

Perspectives of Millennials in Ministry: A Qualitative Study

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This study was completed as a collaboration between the Gateway District of the Foursquare Church and Solid Rock Outdoor Ministries (SROM).

The Millennial generation, the oldest of whom are turning 35 this year, are inarguably the ministry leaders of the future. However, Millennials also have the smallest percentage of religious affiliation and church attendance¹ of any generation, leaving many pastors looking for insight and advice on how to reach them. While there are many opinions regarding Millennials and the future they may create, there is very little information regarding the perspectives of Millennials serving in ministry positions.

BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Much of the research on Millennials either centers around the large number of those who mark “None” on demographic surveys when asked to indicate their religious affiliation. There is also growing interest in those who have left their church affiliation, called “Dones” by Tom Schultz² (although they have been called other things by other research institutions³). In seeking to help the pastors in the Gateway District of the Foursquare church and better train ministerial leaders through the intensive discipleship program offered by SROM, we sought out data in the form of evidence-based opinions as to what was working in reaching the Millennial generation. Even though the conversation surrounding Millennials and faith is at least 15 years old (the generation after Millennials, termed Generation Z or Digital Natives started around the year 2000⁴), there is surprisingly little evidence-based insight as to the faith perspectives of Christian Millennials and how they conceptualize the role of faith in their life. This is important because while there is research on the faith perspectives of Millennials as a generation, those who are professing and practicing Christians make up less than one third⁵ of the generational cohort, constituting a minority. Furthermore, there is very little data on how many people from this age demographic are entering ministries.⁶ This lack of data is conflated both by the call of many Millennials to bi-vocational ministry,⁷ and the large numbers of Baby Boomers still occupying paid ministry positions.

We believe that in order to better inform ministerial recruitment, preparation, and denominational organization, the perspectives of Millennials serving in ministry deserves a deeper look. Previous work has been published with the conclusion that Millennials do not think spirituality is relevant to their lives.⁸ We did not know if this was anecdotal or evidenced-based, and wanted to see how Millennials in

¹ Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life. (2015, May 12). America’s changing religious landscape. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

² Schultz, Thom and Joani. (2013). *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore: And How 4 Acts of Love Will Make Your Church Irresistible*. Group Publishing Inc.

³ Barna, G. (2006). *Revolution*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publisher.

⁴ Some researchers have the Digital Native generation starting as early as 1996 while others have it beginning as late as 2001.

⁵ Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life. (2015, May 12). America’s changing religious landscape. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

⁶ <http://nineteensixty-four.blogspot.com/2014/08/sister-statistics-what-is-happening.html>,

⁷ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/mercynotsacrifice/2013/07/30/why-millennials-dont-want-to-be-methodist-pastors/>

⁸Twenge JM, Exline JJ, Grubbs JB, Sastry R, Campbell WK (2015) Generational and Time Period Differences in American Adolescents’ Religious Orientation, 1966–2014. *PLoS ONE* 10(5): e0121454. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0121454

ministry reacted to that notion. We also wanted to know more on what they thought about spirituality, religion and church. Rather than testing the prevalence of current assumptions about the Millennial generation, we attempted to leave the questions broad and inclusive in order to gain as much insight as possible.

RESEARCH METHODS

Our team took a qualitative approach to our research question and surveyed Millennials serving in ministry, asking them to describe their perspectives on religion, spirituality, and church. The framing and introduction included in the survey was:

Most of what is said about the spirituality of Millennials are generalizations about the entire cohort. While this is legitimate research evidence and valuable in understand trends, it still leaves many questions regarding "what to do" in missionary endeavors to individuals 18 to 35.

That is what this survey is about. I would like to collect the perspectives of individuals involved with and committed to a life following Jesus. I want to hear the stories of how God reached you and why you made the choices you did. I want to find 'what works' in reaching this generation.

I really appreciate your participation in this and whatever insight you can give me regarding your own spiritual journey. My goal is that I can use your stories to help influence the thinking of church leaders and church planters in my denomination.

Thank you for sharing your experiences and perspectives with me. I look forward to learning from you.

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For the survey questions, we used 5 open-ended questions in order to obtain an expression of their thoughts. The questions were:

1. What year were you born? (enter 4-digit birth year; for example, 1976)
2. Many Millennials say that spirituality/religion/church simply are not important or necessary for their life. How would you respond to someone who says that?
3. What role does spirituality play in your life? Why do you choose to have a spiritual life? What constitutes your spiritual life?
4. What role does religion play in your life? If you choose to engage in religion, why do you make that choice? What kind of religious practices do you engage in?
5. What kind/type of church do you engage in? If you could make 'church' look like anything, what would it be? How often would you ideally like to engage in this 'church' (what rhythms of involvement and engagement would make the most sense for your life)?

Question 1 served to identify the individual as belonging to the Millennial generational cohort. Question 2 served as a primer question to help respondents begin to articulate their thoughts. This question ended up having limitations in that some respondents approached it from a ministry aspect that was

other's-centered. While the insights offered by the answers given to this question were of a mixed quality, some answers were quite insightful as will be discussed below.

Question 3, 4, and 5 pertain to the research question specifically. The reason for treating the concepts of religion and spirituality separately is that they have been considered to be distinct by the past two generations (Baby Boomers and Gen Xers). The creation of two different questions, therefore, was due to the assumption of the researchers as to this paradigm.

Question 5 sought to learn what Millennials serving in ministry thought about church and the rhythms thereof. Committed church attendance, in current research, is defined as attending at least 2 times a month.⁹ As researchers, we wondered if there might be more to learn about that assumption of definition. We also understood the conceptions and understandings of *church* are currently in flux in our culture, thus the word *church* was placed in quotations in order to tease out possible insights as to what conceptions of church Millennials serving in ministry hold.

The survey was distributed informally through several distinct networks of Millennials. Jessie Cruickshank emailed the survey link to 3 Millennials serving in ministry in distinct and non-overlapping social and networks. One was denominational, one was parachurch, and one was a faith-based non-profit. Those three individuals were encouraged to send the survey to their friends and social networks. From there the survey went to schools friends, former ministry coworkers, and various relational networks. Surveys were collected online anonymously, and no individuals were compensated for their participation in any way.

Respondents from across the United States answered the survey, totaling 25 individuals. This is a small sample size, typical of qualitative research, and therefore has significant limitation as to what can be extrapolated from the sample. In the sample, the respondents ranged from single, to married, to parents. They also ranged from serving in volunteer positions in churches, to serving in Christian non-profits, to pastors. They also varied in denominational and theological affiliation. The diversity in the fundamental demographics of the respondents contributes to the insightfulness of the answers provided, as we are confident that they are not coming from any uniformity of background, training, or formal experience.

