



# YOUNG AT HEART WORKSHOP

ON MAKING A CHURCH HOME  
WITH MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z



## Part 1. Introducing Your Kids: Will they Grow out of it?

### Agree/Disagree

It is common for young people to leave the church.  
But most tend to come back after they have children.

Church<sup>1</sup> is no longer viewed as a center for community life or place of membership, largely because most millennials and genZ believe **religious organizations are antithetical to their values** with which they desire to raise their children. They see the church community as:

- exclusive in an increasingly inclusive world (and so internally rather than externally focused)
- out of touch with culture (e.g., in regards to sexuality, science, and social problems)
- antagonistic to doubt and overprotective of dogma.<sup>2</sup>

Research suggests more young adults are leaving the faith than staying, and less are coming back than not:

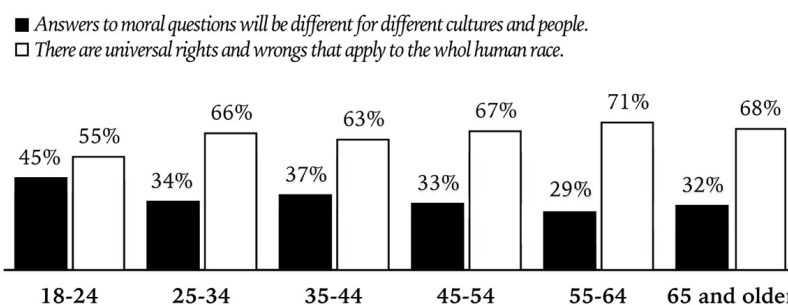
- 59% of Christian Millennials and genZ leave the church permanently or for an extended period.<sup>3</sup>
- 55% of millennials and 45% of genZ are either apathetic towards the bible or distrustful of it.<sup>4</sup>
- 90% of Americans who once were religious but left did so before the age of 29.<sup>5</sup>

Millennials<sup>6</sup> and genZ<sup>7</sup> differ with older generations in ways that are more than just typical generational gaps, but a shift in *worldview*: the nature of truth, authority, ethical norms, and sexuality. These views will not change over time without a radical change in societal norms, structures, and events. Here we identify three major sea changes: their philosophical assumptions, social structure, and relationship with the church. One Gallup Analysis states, “these differences that the data reveal represent a departure from the patterns of older generations at the same points in their lives.”<sup>8</sup>

### 1A. Philosophical Assumptions: shallow-postmodernism, scientism

Millennials and genZ are in part the products of the philosophical movements of the late 20th century, yet most have not thought critically about the philosophical movements that shaped them due to a deficiency in liberal arts education. We can identify three major aspects to their philosophical worldview:

- **They are *shallow postmodernists*.** We define shallow postmodernists as (a) the residual products of now largely rejected philosophical movements (such as positivism, postmodernism, structuralism, and deconstructionism), (b) who believe in postmodern tenets, but don’t know why, accepting it as the norm, and (c) who don’t have any familiarity with the real philosophical positions of existentialism and postmodernism.<sup>9</sup>
- **They are followers of *scientism*.** This includes the teaching that science is more valuable, more practical, more attractive, and more important than theology and the humanities, because science is the only path to real knowledge and truth. Some scholars write that strict scientism is currently in decline, whereas relativism and postmodern thought is on the rise.<sup>10</sup>



## 1B. Changing social structure: Diversity, Family, and Sexuality

### *What do you think?*

Shifts in societal norms have been radically changing since the 1960s,  
so why is society so hung-up on Millennial culture?

Shifts in societal norms are nothing new, but what is remarkable is the major shift these norms have taken in a very short amount of time. As one pollster puts it, millennials are “beginning to rethink and reconstruct social norms to better fit their wants and needs, throwing off convention when it no longer serves a compelling purpose.”<sup>11</sup> We see norms shifting in three major ways: race, sexuality, and gender.

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### ***Racial diversity is the new normal.***

The younger generations are increasingly more diverse both in the US and Canada. Gen Z is the most diverse of any generation in the U.S.: it is projected that by the 2020 Census, more than half of all U.S. children will be part of a minority race or ethnic group. In Canada, two in five children have an immigrant background. By 2036, it is projected that this will increase to close to half (49.1%).<sup>12</sup> “Because this generation is extremely ethnically diverse, they embrace diversity and they embrace differences,” says Nancy Breiling Nessel, the founder of GettingGenZ.com, the consulting firm. “They are inclusive. They are accepting.”<sup>13</sup> And so an environment *not* diverse is not normal.

