CHURCH DOES NOT FACILITATE A "REALNESS" TO THE EXPERIENCE	44.44% 16	47.22% 17	8.33% 3	36	1.52
CHURCH DOES NOT TEACH LIFE APPLICATION OF SCRIPTURES	41.67% 15	55.56% 20	2.78% 1	36	1.57
CHURCH IS "TOO EXTRA"	31.43% 11	54.29% 19	14.29% 5	35	1.63
A CHURCH EXPERIENCE CONTINUES TO DISALLOW THE MOVEMENT OF THE "HOLY SPIRIT" TO DO HIS JOB	30.56% 11	61.11% 22	8.33% 3	36	1.67
CHURCH FAILS TO SHOW HOW TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD	25.00% 9	63.89% 23	11.11% 4	36	1.72

Survey Results 3.5

Q5 PLEASE RATE YOUR RESPONSES

Answered: 36 Skipped: 1

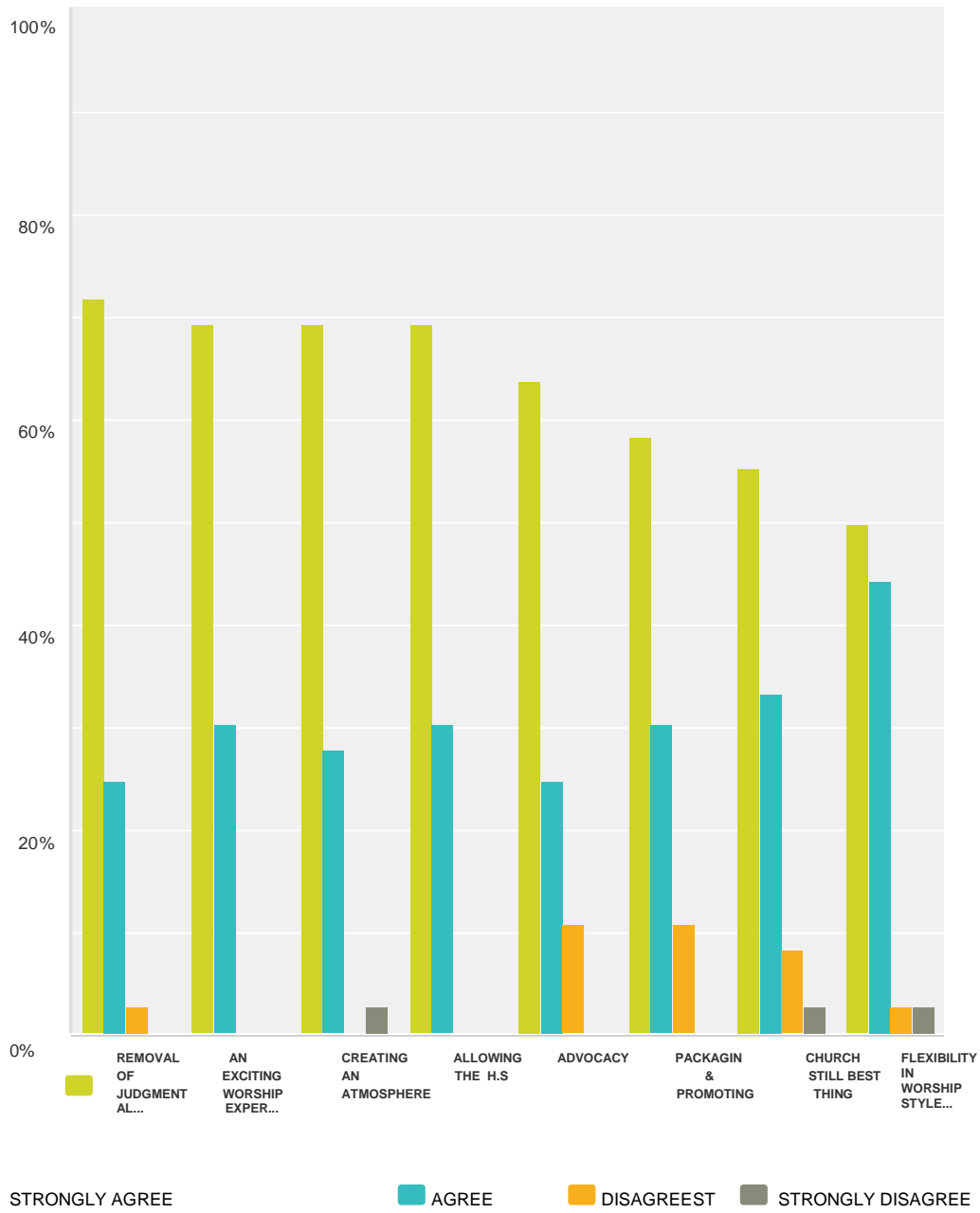


Table 5
Survey Results 3.5

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	Total	Weighted Average
REMOVAL OF JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDE	72.22% 26	25.00% 9	2.78% 1	0.00% 0	36	1.33
AN EXCITING WORSHIP EXPERIENCE WITH A MEANINGFUL PASTORAL PRESENCE IS A MAJOR "INCENTIVIZER."	69.44% 25	30.56% 11	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	36	1.31
CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF BELONGING, INCLUSIVENESS AND EMPOWERMENT	69.44% 25	27.78% 10	0.00% 0	2.78% 1	36	1.39
ALLOWING THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT WITHOUT RESTRAINTS	69.44% 25	30.56% 11	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	36	1.31
ADVOCACY FOR FLEXIBILITY IN THE WORSHIP (NOT JUST TRADITIONAL) EXPERIENCE COULD BE A MAJOR "INCENTIVIZER."	63.89% 23	25.00% 9	11.11% 4	0.00% 0	36	1.58
PACKAGING AND PROMOTING THE "FUN" IN CHURCH COULD BE A MAJOR "INCENTIVIZER."	58.33% 21	30.56% 11	11.11% 4	0.00% 0	36	1.64
HAVING TASTED OF "THE WORLD," THE CHURCH IS STILL THE BEST THING. IT FILLS THE VOID!	55.56% 20	33.33% 12	8.33% 3	2.78% 1	36	1.69
FLEXIBILITY IN WORSHIP STYLE AND THE TIME WE CONGREGATE FOR WORSHIP	50.00% 18	44.44% 16	2.78% 1	2.78% 1	36	1.64

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