KEY FINDINGS

Quality of Responses

The quality of the sample responses to the survey cannot be disregarded when reading through the data. Of the 25 respondents, only 3 had the survey open and active on their browser less than ten minutes (#10, #20, #23), and 7 showed a time-stamp of having it open and active for over an hour (#3, #5, #8, #13, #14, #19, #22). Not only is the amount of time spent on these responses impressive, but the

⁹ Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life. (2015, May 12). America's changing religious landscape. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>

survey responses themselves were thorough and well-articulated (see especially #13). The answers were not vague. The individuals in this sample often gave very specific examples of spiritual practices (both individual and corporate) and described ways in which their spirituality and/or religion had affected and informed their decisions. Of the 25 responses, 10 detailed personal spiritual practices in which the participants routinely engaged (#2. Q4., #3. Q3. P1-2., #8. Q3. P3., #11. Q3. P1., #13. Q3., #14. Q4., #17. Q4., #18. Q4. P2., #19. Q3. P2., #21. Q3.). Participants often responded in the active tense, describing personal practices and a Christ-centered relationships.

These responses reflect individuals who have thought about the questions included in the survey, and the answers given often disclosed personal experiences with both Christ and His Church. The complexity of the language used was at a college or graduate reading level, and the thorough responses indicated that the participants thought critically about these concepts. One participant went so far as to reference academic research in their explanation for why they choose a spiritual life (#24. Q2)! Again, these are characteristics of this small sample and cannot be generalized to Millennials, or Millennials serving in ministry without further research.

In light of the critical thinking reflected in these survey responses, it is both surprising and encouraging to read of an overall positive perspective of Christ's Church expressed by the small sample¹⁰. Currently, the acceptance of a fallen Church has become the norm. In the previous two generations (Baby Boomers and Gen Xers), the common perspectives is of the Church as corrupt, hypocritical, judgmental, and out-of-date.¹¹ By contrast, the perspective of the Church as described by the Millennials in this survey is simultaneously pragmatic and hopeful: expressing both an honest and realistic view of the current fallen state of the Church, and an irrepressible optimism of what the Church is called to be. Participants describe a captivating and compelling understanding of the mission Christ gave to His Church, and express that they would like to see this mission lived out in their local bodies of believers:

"I would like to engage in a church that holds scripture, tradition and reason in balance, has robust hermeneutic, incorporates the body and its sense into worship, celebrates the sacraments, has a compelling sense of mission to ensouled bodies and not just embodied souls, and is not afraid to address unjust structures of power and practices that systematically commit sin. Ideally, I would be engaged in this church [e]very day – but we may not necessarily gather as the body of Christ daily. Life would be done in community with other Christians, living out our faith in the world, supporting one another and encouraging one another" (#13. Q5).

"I want a church that is gospel centered, Holy Spirit led and missional. I prefer exegetical teaching and sound doctrine but there must also be room for mystery and the Holy Spirit. I want the church to be on mission but not pragmatic as to miss the heart of

¹⁰ It is possible that those with a negative view may not have even responded to the survey, and to that end the sample is self-selected. The pervasiveness of a positive view of the church by Millennials serving in ministry must be born out with further research.

¹¹ Mabry, J.R. (2013). *Faithful Generations: Effective ministry across generational lines*. New York: Morehouse Publishing.

...serving. I long for spiritual truth and depth. I also want a church to have a sense of reverence before the Lord” (#17. Q5).

“If I could make church look like anything I would want it to look like the way Jesus operated [...] He had this beautiful way of loving people where they were at, but also calling them higher. His ministry met needs, disciplined people and showed us how to live life together in the Spirit while also looking outside of ourselves to those that don’t yet know truth, always seeking to [advance] the kingdom” (#15. Q5).

“I love my local church; I love [...] that it’s committed to social justice, that it strives to foster healthy community, that it’s seeking to plant other churches and be connected to the global Church, that it’s committed to the historic witness of the church and the gospel message, that it offers intellectually stimulating sermons and challenging messages, that it’s open to corrective feedback” (#21. Q5).

“I like to engage with a church that is focused on partnering in God’s mission and not their own mission. I like churches that have a servanthip mentality and clearly have an impact on their community because it’s the right thing to do not because they want attention. I like a church that seeks to empower people to be who they were created to be” (#23. Q5).

Religion-Spirituality Distinction

As previously noted, the optimism and embracing of the church demonstrated by the Millennial respondents in this small sample stands in contrast to the previous two generations. The Baby Boomers are known for their generational disassociation of religion and spirituality. They saw religion as institutional and not to be trusted. Religion became associated with rules, hierarchies and abuses of power.¹² Thus, *religion* has strong negative connotations for Baby Boomers. Gen Xers feel similarly, though not as strongly. Gen Xers were raised in the environment of anti-religion and also conceive of the two concepts as distinctive and occasionally antithetical. It was from this paradigm that survey questions 3 and 4 were written.

Given those generational perspectives and cultural assumptions, the reactions of the respondents to the distinction between the two implicit in the survey were surprising. Only 3 of the 25 respondents expressed negative connotations associated with *religion*.

“The word religion has a very bad connotation for me. I [relate it] to crusades, legalism, countless and meaningless rituals. I guess Bible reading and prayer are the most “religious” practices I engage in as a protestant Christian.” (#19. Q4.)

“ ‘Religion’ is known as a club. I don’t believe in clubs.” (#10, Q4.)

¹² Mabry, J.R. (2013). *Faithful Generations: Effective ministry across generational lines*. New York: Morehouse Publishing.

"I don't like the word religion because my relationship with Jesus is not a religion. I don't just have a set of rules I follow like other religions. This Jesus thing is different." (#20. Q4.)

These are responses typical with the paradigms of the previous generations. What was surprising though is that this type of paradigm was a distinctive minority in our survey sample and was not shared by 22 of the 25 respondents. Rather, many of them saw religion and spirituality as being strongly associated, even inextricably interconnected.

(In response to Question 4) "I don't like this question, because for me spirituality IS religion...Religion is the embodied practice of spirituality; I see it as similar to the relationship between faith and works. We are saved through faith, but faith without works is dead. Spirituality is what brings wholeness to my life, but without religion, spirituality accomplishes nothing." (#21. Q4. Emphasis original)

"I don't see a separation in religion or spiritual life." (#23. Q4.)

"I don't love the terms "spirituality" or "religion" but there aren't many better ones. While they have different connotations, I don't distinguish much between them in my life." (#3. Q4.)

"Religion is the earthly facilitator of the spiritual. Religion provides us with others to share in the experience of God. (#7. Q4.)

"Religion gives structure to my spirituality." (#8. Q4.)

Some respondents understood there to be social aspect to the distinction between religion and spirituality, though they found those concepts lacking in describing their personal point of view.

"I don't believe that Christianity is just religious, but as I live this life I do look religious to people around me." (#24. Q4.)

"When I talk about Jesus, it automatically seems religious... Religion has played a role in defining my identity and my place in society." (#16. Q4.)

A couple of respondents had no real concept of religion, only *faith* and *practice*.

"Thinking about this actually makes me think that it may not be spirituality that I am talking about. I would say it is my faith and those who may not be Christians would say it is my spirituality. To be honest, I don't think I like the word spirituality because it sounds all high and mighty...I engage in religious practices, yes. But is that how I define those things, no. I am not sure why but I don't like the word religion because it does not seem personal, so I would rather say that that is my relationship with God. I do all those things not because I have to but because I want to. The word religion seems more like an obligation than a choice." (#25. Q3, Q4.)