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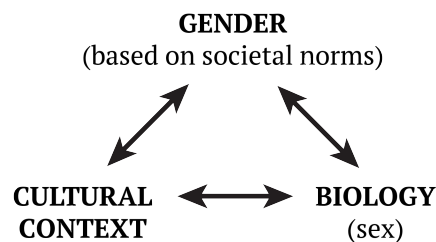
### ***The make-up of the family has changed.***

*Family* (i.e., parenting, family vs work time, quality programming for children) is a key value for this generation, often placed high above career and financial success.<sup>14</sup> Yet, Millennials are more likely than past generations to be **single** (59% vs 16% of GenX at the same age),<sup>15</sup> **co-habiting** (In Canada, common-law unions have tripled since 1981--from 6.3% to 21.3%--and are four times the amount of the US-- 5.9%; in Quebec this is 40%);<sup>16</sup> **having children with a partner** (50% of all Single Millennials age 30-34 have children compared to just 30% a generation earlier. In 1960, 5% of children in the US were born to unmarried couples, this has now increased to 40%),<sup>17</sup> **be in an open, same sex relationship** (since marriage legalization in 2005, same sex Canadian couples have increased by 60.7%--heterosexual couples increased by 9.6%); or be in a **single parent household** (from 16.3% in 2011, to 28% in 2016). And more and more of these households are men (increased 34.5% from 2001 to 2016).<sup>18</sup>

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### ***Gender has been “unofficially” redefined.***

How the American Psychological Association defines gender has not changed in the past few decades: **Gender refers to “socially constructed roles,” which are, ultimately, based on societal norms.** These roles are interconnected to a person’s cultural context and biology. In a psychology class, one might discuss physiological differences between men and women (i.e., brain circuitry or hormonal differences) as well as look at variations in gender roles across cultures to discuss how much of gender is biologically driven (nature) vs socially driven (nurture).



*Individual* ↔ *Gender*

While the definition has not changed, “gender” has gotten more nuanced. Terms like “**gender identity**” (how a person internally identifies) and “**gender fluidity**” (gender exists on a spectrum from the most feminine to the most masculine. Gender can shift from day to day, even hour to hour, depending upon how **you** identify) are being used interchangeably with gender to mean something entirely different. Consequently, “gender” has become very confusing. As APA explains, people may use terms like *androgynous, multigendered, gender nonconforming, third gender, and two-spirit people*. But “*exact definitions of these terms vary from person to person.*” The reason is that **gender is no longer reflecting a social norm, but an individual’s preference.**

This preference is a hot topic. It is being fought for as an unalienable right that should be accepted and accommodated by society at large. Many universities in the US have now adopted general neutral pronouns. In 2011, The LGBT Resource Center out of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee released a card to help people understand how to use “non-binary” pronouns.

**In Canada, the idea of “gender” as an individual choice and right is being legislated. Royal Assent of Bill C-16 on June 19, 2017** amends the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal Code to add “gender identity” and “gender expression” to the list of prohibited grounds of unlawful discrimination and hate propaganda. The question currently up for debate is whether or not C-16 would mean that not using someone’s preferred gender pronouns or academically dissenting from the belief that gender is up to the individual would be considered discrimination or hate speech.

Gender as an individual choice and unalienable right is also being taught in the classroom. Based on **Ontario’s new Health and Physical Education Curriculum**, “gender identity” is first officially introduced in grade 3. It is taught as an “invisible difference” between people, just like a person’s religious beliefs or cultural background.<sup>19</sup> In Grade 8, gender identity (i.e., male, female, two-spirited, transgender, transsexual, intersex) is fully explored, with the stress on students accepting their gender identity and sexual orientation and developing a positive self-concept.<sup>20</sup>

**Q:** Millennials are often taught a strident individualism: “You determine who you are, how you identify, and where you find meaning. You are free--unfettered by biology or social constructs. The only limits you truly have are the ones you put on yourself.” Contrast this worldview with your own as a young adult.

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**Q:** What do you think are the biggest challenges facing *Christian* millennials growing up in this context?

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## 1C. Communication and Technology

### *How Millennials and GenZ Communicate*

Without a doubt, one of the biggest changes between today's generations is their relationship with information and social networks. Millennials and GenZ differ from previous generations in their dependence on the internet, visual information, and social media applications and networks. They engage:

- **Online:** Both Generations use the Internet as their **Primary News Source**.<sup>21</sup> **88% of Millennials get their news from Facebook; GenZers get news equally from Facebook and YouTube.**<sup>22</sup>
- **Visual sources:** Both generations expect well-designed websites where visuals predominate text. They are looking for resources and business media to be available online and on demand.
- **Social media:** **90% of young adults use social media** (compared to 35 % of 65+). Facebook dominates, but it is projected that Millennials will slim back on its use or branch out to other platforms.<sup>23</sup> **GenZers use multiple sites.** The "most important" social networks (ages 12-24) are Instagram (32%), Twitter (24%), Facebook (14%), Snapchat (13%) and Tumblr (4%).<sup>24</sup>

### *2B. Reimagining Church Communication*

**Your church's online presence opens the door for young people.** Millennials are less likely than previous generations to have brand, organizational, political, or religious loyalty. If they are going to check-out an organization, they are much more likely to engage online, but they are highly selective.