"My religion is that I follow Christ. I would say the religious practices – I like to call them disciplines – [draw] one closer to Christ." (#14. Q4.)

In this small sample, the implicit assumption of the differentiation between *religion* and *spirituality* seems to have broken down. These survey respondents associate a range of definitions and social conceptions to the terms. Whether or not the predominance of their interconnection is widely held remains to be seen in future research.

One very interesting finding is that not a single survey respondent associated the church with negative concepts. While individuals may have had negative ideas around institutions and a range of definitions of “church”, not one expressed a negative view of “church” with comment such as, “I serve God, but don’t need the church.” This is distinctly different from previous generations, most notably the Baby Boomers¹³. This leads us to our next key finding.

Church and Commitment

The commitment and engagement with the broader concept of ‘church’ by the survey participants was profound. Responses indicate (and advocate for) committed relationships with a local body of believers, often seeing this commitment to the body as an extension of personal or individual spiritual practices, and as an extension of their commitment to Christ.

“Relationships with other people are important, because God is love, and love is relational” (#8. Q3).

“I am actively involved in my Christian church because I see it as an important construct that the Lord lays out in the bible” (#15. Q4).

“I do engage in religion, not so much for the sake of religion, but because it is useful both in pursuing a like-minded community and because it is helpful to me to stay connected with God” (#18. Q4. P1).

“It’s not a perfect church, so I also like that my church encouraged commitment—so we’ll stay even when we see the non-optimal elements of the church” (#21. Q5).

“If you are looking for meaning, value, a sense of belonging, emotional well-being or a sense of connectedness, you should consider trying to find out about the possibility of God being who He says He is & learning about Him & relationship with Him on His terms. I encourage you to ask questions & try to find out about God in community because life should not be lived in a vacuum & those around us who may have good answers are not scared of questions” (#24. Q2).

(See also #2. Q4., #3. Q2., #8. Q2-3. Q5. P3., #9. Q4-5., #10. Q5., #14. Q4., #23. Q2-3., #24. Q5., #25. Q2. Q5.)

¹³ Mabry, J.R. (2013). *Faithful Generations: Effective ministry across generational lines*. New York: Morehouse Publishing.

In their descriptions, many Millennials engage with their fellow believers in many forms, shunning the notion that the Church is limited by a building.

"I orient my weekly practices to be building up Christian community and connected to the Church (Sunday services, leading a children's ministry in my neighborhood, evening prayers with those who live in my apartment complex)" (#2. Q4).

"Church is both form and content. Church is a place to serve, but it is not that primarily" (#3. Q2).

"In this season of my life I live with Christians, am dating a Christian, have almost exclusively Christian friends in the city where I live, [...] and work for a ministry. I do not attend Sunday services because I believe that the sum total of my daily, constant, engagement with Christians is active and living participation in the body of Christ" (#16. Q5. P1).

"I think that it is crucial to have church outside of the building, a real community of believers who are there for one another and for the non-believers" (#19. Q5).

"We have developed friendships with other families in the church that we maintain outside of the church building. This frequency of interaction helps us keep connected without feeling overwhelmed in our busy lives" (#22. Q5. P2).

(See also #4. Q5., #6. Q4. P2., #7. Q5., #8. Q5., #9. Q5., #10. Q5., #11. Q5. P3., #13. Q5. #14. Q5.)

It is clear from an initial reading that these Millennials are actively engaged with and invested in the Church in ways that extend far beyond a set time and location, even as they express an understanding of the limited nature of the body. Church is seen as a family, and they are committed to where they experience this family, whether in large group setting or small group setting. Of the 25 respondents, 7 described Church (either the current local body they attended, or their ideal type of church to engage in) specifically as a *"family."* When used in the surveys, participants had an overwhelmingly positive connotation of the concept of *family*:

"God, at the very essence of His being, is love. There is not a single person on the planet who doesn't need to know the purest, most selfless, gentle, and fierce love, that is God. It is very difficult to simply receive love from someone that you can't see. The purpose of the Church is to teach people that they are lovable; to work together and live life as a family, and to remind each other that they are lovable and loved" (#6. Q2. P2-3).

(See also #8. Q4. P2. Q5. P3., #9. Q2. Q5. P1., #14. Q5., #20. Q2., #24. Q5., #25. Q5.).

As participants extrapolated their concepts of *family*, they explained that they did not expect perfection from one another, but rather valued authenticity and active trust in their fellow believers, as displayed by sharing the imperfect aspects of oneself with each other. As demonstrated in the following quotes, participants are far from being judgmental or accusatory when considering these imperfections, but express genuine appreciation for the culture of authenticity in their broader church family:

“The Church is full of ugly people, including myself. I’m grateful for church communities that confess their sin regularly and continue to be open to the gospel transforming their lives over and over, deeper and deeper” (#2. Q5).

“Church is a place for community and a place for learning. A place to go when mourning and when laughing. A place to go for the seminal moments in life: birth, marriage, death. And it’s a place to go week in [and] week out. It’s a place to move through the seasons (i.e. the liturgical calendar!). Church is both form and content. Church is a place to serve, but it is not that primarily. Church is of course, broken, but it’s the best we’ve got” (#3. Q2).

“I like to be [a part] of a ‘church’ where there is love, acceptance and forgiveness. Where people are not walking in with their mask on, but they come in as they are raw and messy. [...] That there is a sense of family and the approach where every one knows we are all on the same playing field, that no one is above sin” (#25. Q5).

While several participants do mention that they do feel an emotional and/or spiritual benefit from their connection to the fellowship of believers, personal benefit is not always the primary motivator for them to seek out a Christian community. Perhaps the most unexpected motivator mentioned is one of obedience and following through on a commitment:

“My preference [for what type of church I like to engage in] has very little to do with convenience and more to do with where I believe that God wants me” (#6. Q5).

“My belief that the Bible is the living word is foundational to my moral values and the way I live my life. I make decisions based on what I have learned from reading God’s word and my desire to live a life that is set apart from those that are ‘of the world’” (#9. Q4).

“I seek first the Kingdom (heart and dominion) of God and say yes to and obey what He lays out in scripture and speaks to be daily. I want to be more like Him, so I spend as much time with Him as possible and pray constantly” (#14. Q4).

This kind of obedience might stem from what many of these Millennials describe as a personal encounter with God and represents yet another theme that has arisen in the survey responses.

“Choice” and Encounter

As described earlier, the Millennial respondents to the survey express an enthralling and convicting understanding of the mission and purpose of the Church. Again, the pervasiveness of this position is unknown, but the kind of commitment and vision expressed by this small sample seems to stem not only from their engagement with their local bodies of believers, but also from direct encounters with the Lord Himself. Responses here indicate that the personal encounters and experiences with God have not only strengthened their commitment to Jesus and to His body, but have informed the way they

relate to and engage with the Church. Nine of the participants expressed encountering or experiencing God in a personal way, leading them to further support their commitment to a spiritual life:

"I believe that the Bible is filled with accounts of real people experiencing God, these experiences line up with the same values that I have heard and seen in God in my own experiences" (#6. Q4).

"I choose to have a spiritual life because I have experienced the abundant grace and mercy of God through the struggles in my life as well as through the good times" (#9. Q3).

"[Spirituality] plays an integral role. I choose to have a spiritual life because I have had encounters with God that I don't think leave me any choice otherwise" (#14. Q3).

"Jesus is important to my life because He has done so much for me, and I've met him personally, and I think someone who does not acknowledge God's part in their life is missing an important fact about existence" (#16. Q2).

"I choose to have a spiritual life because I have encountered God, I know Him, and once you have met Him, it's not something you can just ignore and pretend you haven't. Knowing God changes everything" (#18. Q3).

"I have so many stories and experiences where I felt God at work" (#24. Q3).

(See also #8. Q3. P3., #13. Q1-Q2., #20. Q3.

In the next section, several participants expressed a resistance to the idea that they had chosen a spiritual or religious life. Of those resisting the idea of choosing a spiritual/religious life, most indicated that spirituality and accepting themselves as a spiritual being was connected to overall health and well-being. The ethos of this resistance is well expressed by one participant in particular:

"It is a fundamental element of the human experience to have encounters with the divine, with something transcendent. [...] People today still have experiences of the divine and attempt to understand their experience; many turn to spiritual practices for a way to form a ritual or live through their experience and understanding. To jettison this way of life is to deprive the human experience of a way of understanding itself" (#13. Q2).

More than one respondent expressed a deep connection to having a spiritual life:

"I have a spiritual life because it's how I was taught to live [...] and because I cannot live without it" (#3. Q3).

"Spirituality is my relationship with the Creator. It is the foundation underneath my decisions and my disciplines. I don't think that I ever really chose it, I just started talking to God when I was a child, and He always responded to me. I choose to continue everyday, because I love Him" (#6. Q3. P1).

"I choose to have a spiritual life because it gives meaning to my life. It gives me hope. My relationship with God is so real, that after what I have experienced with him, I could not go back to life without God" (#8. Q3. P2).

One respondent indicated that they did not see separation between being alive and having a spiritual life:

"[Spirituality] is a central element of my life. I did not 'choose' to have a spiritual life. I am alive, and so I have experiences of the spiritual in my life" (#13. Q3).

Two participants quoted the Apostle Peter, indicating that they (like Peter) saw no other choice to find life but to follow Christ.

"I've found myself saying with Peter, 'Lord, you have the words of life... Where else could I go?'" (#4. Q2).

As for why I continue to identify with this faith, I might appropriate the words of Peter to Jesus in John 6:68 – "Lord, where else can we go? You have the words that give eternal life [or life in abundance]" (#11. Q4).

In reviewing these answers, a theme arises in which participants so strongly embrace and experience spirituality that they feel they have no choice *but* to recognize and nurture a spiritual life and express a committed relationship to His body. This relationship to Christ's body reveals an interconnected and interdependent faith life in the Millennials in this survey sample.

Implicit Trends: Interconnected and Interdependent Faith Life

There are several trends implicit in the data of this qualitative study. While one must be careful in extrapolating trends from a small sample size to a large population, the pervasiveness of these trends in the data and their strong distinction from previous generations make them worth explicating and exploring further. The consistency of these trends in the Millennial ministerium at large is where future research is necessary.

First, survey respondents expressed concepts depicting a faith life that is holistic and practical.

"I would like to engage with a church that ... has a compelling sense of mission to ensouled bodies, not just embodied souls." (#13. Q5.)

"[My spiritual disciplines] are seeking Jesus in the morning and right before bed. I pray and engage my body, soul and spirit with God [...]. I'm in God's word. I spend time with other believers to encourage and spur one another on. And I spend time with people who don't know God – the last, least, and lost of the world" (#14. Q4).

"I believe humans are spiritual beings whether we realize it or not. To realize it and act on this is to align with reality and holistic health." (#16. Q3.)

"[My spirituality] affects my life in that it does (or at the very least, should) inform every decision I make, from where I live, what I do, how I do it, to what I buy. It also creates in me a desire to know God more and more, which leads me to do things like pray, journal, and read my Bible." (#18. Q3.)

"I have a consistent conversation going with God, throughout the day, not always speaking, but always open. Many days I also take particular time to journal prayers, or just what is going through my head that day. Music, nature and science help me see God through beauty. Relationships with other people are important because God is love, and love is relational. My spiritual life involves my mind, my heart, my emotions, my memories, my spirit, my personality, my body, my actions, my speech, my thoughts: everything about me." (#8. Q3.)

"Weekly, I attend a Sunday morning service, volunteering about once a month to bear the chalice, read, or count the offering. I also attend a midweek Bible study that has elements of prayer and worship. I meet with my mentor on Tuesday mornings where we discuss life and study the Word. Oh, and I'm a Young Life leader" (#3. Q3. P3).

"Being a Christian is the most central feature of my life, guiding my choices about where and how I live. It's how I orient my world. It's why I live among the poor. [...] I orient my day-to-day decisions around being a Christian [...] I orient my weekly practices to be building up Christian community and connected to the Church [...] and I orient my major life decisions around being a Christian" (#2. Q4).

While this is not necessarily a departure from previous generations, it is distinct in the degree to which this conviction is expressed.

For example, as illustrated in the statements below, one trend that existed in previous generations is the idea the Jesus and the church are separate and can be engaged with differently¹⁴. Ideas such as "I like Jesus but don't like his people" were entirely missing from these respondent's answers. Rather, they expressed value to Jesus being embodied in the church and the church embodying Jesus in a fascinating and un-self-conscious way. It appears they don't even know how new and revolutionary such a paradigm is.

"I do engage in religion, not so much for the sake of religion, but because it is useful in pursuing a like-minded community and because it is helpful to be to stay connected with God." (#18. Q4.)

"I continue to grow and change into the best "me" I can be because of the guidance of the God & His Holy Spirit living in me. I am not trying to be someone I am not [in order] to fit into a Church or legalistic standard, but rather growth through relationships with God and the community of believers who will support me...I am a member of a local church and serve because I value the

¹⁴ Mabry, J.R. (2013). *Faithful Generations: Effective ministry across generational lines*. New York: Morehouse Publishing.

connectedness and the community that I receive there. I participate in Bible studies on a weekly basis and when I have opportunities to serve or minister to others I take advantage of it. I choose to do things that look different from those around me because I am choosing to honor God in every area of my life.” (#24. Q3, Q4.)

“I think that it is crucial to have church outside of the building, a real community of believers who are there for one another and for the non-believers.” (#19. Q4.)

“I would respond [to other Millennials] by saying, for myself... I fully rely on the Father, Son , and Holy Spirit on a daily basis and the church community....My spiritual life is one lived out in community, centered in love and experienced in a variety of ways.” (#23. Q2,Q3.)