- **Invest in Quality Recordings** to offer on-demand Sermons, Bible Studies, and Podcasts.
- **Provide Online Opportunities for Young People to Be in the Know.** Church and bulletin announcements assume people are going to be attending a service regularly, but you can't assume that with Millennials. They will stream videos online before they ever step into your church, and even if they are members, they are much more likely to engage online.
- **Provide Online Opportunities for Young People to Give Financial Offerings.** The collection plate assumes Millennials are going to be attending a service regularly or have cash on them, and pre-authorized offering options assume Millennials are going to be card-carrying members. You can't assume either of these with the younger generations. But you will have plenty of Millennials who are "in your care" and consider your ministry a cause they want to support.

**Your church's desire to create real relationships with millennials invites them to not only walk through the door, but to stick around.** The younger generations are more connected than ever before. Yet, compared to genX and baby boomers, millennials are more likely to report feelings of emotional angst, loneliness, stress, exhaustion, and anxiety.<sup>25</sup> They have even been dubbed "the loneliest generation." Sociologist Jon Callegger explains,

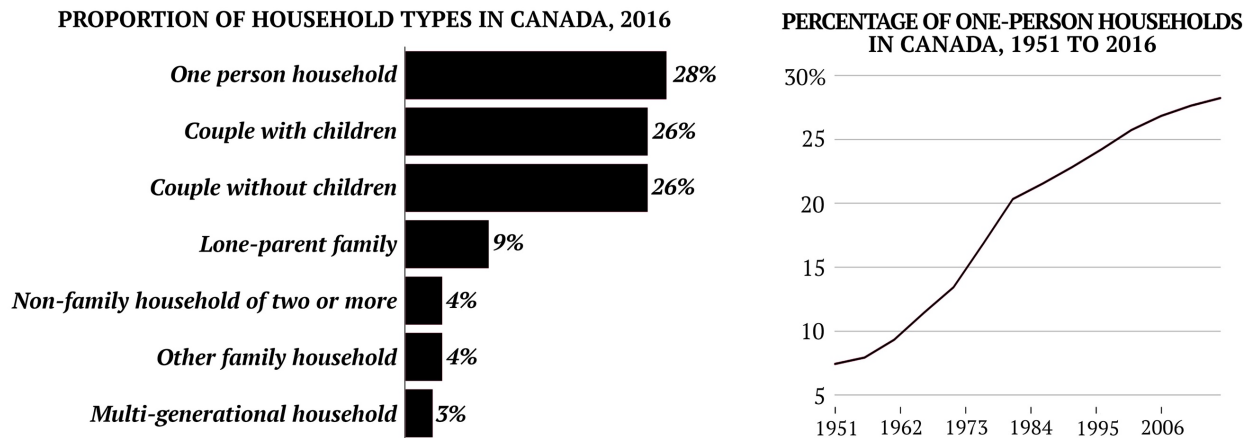
"Millennials, compared to their counterparts, read fewer newspapers, fewer magazines and books. They watch significantly less TV on the box. They spend less time physically in the presence of friends and family, and an overwhelming majority say they have no contact with their neighbours. They even walk around less in the physical world." <sup>26</sup>

Millennials have a strong desire for community. It is important to capture their attention and engage them online, but if you want them to stick around, they need a lot more than an engaging web presence.

## Part 2. Loneliness and Friendship

### 2A. The Reality of Loneliness

Studies overwhelmingly suggest that, despite being more connected through technology and social media, the vast majority of North Americans are lonelier than ever before. Scientists argue for a diversity of causes, from smaller family sizes and more wealth, to a greater emphasis on individuality. Whatever the causes might be, the stats for single-person households are noted below. In Canada, according to census data, from 1951 to 2016, one-person households increased from roughly 7% to 28%. Today, more than half of Canada's population is made up of two-person or less households.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census

Despite Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and a host of other social media platforms promising to connect people like never before (2.4 billion people were using social network programs in 2017, including 240 million or 70% of Americans using Facebook alone), people have *less* meaningful friendships than in the recent past. As one writer puts it, “The average person has over 300 friends on Facebook, yet reports of loneliness have skyrocketed.”<sup>27</sup> Caroline Beaton in a Forbes article writes,

The General Social Survey found that the number of Americans with no close friends has tripled since 1985. “Zero” is the most common number of confidants, reported by almost a quarter of those surveyed. Likewise, the average number of people Americans feel they can talk to about ‘important matters’ has fallen from three to two. Mysteriously, loneliness appears most prevalent among millennials.

*Caroline Beaton, “Why Millennials Are Lonely”<sup>28</sup>*

Our conclusion is not that if you are single and living alone, that you’re lonely. What the data is clearly suggesting is that, regardless of the reasons why, there are more people “going it alone” with fewer meaningful friendships in their lives than ever before in modernity. And this is of especial interest to Christians, since Jesus promises to seek out the lonely and bring them into a new community (Psalm 68:6).