“I like to engage with a church that is focused on partnering in God’s mission and not their own mission I like churches that have a servanthip mentality and clearly have an impact on their community because it is the right thing to do, not because they want attention. I like a church that seeks to empower people t be who they were created to be, a safe place to be a hot mess and one that helps people find healing and love. I would pastor a church like that.” (#23, Q4)

“The purpose of the church is to teach people that they are lovable, to work together and live life as a family, and to remind each other that they are lovable and loved.” (#6. Q2.)

“Church is a close knit fellowship of believers.” (#7.Q5.)

“I choose to engage in religion because I can’t do life on my own. I need support and encouragement. I need others to love me and to show love to. The Bible also presents the image of family and of a body, and this further supports living and meeting together as Christians.” (#8.Q4.)

“Ideally, I would be engaged in this church every day – but we may not necessarily gather as the body of Christ daily. Life would be done in community with other Christians, living out our faith in the world, supporting one another and encouraging one another.” (#13. Q5.)

“I have been blessed by positive church community. I have also struggled to find church community after college, but have persisted because I have previously experienced the blessing and desire to be a part of a community that presses into the Word and takes care of each other.....The church that I am engaged in is very community based. The email blasts that are sent out to the congregation address the congregation as "family". We are asked to volunteer our time in the church and community as a responsibility to the family. This language has been a neat way to see the ownership we all have over what the church community can/does look like. This church in particular was started 4-5 years ago and is still a growing, but small congregation. I love the picture of the church as the family, I believe that this is a biblical image...I am interested in becoming more involved, part of that is getting to know other church attenders and allowing those people to become my friends/ walk through life with me. For a church to be a good community, we need to share life with each other and not just sit next to each other on Sunday and forget about each other throughout the week.” (#9. Q4, Q5.)

In the remaining implicit trends in this sample we see a possible pattern. The implicit trends seem to fall into three groupings of faith conceptions: that Millennials engage in a faith and practice that moves them towards an *Integrated Self*, provides a means of being *Connected to Others*, and is *Transcendent*. These characteristics seem inherently connected with other Millennial generational characteristics, such as connectedness and a concern about social and emotional health. But what has not been often seen, and which this qualitative study sheds light on, is how those generational characteristics play themselves out in an Millennial Christian's life of faith.

Integral Faith Practice

Having an *integral* faith practice can first be understood in contrast to having a *compartmentalized* faith practice. A compartmentalized practice can be described as one where an individual links the activities of their faith to certain spaces or times, such as praying for meals, attending church on holidays, or even the concept of 'church' being a specific event which takes place in a specific building. The contrast of this compartmentalized conception is an *integral* faith practice, where the activities of faith do not occur within the boundaries of a set time, place, or even group. Instead, the boundaries between 'faith life' and day-to-day life bleed and can range from fuzzy to non-existent. An integral conception of the activities of faith was both implicit and explicit in the responses.

First, the high level of intentionality in practice of spiritual disciplines was very interesting. Many of the respondents listed spiritual disciplines as critical to their faith practice, but the list of items included was an expanded version of Richard Foster's original 13.¹⁵ Items listed specifically as spiritual disciplines included dance (#16. Q3.), sharing time and meals with other believers (#4. Q5., #6. Q5.), sharing time and meals with the lost (#2. Q4., #14. Q4.), physical exercise (#3. Q3.), confession (#3. Q3., #18. Q4.), communion (#16. Q4., #18. Q4., #22. Q4., #25. Q4.), forgiving others (#2. Q4., #25. Q5.), and love (#8. Q4., #10. Q4., #17. Q4.). These may be found in Foster's work and are definitely of the same spirit, yet the comprehensiveness of the list demonstrates a conviction of living life with practical disciplines, yielding holistic health.

Second, several respondents to the survey expressed the idea that 'church' is more than an event or gathering, but rather it is a tribe or collection of people. This was stated both explicitly (#8. Q5., #15. Q5., #16. Q5., #25. Q5.) and implied through descriptions of acting as a Body of Christ (#10. Q5., #19. Q5., #22. Q5., #24. Q5.).

A third demonstration of this understanding can be seen in the data as people described *when* they practiced their faith. While disciplines were described of as discrete practices and actions, the notion of 'church' being bound or constrained to a specific time was also explicit in the responses (#3. Q3., #5. Q5., #7. Q5., #9. Q5., #13. Q5., #14. Q4., #15. Q3.).

¹⁵ Foster, R. J. (1978). *Celebration of Discipline: The path to spiritual growth*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Implicitly in the responses were several additional expressions of an integral faith practice. There were many respondents who described a paradigm of life and faith that was more integrated than separate. For example, for some there was not a distinction between the sacred and the secular (#1. Q3., #8. Q3., #13. Q3.). Rather, actions normally attributed to the secular, such as backpacking (#5. Q3.) or bowling (#8. Q5.), were attributed with sacred meaning. This paradigm was pervasively expressed by the respondents.

Additionally, many respondents did not draw strong distinctions between the spiritual and material worlds. Rather, they expressed a blending and integration of two both implicitly (#7. Q5., #10. 5., #22. Q3.) and explicitly (#2. Q4., #4. Q4., #5. Q3., #8. Q3., #13. Q4., #21. Q4.). For these individuals, the alignment of the spiritual and the state of being alive form a foundational paradigm of how they interact with the world. When the boundary lines are blurred between what is sacred and what is secular, as well as between what is spiritual and what is material, there arises a holistic connection to life. Furthermore, the boundaries are blurred between insiders and outsiders (#11. Q5.) and 'acts of worship' are extended so that expressing love, being alive, and being human are seen as worship to God. This seems to reflect a conviction (known or tacit) of what Jesus said in the greatest commandments to love God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength (Luke 10:27) or Peter's exhortation in 1 Peter 1:15 to be Holy in all the habits of life.

Connected to Others

Several of the responses speak to finding great joy in weekly gatherings, and expressing a desire for meeting more often with more intimate fellowship. Again, there is a desire for a more holistic and practical relationship with Christ and His Church. Not only do we see individual integral faith practice, but we see a desire for deeper and more often communal practices. For many of the respondents, attending a gathering in a building once a week does not slake their spiritual thirst:

"Church is the close knit fellowship of believers, church should look like eating, celebrating, lifting up, and going out into the world with a like minded group of people. Church should happen more than once a week" (#7. Q5).

"I participate in Sunday services and a Wednesday night small group. I am interested in being more involved, part of that is getting to know the other church attenders and allowing those people to become my friends/walk through life with me. For a church to be a good community, we need to share life with each other and not just sit next to each other on Sunday and forget about each other throughout the week" (#9. Q5. P2).

"For me, church engagement has to be at least a weekly occurrence. Interaction with a smaller group of church members during some other time of the week is ideal" (#11. Q5. P3).

"I attend every Sunday and Wednesday, and I would like to attend a small group on Monday evenings or Sunday school before the Sunday service" (#12. Q5).