## 2B. Christ, Christians, and Friendships

We know that Jesus came preaching and teaching during his three years of ministry. But what did that look like and involve? Take a look at the passages below and consider:

**Q:** What kind of community was Jesus creating around himself? Consider what kinds of people, how Jesus interacted with them, and what Jesus taught that directly relates to his interaction with other people.

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**Q:** What does Jesus have to offer that's lacking for so many people in our culture today? What can a Christian offer 18 to 35 year-olds that they're not finding anywhere else?

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**Luke 19:1-10** Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. <sup>2</sup> A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. <sup>3</sup> He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. <sup>4</sup> So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." <sup>6</sup> So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

<sup>7</sup> All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner.' "

<sup>8</sup> But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount."

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. <sup>10</sup> For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

**Mark 2:15** While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

**Matthew 9:11** When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

**Luke 7:34** The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'

**Luke 16:9** "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."

When we see clearly that *sharing and celebrating the gospel involves the activities of friendship*, we shouldn't be surprised what all the data tells us about the correlation between friendships and church membership. The sociologist Rodney Stark observes that (humanly speaking) social relationships (that is, friendships) play a major role, if not *the* major role, in whether or not people become Christians. He writes,

“Conversion... occurs when, other things being equal, people have or develop stronger attachments to members of the group than they have to nonmembers.”

Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*<sup>29</sup>

In other words, if you want a person to stay connected to the church family, that person needs friends in the church. (As Christians, we realize that Stark’s findings are correlating with connection to the Means of Grace, that connection being ministerially made by Christian friends.) Consider the following quotes from *Growing Young* (a massive study on youth in the church by the Fuller Youth Institute studying over 250 congregations).

“While young people may be able to find great preaching online, many told us they’re aching for more than that. They want to be in relationship with leaders who know their name and model a life of faith.”

“Similarly, when we asked, “What makes your church effective with young people?” only a quarter mentioned worship at all, and only 12 percent mentioned anything about music (that figure dropped to only 3 percent when we isolated the top third of churches most effective with young people). So what do they talk about when they describe their church? Overwhelmingly, nearly 1 in 3 share about its warmth...Warmth is more than superficial community. It’s like family. In fact, the phrase “like family” surfaced as the most common term young people used to describe their church in our interviews and field visits.”

*Growing Young*<sup>30</sup>

**EXERCISE:** Make a list of what family have literally done for you. Now ask, “when was the last time you did this for a millennial in our church you were not related to?” That’s treating someone like family.

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## 2C. Friendless Christians and the Decline of the Church

“Over 80 percent of those who drop out of church do so in the first year of their membership.”

Charles Arn, “*Why Churches Don’t Grow*”<sup>31</sup>

Earlier we noted sociologist Rodney Stark stating that strong social attachments to members of the Christian community correlated heavily with growth in the Christian Church. It stands to reason that the opposite is also the case. If a person becomes a Christian but then does *not* develop friendships within the Christian community, the person is very likely to leave the church and her faith.



Christian thinker Gary Habermas has been studying doubt among university students for the past ten years, and he concludes that students cycle through three kinds of doubt:

1. **Reasonable Doubt:** The student is confronted by someone with a *reason* to doubt to their faith (whether it's scientific, social, or philosophical)
2. **Emotional Doubt:** The student experiences emotions of uncertainty in a deeply personal way (such as "God, where are you in my suffering?")
3. **Volitional Doubt:** The student decides to willfully oppose the existence of God.

Habermas has observed students, as they lose their faith, typically moving through these three steps from 1 to 3. A student struggles with a reasonable doubt, the doubt is not addressed, and then when the student faces deep personal struggles, emotional doubt emerges. If the emotional doubt remains, the student eventually moves on to volitional doubt. Although Habermas specifically studies university students, we can see how his observations would apply to most anyone.

**Q:** How can you help a person with *reasonable doubt*?

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**Q:** How can you help a person with *emotional doubt*?

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**Q:** What applies to both, regardless of the kind of doubt?

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**Consider the following:**

1. How many of the last 10 people to become members of your congregation can you name? How many meaningful conversations have you had with a new member? Glance at the list of *family activities* you created earlier; have you engaged in any of these activities with a new member in the last two years?
2. Many of us have friends and family members that have left being an active part of the church. Think of a couple examples: How many close, meaningful friends did the person have in their church? Were they more or less than close, meaningful non-Christian friends?

## Part 3. Friendship and the Church

### 3A. A Realistic Understanding of the Limitations of Social Circles

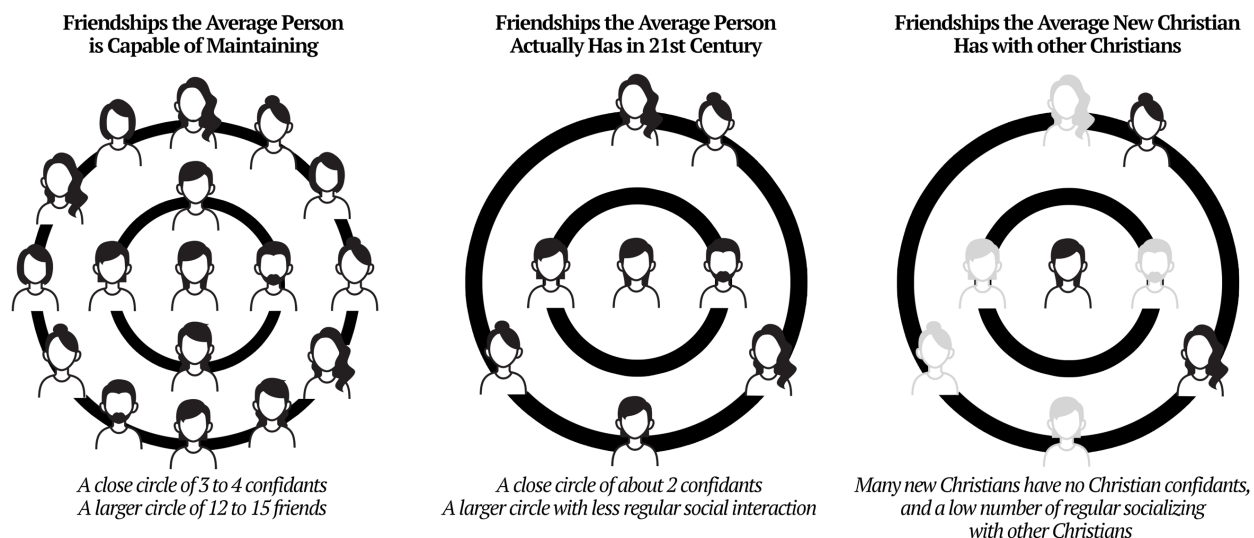
Studies suggest the brain is only capable of a social network of 150 people. The average *meaningful* circle of friends is 12 to 15 people. You can meet the social needs of only 3 to 4 people.<sup>32</sup> Of course, a person's personality will determine if a person's potential is slightly higher or lower, but in general this is what's possible. The number of meaningful friends a person can have is based not only on personality, but also time. A recent study at the University of Kansas concluded:

"it takes between 40 and 60 hours to form a casual friendship, 80-100 hours to transition to being a friend and more than 200 hours together to become good friends."

*Jeffrey Hall, University of Kansas*<sup>33</sup>

So, the *potential* of meaningful friendships is quite small, partly due to the fact that it takes considerable time to develop those friendships. And note that, given the data we've reviewed, the average millennial is not making use of her full potential of friends. (Refer back to the General Survey quote above.)

Take also into account Rodney Stark's comments on the strength of social attachments and its effect on Church membership. Given how few meaningful friendships the average millennial has, the Christian belief or non-belief of any one meaningful friend has enormous implications on whether or not that millennial will stay connected to her church family.



**Q:** If we take in everything we know about numbers of friends, etc., how many close friends does it take to have a major influence on whether or not a person becomes or stays a Christian? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q:** Jesus was 100% human. How many meaningful friendships do you think he probably had? Consider Mark 4:10 “When Jesus was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables.”

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**Q:** If a congregation has, say, over 400 members, what role will the pastor or the members of any particular ministry team have in providing meaningful friendships with those 400 members? How much of the meaningful ‘friendship load’ can we expect them to carry? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q:** In a church of over 400, who needs to supply meaningful friendships? \_\_\_\_\_

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### 3B. The Radical Gospel and Friendship

Consider the following passages below. How are Christians uniquely positioned to impact our culture of loneliness? Consider both what God expects Christians to do as well as the descriptive passages of what Christians *did* in the Early Church.

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**1 John 3:16,18** <sup>16</sup> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers... <sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

**1 John 1:1-3** <sup>3</sup> We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> We write this to make our joy complete.

**Acts 2:44-46** <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together and had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.

**1 Peter 4:9-10** <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. <sup>10</sup> Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.