“Ideally, I would be engaged in this church [every] day – but we may not gather as the body of Christ daily. Life would be done in community with other Christians, living out our faith in the world, supporting one another and encouraging one another” (#13. Q5).

“My engagement with my church is the priority. I rearrange my life, and experience conflict at work, in order to engage with my church” (#21. Q5).

(See also #5. Q5., #14. Q5., #15. Q5., #18. Q5. P4., #22. Q5. P2., #25. Q5.)

Several participants described corporate practices they regularly engaged in as part of their relationship with their local body of believers. When describing these corporate practices, 8 of the survey respondents mentioned communal prayer, often in connection with other more traditional high church practices (e.g., liturgy, confession):

“I would have a bunch of liturgies, communal prayers, and I would make communion the focal point of the service” (#1. Q5).

“The service starts with the Word, then communal statement of faith, confession, and prayer, culminating in the breaking of bread” (#3. Q5).

“Once or twice a month, I join a couple of my friends for an early morning prayer service at another church. This service consists of prayers, songs, chants, and an extended time of silence” (#11. Q4).

“Currently, I express my spirituality through practices of private prayer, including meditative prayer and the ancient Christian practice of ‘lecto divina,’ (sic) but also through corporate practices of prayer, study, celebration and sacramental remembrance” (#13. Q3).

(See also #2. Q4., #3. Q5. P3., #8. Q4. P3. and Q5. P1, 4-5., #19. Q5.)

Outside of prayer, survey respondents also mentioned verbal communication as a highlight and hallmark of their *ecclesia* gatherings. Testimonials, discussions, conversations, and sharing ‘life stories’ were all common in the descriptions of current practices as well as what their ideal church would include:

“Intercession, sharing testimonies, and serving the community would also be components of the group” (#8. Q5).

(See also #5. Q4., #6. Q5., #11. Q3., #13. Q4., #18. Q5. P4., #19. Q5.)

This shared verbal communion was often highlighted as an important part of the participants’ descriptions of weekly or monthly practices. A common practice of sharing meals is seen as participants describe both their current reality and their ideal method of sharing life with one another. Participants frequently mentioned meeting with accountability groups over meals, or meeting with a small group over meals. Meals were often seen as an ideal way to connect with one another and to share life with one another:

"I like to attend on Sunday's (sic), but also find growth and joy in spending time with other members of the church outside of Sunday's (sic), in Bible studies or meals or times of worship" (#4. Q5).

"I love participating in the divine liturgy, prays, class Sharing meals having a space for silence and conversation" (#5. Q4).

"I am part of a house church set up. [...] We eat food, we engage in worship, then either someone tells their life story or someone gives a teaching based on what God has taught them" (#6. Q5).

"Church is the close knit fellowship of believers, church should look like eating, celebrating, lifting up, and going out into the world with a like minded group of people" (#7. Q5).

"I think sharing life together is currently underrated and rarely "practiced." My idea of sharing life together is sharing meals several times per week with at least some fellow Christians, possibly with other community members or friends involved" (#8. Q5. P3).

From this active involvement, it is clear that the Millennial ministers in this sample are not simply interested in intellectual discourse regarding the Church, but that they desire to be personally and intimately involved in day-to-day practices with one another. We did see a strong theme of community or group influence, though this is not surprising for Millennials, who are community oriented as a generation¹⁶. While there is some mention of mentors (#3. Q3. P3.), the description of very small core groups is much more common. One-on-one accountability partners seem to have been replaced by one-on-few accountability groups.

"Another important part of church structure is to have even smaller groups (two to four) who meet weekly for an even more intimate and deep relationship. These groups would facilitate personal accountability, prayer support, a confidential space to discuss problems and share joys, a space for mentoring and discipleship (training each other to glorify God and seek truth) as well as a brainstorming hub for how to love others and live life to glorify God" (#8. Q5. P4).

"A group of people who dig deep for vulnerability and also exchange that with in the surrender of their own lives. Helping to bring Jesus, the best parts of each other to light" (#10. Q5).

"I meet with a group of five other men for breakfast every Friday morning. After a casual time of conversation, we each go around the circle and talk about how we're doing and usually include a prayer request" (#11. Q3. P1).

(See also #19. Q5., #20. Q5., #21. Q4., #24. Q5., #25. Q5.)

¹⁶Howe, Neil & Strauss, William. (2000). Millennials rising: The next great generation. New York: Vantage Books.

As strongly as the Millennial participants seem to have committed to and connected to their *ecclesia* family, connectedness is not limited to the fellowship of believers. A sense of solidarity with the oppressed, as evidenced by a desire for social justice, is threaded throughout their understanding of the Church and the Church's mission. Social justice is rarely directly addressed, but rather seems to be assumed as a natural outflow of following Christ's commands.

"I love my local church; I love [...] that it's committed to social justice" (#21. Q5).

Transcendent

Perhaps the most encouraging reflections found within the survey responses is the understanding of the Church – not as a group of believers limited to a geographic location, but as the Bride of Christ herself: multicultural, multigenerational, across time, around the world, on a captivating mission, and fellowshiping with the Trinity. In their descriptions of engaging with the Church and how they saw the Bride of Christ as consistent through time, many participants mentioned high church practices. Participants described engaging in traditions that the Church has been practicing for thousands of years as a reminder that the Church is much larger than a single building or even a single nation. While participants did not try to hide or gloss over the less savory aspects of Christian history, they expressed that liturgy (undefined in the text) and liturgical practices (such as the liturgical calendar) were comforting in their consistency, both through time and across the globe.

"I love Anglican order of service and liturgical practices. I would have a bunch of liturgies, communal prayers, and I would make communion the focal point of the service" (#1. Q5).

"Our church is a place for the Spirit to move, but also where tradition is not discarded. I love that there is an emphasis on the liturgical calendar, and I appreciate the weekly worship service with opportunities to volunteer on Sunday mornings" (#3. Q5).

"I go to a Greek orthodox church. [...] I love participating in the divine liturgy, prayers, class" (#5. Q4).

(See also #2. Q3., #8. Q5. P1., #21. Q3.,)

Of those, one respondent specifically mentioned that liturgy was a way for them to feel connected to the Body of Christ across the world:

"While I have never attended a liturgical church for an extended period of time, I do enjoy aspects of liturgy. [...] I like the unity of knowing that Christians across the world are reading the same words on the same day" (#8. Q5. P1).

Liturgy was also mentioned as a connection to the Body of Christ across time:

"I now attend a charismatic, liturgical, evangelical Anglican church, and I've enjoyed the depths of liturgy and being reconnected to the Church throughout the centuries" (#2. Q3).

Liturgy was not the only way that participants expressed ways in which they sought connection to the Body of Christ; many participants expressed a desire to feel connected to other cultures through worship. In their comments regarding worship, participants frequently named ways in which their local body of believers expressed multicultural worship in their current practices, or ways in which their vision of an 'ideal' church would embrace multiculturalism.

"There would be a 20-25 minute homily, but the service would build towards communion. Worship songs of all stripes and traditions" (#1. Q5).

"The real church is going to have every generation and nation, right? So I would love if more churches had more ages, races and cultures" (#4. Q5).

However, connectedness and unity were not the sole or primary focus of the Millennials' desire in a corporate gathering. Many respondents (17 of 25) highlighted Scripture as important to both their individual spiritual life, and seeking a strong Scriptural base and an educated use of scripture in sermons as a necessary component of the Church. The survey responses indicate not only a hunger for experiencing God, but also a deep desire to know Him as He reveals Himself through scripture.

"An important aspect of church for me is knowing that the pastor is preaching the word of God. I am often irritated when I come to a new church and find that Scripture is hardly referenced, if at all, and the pastor seems to be using the pulpit to express his/her own opinions" (#18. Q5. P1).

"It was most important for us to find a church with a pastor who preached from the Bible in a way that is intellectually stimulating and relatable" (#22. Q5. P1).

"I go to churches where I know I will be fed new things that directly apply to my life in the here & now & that are actually from scripture rather than some list of things that will benefit your life" (#24. Q5).

(See also #2. Q3., #3. Q3. P2-3., #4. Q3., #5. Q3., #7. Q3., #8. Q4. Q5. P2. P4., #9. Q4. P2., #10. Q5., #11. Q3., #13. Q5. #14. Q3. Q4., #16. Q4. P3., #17. Q4., #18. Q3. P2.. #19. Q3. P2., #24. Q4.)

As evidenced by the survey responses, there is a strong theme of recognizing the Church as unified and celebrating racial, generational, and cultural diversity (#4. Q5., #8. Q5. P2). The Church is seen as stable, grounding, and transcendent throughout generations. This powerful vision of the Church is depicted as having a historic witness that is both compelling and reassuring to the Millennials in this sample.

"I found returning to church much easier in the Episcopal Church because of its rootedness in tradition, scripture and reason. There was a sense of history and faith that stretched back to the beginning. That gave me a sense of stability and home" (#13. Q4).

"I love my local church; I love that it's in walking distance to my place, that it's committed to social justice, that it strives to foster healthy community, that it's seeking to plant other churches and be connected to the global Church, that it's committed to the historic witness of the church and the gospel message, that it offers intellectually stimulating sermons and challenging messages, that it's open to corrective feedback" (#21. Q5).

While we found the vision of the Church that has emerged from these survey responses moving, we were also impressed by their understanding of a God who is both intimately personal and worthy of our highest reverence. 3 survey respondents specifically highlighted reverence for God as something they appreciated in their current church, and as something they desired in their 'ideal' church:

"I long for spiritual truth and depth. I also want a church to have a sense of reverence before the Lord" (#17., Q5).

"It is also important to me that the church community show respect and reverence for God. [...] I think it is important for people to orient themselves toward the image of God, rather than try to re-orient the image of God to ourselves" (#18. Q5. P2).

(See also #7. Q4.)

Through their expression of the global, transcendent Church and her Head, it is clear that the Millennials who responded to this survey have a big picture of the mission of the Church. What is more, they want to be connected to this big picture; they want to be connected to something bigger than themselves:

"At church, I learn about where I come from, why I'm here, and what I'm to do in the meantime. That's deeply comforting to me. Purpose, meaning, and significance outside of myself" (#3. Q2).

"I think having a spiritual life means you believe in something bigger, more powerful and mightier and other-wordly over your own human abilities and understandings. And you trust that person more than yourself as well" (#14. Q3).

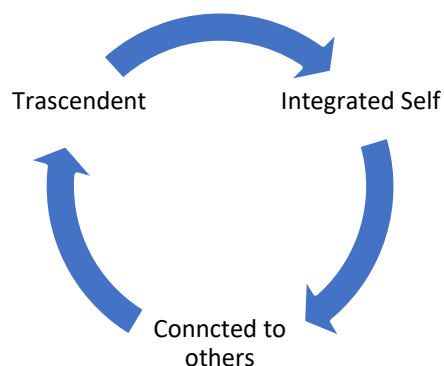
"[Jesus'] ministry met needs, disciplined people and showed us how to live life together in the Spirit while also looking outside of ourselves to those that don't yet know truth, always seeking to [advance] the kingdom" (#15. Q5).

"For myself, when I try to connect with others, I feel more valued & connected when we have something outside of ourselves to connect over & even deeper if it is of a spiritual nature" (#24. Q2).

In this sample, these next generation leaders have a captivating vision for the Church, both on a local and a global scale. Their descriptions of their current individual and corporate spiritual practices are convicting, and their vision for what the Church could be (and should be) are solidly centered on Christ's mission.

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Overall, we see three implicit findings in the survey response: 1) of valuing faith practice that is integral, 2) connected to others, and 3) transcendent, are an interesting development for the previous generations conceptions of faith and life. Given that this survey is of those in the Millennial generation only, the responses can be further considered in light of the generational characteristics.



For example, the Millennial generation has more single parent homes and more divorce than the previous generations. In fact, 45% of Millennials have parents (Baby Boomers) who are divorced.¹⁷ According to the Pew Research Foundation, about 55%¹⁸ live with a step-parent, single parent or with no parent. Almost 39%¹⁹ live without their biological father involved in their life. This dynamic has caused some to term them a “Fatherless generation.”²⁰ What was striking to us, as ministers who train Millennials for ministry, is the desire to find family-type relationships in the church and fellow believers (#8, Q4., #9. Q5., #20. Q2., #24. Q5.). Psalm 68:6 says that God puts the lonely in families. Perhaps the lonely Millennials are looking for and finding the manifestation of that promise to a greater degree than those who have come before. Perhaps for Christian Millennials, the church really is their family, in God (Ephesians 2:19, 1 Peter 2:17).

As ministers who worked with Millennials for over 10 years, training them up for ministry, we have often heard older Christians bemoan the state of faith for this generation.²¹ Our conviction regarding the

¹⁷ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/03/27/divorce-is-actually-on-the-rise-and-its-the-baby-boomers-fault/>

¹⁸ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/22/less-than-half-of-u-s-kids-today-live-in-a-traditional-family/>

¹⁹ <http://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistics>, accessed 12/1/15

²⁰ <http://www.fatherhood.org/father-absence-statistics>, accessed 12/1/15

²¹ The amount of negative prophecies, as well as the ‘doomed’ perspective spoken over them has been shocking to me. Even in 2015, I hear older generations speaking poorly of Christian Millennials and their faith walk. They talk as if the predicted demise of the church is the fault of compromising Millennials, who are barely even leading congregations. What has been missing for almost a generation is speaking life over, sowing seeds of hope into, and praying over the future generations to carry on the work of the Great Commission. Personally, I wonder if in their

Millennials did not fall in line with those predictions that the end of faith and truth would be seen because of Millennials. Rather, we believe that, for those who have tried everything and found the world to be lacking, they will become mighty when they give their life to Jesus. For them, the world holds no allure and no temptation. They've been there, tried that, bought the t-shirt, and found it meaningless. We believed that Millennial followers of Jesus, who have found nothing else that gives their life meaning and purpose, would become sold-out for God and a force for the Kingdom.²² In line with our prediction and as can be seen in the data from the qualitative study, what gives meaning and purpose to the lives of these Millennials is that transcendent connection to God and to others (#1. Q4., #4. Q2., #6. Q2., #23. Q3., #24. Q3., #25. Q5.).