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### 3C. The Role of Church Programs and Friendship

#### ***Typical Church Programs: What needs to happen to encourage friendship creation?***

By this point hopefully we see clearly now the need to be met: the increasing of one's meaningful social circle of friends. Many church events promote 'fellowship,' but this by no means leads to the development of meaningful friendships. In fact, Sunday worship is by definition an activity of fellowship, but worship services don't directly and explicitly lead to the development of meaningful friendships (although, because the Means of Grace are present, they certainly help facilitate it). Consider the following questions:

**Q:** Are Sunday worship, bible study, and coffee hour primarily for visiting existing relationships or creating new ones? How do we maximize their new-friendship potential? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q:** Large events, like Sunday worship or coffee hours, are great for Introductions (i.e., learning someone's name and a few fun facts). But they rarely help people to move past this point unless individuals decide to take the next step. What does this next step look like? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q:** When planning "fellowship" events like Game Nights, Cook Offs, etc., what can get in the way of the creation of new friendships? How can we encourage new relationship-building? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q:** Relationship-building is time consuming. Are there events/programs in the church we need to slim back on so that we have time to build friendships? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### ***Programs explicitly designed to facilitate the development of meaningful friendships:***

- **Small groups** (dinner and a bible study lead by church leaders in homes settings) allows folks share meals together, connect, study God's Word and grow as friends and fellow Christian travelers. The small group model creates **natural opportunities for organically grown mentoring**, provided that leaders are intentional in encouraging and seeking out these relationships and are also receiving regular mentoring/feedback from their pastor. This model also encourages millennials to grow an intimate Christian community. Peer think is crucial for millennials and GenZers. To encourage them in their Christian walk is also to help them find like-minded peers.
- **Formal mentoring programs** key into millennials' desire for self-development via a mentor who will invest in them. This type of program is waiting to be developed. There are minimal examples within the WELS to pull from. Some guiding factors to consider:<sup>34</sup>
  - Gathering a small group of viable mentors, work through a training text with a strong emphasis on the purpose of Christian mentoring. (E.g. Abiding Word in Houston, TX trialed a Women's Spiritual Mentoring program back in the early 2000s using the book, *Spiritual Mothering*)
  - Establish Millennial-Friendly ways for people to show interest in being a mentee. For example, use an online skills and interests online strength-finder.



- Encourage face to face meet-ups at Millennial friendly locations. If cost is an issue, develop a budget to support coffee outings, etc.
- Develop a formal mentoring vision and curriculum, which would include a timeline with specific mentoring goals, materials for mentors to work through together, regular debriefs with a pastor to gauge how things are going.
- Mentor, be ready to invest time, treasures, and talents in your mentee. Be ready to invest a considerable amount of yourself as you begin to discover the needs of your mentee.

### 3D. Can I Make More Friends?

#### *Agree/Disagree*

How you (and your family) view your home is a top factor in connecting with millennials and other people seeking deep friendships.

#### ***Practicing Hospitality***

Part of Christ's direct command to bought and redeemed children is to *practice hospitality*. (Romans 12:13, 1 Peter 4:9, Hebrews 13:2, 3 John 1:8). *Hospitality* is defined as taking care of guests in your home. Consider the following three and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each model.

My Home is best described as (check one)...

☐ **Closed: A Sanctuary to Avoid Burn-Out**

My home is a refuge away from the stressors of life. No one would ever just show up at my house, unless they called first, and I don't usually invite people over for meals, studies, etc.

☐ **Safeguarded: A Tool for Ministry**

There are boundaries between service and family life. My door is not always open, but at the same time, friends and new acquaintances are invited over regularly for different events like dinners, studies, game nights, etc. The home is not only a refuge, but a tool to help forge relationships with people.

☐ **Open: A Second-Home for Many**

Though people don't just barge in, they know they can pop-by and will be welcomed in and invited for lunch, watch a game, etc. At times people might even board with us. This type of family is often extroverted and gets charged up by interacting with lots of people, most of the time.

#### ***But I'm an introvert! How can I help? New people scare me!***

Maybe you think that, because of your personality, you're not cut to contribute to more friendships in church. Interestingly, if you consider yourself an introvert, you're exactly what we need. Extroverts, by definition, have many friends, but not as many deep relationships. Introverts, by definition, have few friends, but more deep relationships. Which do you think are more necessary for creating genuine family?

#### ***But I'm 20+ years older than the Millennial Generation!***

That's great! We can use you! Many millennials are looking to be mentored. Many millennials could use your help having important needs met. Many from the younger generations have never been part of a two-parent family and have never seen a healthy, Christian marriage. In addition, millennials are redefining what their families look like. Inviting them into not just the family of believers but a living, breathing Christian family is a major step in breaking down barriers, Christian marriage stereotypes and gender roles and forging a relationship. Whether formal or informal, this mentoring is always intentional.

## Part 4. Concrete Service

### What do you think?

There is a lot of time and money being spent on why Millennials are not “taking up the torch” of previous generations. Yet, church culture consultants like Thom Rainer write that millennials love to give back and are looking for opportunities to grow, lead, and serve.<sup>35</sup> Why the disparity?

### 4A. Causes, Identity, and Agency

Millennials tend to put their trust in people, not authority, and give their time to causes, not an institution. Ryan Scott of Forbes writes in his article, “Millennials Rule at Giving Back,” that, even though they’re less likely to vote, serve on a jury or stay informed, millennials love and will be swept away by social activism as long as it’s, among other things, **personal**. He writes,

“Millennials *engage with causes* to help other people, *not institutions*. If you want to get their attention, share real stories of real people in real need. Millennials also *support issues rather than organizations*.” They want to clearly see the effects of their involvement on a personal level.<sup>36</sup>

Rather than being interested specifically in causes, genZ cultivate a more existential culture, seeking answers to questions about their personal **identity**, purpose and potential for **agency** and change within the world. Although they’ll do it in a way that stresses their uniqueness, the common ground with millennials is genZ believe they can change the world. Both groups want to **feel that they are making a difference**, and they want to see some type of tangible results from their efforts.<sup>37</sup>

### 4B. The Radical Gospel and Radical Service

Millennials and genZ want to change the people and communities around them for the better. How does this compare with what Christians have been tasked to do by our Jesus? Read the passages below and consider:

**Q:** What is the motivation for a Christian’s life of service? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Q:** What kinds of acts of service does Christ call us to engage in? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**1 John 3:16,18** <sup>16</sup> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers...<sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

**Matthew 5:38-42** <sup>38</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup> And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup> If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

**Acts 20:35** [Paul to the Ephesian elders] “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ”

**Acts 4:32-35** <sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. <sup>34</sup> There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

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Sociologist Rodney Stark, who earlier noted the importance of social relationships for the growth of the Early Christian Church, also writes that the Christian *lifestyle of radical service* played a pivotal role in the Early Church’s growth as well. In contrasting how Early Christians responded differently to those in need than the pagans (especially when great tragedies took place), Stark observes:

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“Christian values of love and charity had, from the beginning, been translated into norms of social service and community solidarity. When disasters struck, the Christians were better able to cope.”

*Rodney Stark, The Rise of Christianity* <sup>38</sup>

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### ***The Gospel ministry is the ultimate cause.***

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Here we state the obvious: If a millennial wants to be part of a cause that matters, nothing comes close to the cause of the gospel. It’s a mystery to much of the world (and to many of our friends and families) about how God through the incarnation is reclaiming the world from sin, death, and the devil. To be part of this cause requires a radical life shift that only the Holy Spirit gives us the ability to begin. So how do we share a world-changing message with a generation that wants to change the world? Simply tell it to them, in all its epic glory as Scripture presents it. Invite them into the Grand Story so that they might find their story.

## **4C. Reframing church service**

In contrast with championing causes that seek the welfare of others, the church is often viewed as ***self-serving***, organizing services largely for the benefit of its exclusive members. In contrast with developing and mentoring agency, activity and change within the world, the church is often viewed as developing passivity: either busywork or simply sitting around and listening to preachers and teachers.

We know these views are largely caricatures of what Scripture teaches. Although the bible teaches Christ as the exclusive way to God, it also teaches that who Christ came to save includes all people everywhere. And the end goal is not an ethic that seeks to serve oneself, but rather is literally a command to serve one’s neighbour who is defined as anyone who needs help. So, apart from re-cultivating these truths if they’ve been de-emphasized in your congregations, consider adjustments in how you talk about, promote, and share already-existing service projects:

- Focus all advertisement on ***clearly defining the service***, and that this *is* a service. For example, don’t focus advertisement on a purchasing event (“Don’t forget to buy your pies!”) as much as on an opportunity to serve (“Don’t forget to help St. John’s on the Apache Mission!”). If someone has a question about an event, you’ll know you’ve done things right if the question is about *how to help* not *who we’re helping*.

- Make the service **concrete**, that is, not abstract (e.g., “the money is going to the poor”) but something easily visualizable (“the money is going to mosquito nets, and every mosquito net bought will guard four people from malaria for 10 years”).

**Consider meeting with your church leaders and program directors and discussing the following:** Below are different ministries in which a variety of WELS churches are involved. How would you modify each service to engage millennials? Remember, it is not about whether the cause is community-based or global, the real question is if it is concrete and if it is personal. To help in this exercise, go through each item and answer the following questions:

- 1) Who is this service for? (You need an actual name and face)
- 2) Why is this important? (What is this person’s story)
- 3) How will this service project actively make a difference in their life?
- 4) What steps can we take so that this project is communicated online and in person?
- 5) Does this service provide Christians with face-to-face opportunities to serve?