If this sample study is indicative of the Millennial generation in ministry, this desire for and pursuit of a transcendent connection to God and others may deeply affect the philosophy and practice of ministry in the season to come. This trend, demonstrated by the desire for the transcendent and holistic life of faith, has the potential move farther away from the dualistic western (mainly Greek) mindset where the material and spiritual are seen as separate.²³ It might indicate a movement towards a more monistic mindset reminiscent of pre-Enlightenment Christianity or Messianic Jewish practice. In this paradigm, the spiritual and material/physical are inextricably interconnected. However, the depth or pervasiveness of this trend has yet to be seen and is beyond the scope of this study.

There are also implicit push-backs against the culture of Christianity that Millennials grew up in. They expressed strong and pervasive interest in an active and experiential faith. This is contrast to a passive posture of sitting in a congregation and listening to a sermon once a week. In their ideal church they were involved and working out their beliefs as opposed to being 'preached at.'

"I am often irritated when I come to a new church and find that scripture is hardly referenced, if at all, and the pastor seems to be using the pulpit to express his/her own opinions. I certainly do not come to church to hear someone's opinions. I come to learn about God and grow closer to Him." (#18.Q5.)

"Church used to be a big part of my life when I was a teenager and when I was at University. I tried going regularly, but I feel like at this point of my life spending two hours every Sunday listen to someone talk just doesn't do it for me." (#19.Q3.)

Another implicit push-back was against a consumerism mentality of Christianity. Survey respondents did not express a desire to be kept from challenging situations or questions, but instead expressed an understanding and embrace of the messiness of the Church (#3, Q2., #6. Q5., #18. Q5., #21, Q5, #23. Q5., #25. Q5.). What was obvious was a complete lack of the need to be 'entertained'. Flashy displays, cutting edge sound systems, and other trappings of a consumer mentality were entirely absent in these

haste to "fulfill the Great Commission in their generation" many have neglected training up the future church, and some have even cursed them.

²² When the enemy has played all his cards and lost, there is no way to entice them into the compromises of life (such as with money or inappropriate relationships). Maybe that is why the enemy's tactic has been to prevent their leadership development.

²³ Originally postulated by Plato and Aristotle, dualism serves as the foundation for the Western mindset.

responses. Most mentioned attending either a house church or liturgical church. While there were definitely respondents from traditional evangelical congregations, most were not. It is worth noting here that in order to qualify for the survey, one had to be both a Millennial *and* serving in ministry in some way, so there may be extenuating circumstances that better explain the lack of respondents from traditionally evangelical churches. Underlying reasons for this potential trend (including verification that it is, indeed, a trend) as well as corresponding implications would require further research.

The relationship with Jesus described by the respondents is what we would describe as *captivating*. It is not based on arguments and few apologetics were given. In place of arguments, we saw descriptions of listening, expressing compassion, relating experiences, and expounding the relational nature of life with Jesus. Christianity was not just something many of them believe; it is their life's conviction. Many expressed living a life of what others would call 'discipleship'.²⁴

In describing their ideal church expression, many expressed a strong desire for tradition, community, and charismatic moves of the Holy Spirit, all in the same sentence (#2, Q3., #3. Q5., #8. Q5., #17, Q5.). It was fascinating to see how close the descriptions of their ideals were to each other. Indeed, though their ages varied by more than a decade and denominational affiliations were broad, the description of their ideal church expression was surprisingly uniform.

In scripture, the church, the *ecclesia*, is also known as the Body of Christ. She is a single entity with bodily components and specialized parts. She is also called the Bride of Christ. This metaphor implies both maturity, as well as unification into a single entity. Perhaps more than ever before since the Reformation, the Christian Millennials in this survey expressed a consciousness of being part of something greater, which transcends ethnicity (i.e. #8. Q5.), continents (i.e. #4. Q5.), and generations (i.e. #22. Q5.). The hive-type mindset of Millennials may cause them to have a greater awareness of the Christian witness across the globe. This could potentially lend itself to a greater unification in purpose and in spirit than perhaps the world has been before.

Apostolic Genius

When viewing the respondents answers through the lens of Apostolic Genius, as described by Alan Hirsch in *The Shaping of Things to Come*,²⁵ one final potential implication can be seen. In this seminal work, Hirsch describes 6 components of Apostolic Genius that underlie all Christian movements in history: the uncompromising conviction that *Jesus is Lord*; a *Missional-Incarnational Impulse* to live the Gospel; systems for *Disciple Making*; *Organic Systems* of reproduction; leadership development around the capacities of *Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd, and Teacher (APEST)*; and *Communitas*

²⁴ Oswald Chamber's famously said "The "show business," which is so incorporated into our view of Christian work today, has caused us to drift far from Our Lord's conception of discipleship. It is instilled in us to think that we have to do exceptional things for God; we have not. We have to be exceptional in ordinary things, to be holy in mean streets, among mean people, surrounded by sordid sinners. That is not learned in five minutes."

²⁵ Frost, M., & Hirsch, A. (2013). *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group.

(*Communities*) that embrace risk and change. When viewed through this lens, the respondents tacitly expressed four of these six capacities. Those capacities presented in the answers to an identifiable degree are: *Jesus is Lord*, a *Missional-Incarnational Impulse*, *Disciple Making*, and *Communitas*. There were slight hints of an APEST leadership dynamic, but for the most part concepts of leadership development and *Organic Systems* of reproduction were not present. Whether this has to do with their stage of life, spiritual development, or the lack of Millennial leaders in churches (and thus the lack of Millennial leaders developing other leaders), remains to be seen. This means that four of the six movemental capacities are emerging in this small sample. For us as researchers and developers of Millennial leaders, that gives us great hope.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research project was initiated from personal interest and in seeking to better serve our respective constituencies. It was not meant to be a formal research project. Proper research methods were employed, though sampling methods were necessarily limited because of a lack of access to a large enough pool for random sampling. It should be noted that the questions were reviewed with utility in mind, rather than through a pure research lens. Hence, there are obvious limitations to Question 2 and no qualifying question to confirm ministry service is included. That being said, the content of the responses confirms ministry service. We only say this to point out that our particular survey does have limitations and had we anticipated the quality of response and quality of insights provided, we would have more formally reviewed the questions asked.

As is the nature of qualitative research, these results cannot be extrapolated to Millennials in general or Millennials in ministry in specific. However, the insights and perspectives offered by the survey respondents can provide a platform for future quantitative and demographic research. We believe there is much more to be uncovered and the pervasiveness of these perspectives is worth further investigation.