Quilting and donating quilts to world missions: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Fundraising for the Caribbean Scholarship Fund to allow local students to study for ministerial training: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Angel Tree: purchasing a gift for an inmate’s child, dropping that gift off in a collection bin at church: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Be a Friend: connect with the elderly, homebound, or have a long-term terminal illness: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Meals on Wheels: Delivering meals to the homebound: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Refugee Care and Advocacy: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Pregnancy Counseling Centers: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_



#### 4D. Inviting Millennials to Join the Cause

Contrary to popular opinion, millennials do want to serve and even lead. But, they don't just want to be invited to pick up the torch left behind from the previous generation. They are attracted to groups that **value their perspective and input, are open to trying new ideas, and want to invest in them.**

Millennials can easily be turned-off by the institutional nature of the typical church program. Standard meeting practices like *Roberts Rules of Order*, large congregational voter's meetings, in-depth discussions on constitutional by-laws, or two-year termed positions, often inhibit millennial interest in church leadership. Structure is necessary, but not all of it needs to be front and center. When deciding how to create a more millennial friendly leadership structure, consider the following:

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##### ***Encouraging "Millennial Friendly" Leadership***

**1) Flexible:** Younger generations are eager to lead if they are given freedom to "life hack" or should we say, "church hack:" use new technology and apps, work remotely, and trial many different positions before agreeing to any long-term commitment.<sup>39</sup>

**2) Creative Environment:** Environment matters. PWC Consulting explains that beyond digital needs, a millennial-hotspot "needs to be comfortable and creative...They will be drawn to organizations that offer an engaging, comfortable, and stimulating atmosphere that creatively blends work and life."<sup>40</sup> The same is true of where they serve.

**3) Collaborative Meetings:** Millennials are "innately collaborative and accustomed to learning in teams and by doing." They will be engaged in meetings where group participation is supported, and they are valued for their personal input.<sup>41</sup>

**4) Mentor/Invest in Them:** Millennials love self-development. They are often eager for professional mentors who will help them identify their strengths, coach them, identify development goals, and offer them regular feedback and encouragement.<sup>42</sup>

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##### ***How far are we willing to go?***

For the past two years, St Paul (the workshop authors' congregation) has on-going children's events which average 40 volunteers, two-thirds of which are Millennials and GenZ. **How did this happen?**

Our team does go out of its way to be flexible in people's positions. As volunteer coordinator, I often meet with people in a variety of personal locales (lunch, coffee dates, play-dates, etc.) to discuss what we are doing. And our meetings are collaborative. **But by far, the most amount of time is spent in mentoring/inserting ourselves into a person's life:**

Almost all of the young people who have volunteered for us are individuals we have had over for meals or met out for events on numerous occasions. All of these people were individuals our volunteer coordinator personally spoke to, text, or emailed about service numerous times, even before confirmation of involvement. And almost all of those currently leading have been informally mentored.

Millennials are not partial to children's ministry: This could be any of our ministries. But **it is a shift away from event planning and towards community building.** This is not a fix to low volunteerism. We are not getting to know people for the sake of plugging them into a volunteer position. We are investing in people as we would a sister or brother. And as we get to know each other, we are looking for ways to serve together.

**Q:** We'd have to be a mega-church to follow this model with all of our current educational opportunities, social events, fundraisers, outreach opportunities, and women's programming. Based on our discussion today, what top three areas of the church are you willing to carve out major time commitments to inter-generationally improve?

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**Q:** Based on our discussion today, what might be some of the barriers hindering young adult involvement?

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**Q:** Based on our discussion today, what are at least three clearly defined action steps we can take?

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<sup>1</sup> **“Young At Heart Workshop” is written by Luke George Thompson and Christine Thompson, and is distributed on ResourcefulChurch.com. This workshop, and all associated materials, may be freely used by pastors and churches, but it may not be in any way monetized or sold.**

<sup>2</sup> For different ways of organizing or stating these points, see “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church,” <<https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church/>>

<sup>3</sup> David Kinnaman presenting Barna research, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church* (Baker, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra, “What the Latest Bible Research Reveals About Millennials,” Christianity Today, May 16, 2016, <<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2016/may/what-latest-bible-research-reveals-about-millennials.html>> accessed May 26, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Betsy Cooper, Daniel Cox, Ph.D., Rachel Lienesch, Robert P. Jones, “Exodus: Why Americans are Leaving Religion—and Why They’re Unlikely to Come Back,” PRRI, Sept. 22, 2016, <<https://www.prri.org/research/prri-rns-poll-nones-atheist-leaving-religion/>> accessed May 26, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Many studies refer to millennials as persons born from 1980 to 2000, marked particularly by growing up in the information and technology age. William Strauss and Neil Howe are credited with introducing and first defining the term in *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation*, (New York, NY: Vintage Original, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> For the sake of this workshop, genZ, or Generation Z, iGeneration, or post-millennials refer to persons born roughly from 2000 to 2020. There is no professional consensus on dates for genZ.

<sup>8</sup> John Fleming, “Gallup Analysis: Millennials, Marriage and Family” Gallup.com <<http://news.gallup.com/poll/191462/gallup-analysis-millennials-marriage-family.aspx>> accessed May 1, 2018.

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<sup>15</sup> Fleming, “Gallup Analysis”

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<sup>19</sup> See C3.3 and C1.3, 124

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