Declining Church Attendance:
Five Reasons Why Millennials Have Stopped Attending Church

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by

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Declining Church Attendance: Five Reasons Why Millennials Have Stopped Attending Church

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During the past decade, every denomination has recorded a decline in church attendance despite a continual increase in the US population. Research organizations including the Barna Group, Pew Research, and the Hartford Institute of Religion Research conducted an untold number of surveys providing statistics that ascertain reasons for declining church attendance and why people are leaving the church. Failure to address the issue of declining attendance will lead to more church failures and an increased number of people with no church affiliation.

This research document will review data from the Barna Group, Pew Research, and the Hartford Institute of Religion Research that provides statistics to ascertain reasons for declining church attendance among Millennials. Surveys of Millennials, specifically the unchurched, will be conducted to outline reasons why they have stopped attending church. Finally, this research document will outline five top reasons for the decline in church attendance among Millennials and offer solutions that will help make the worship experience more palatable.

Words: 164
Acknowledgements

This research study is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Aline Sumpter. She never completed her primary education but made sacrifices to provide a nurturing caring and loving home for the family. Her sacrifices also allowed me to pursue my undergraduate and graduate-level education. Thank you, Mother; you will always be my inspiration.

The motivation to address declining Millennial attendance in the church is directly attributable to my two daughters, Jasmine and Briana, and their apathy toward the traditional church worship experience. Although raised in the church, like many other young adults, they demonstrated indifference toward the traditional worship experience. My motivation for selecting this research topic was to understand why they had lost interest in God. What I found was that they still believed in God but needed a church that addressed issues relevant to their generation. I thank God that they have found such a church where they attend regularly.

I am grateful to the Rawlings School of Divinity for allowing me to further my graduate-level studies. I offer a special tribute to Dr. Charlie Davidson and Dr. H. L. Willmington, who were inspirations to me during this journey. Further, I recognize my former pastor, Dr. M. L. Ford, who demonstrated that education is not antithetical to serving God and can enhance our knowledge of God. Further, I offer a special recognition to my grandmother, Pastor Betty H. Altmon, who taught me the power of faith in Jesus Christ. Additionally, a special thanks to my mentor, Dr. Hester, who continuously offered words of encouragement and advice during this journey.

Finally, I am appreciative to my wife Lynn and our two daughters for their patience and understanding and yielding to my inclination to complete this graduate-level training. Thank you for your patience. Above all, I am grateful for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who showered
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Chapter 1

Introduction

History of the Church

The Christian church has been the moral compass of the United States since this nation was formed in 1776. Church has been a part of the American lifestyle since the Mayflower departed England in the 1600s and arrived in America. Early Christians were devout, but nonconformist. Instead of preaching a sermon on love, Christians were more accustomed to “fire and brimstone” sermons similar to the one preached by Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God.”¹

A nation founded on Christian morals allowed the development of religious freedoms that are the basis for church worship. These freedoms led to a rise in the institution of the church and a variety of Christian denominations and other religious groups including Protestantism, Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Pentecostalism, Jehovah Witnesses, Mormon Temples, and even the Church of Scientology. In addition, the freedom of religion in America resulted in the rise of all types of worship institutions, including schools, universities, hospitals, and churches.²

Decline in Attendance

Some estimate the number of people attending church doubled from 17 percent in 1776 to 34 percent in 1850. This number continued to climb to about 62 percent in 1980 where it became


² Ibid., 126.
In 1980, there were 226.5 million people in the United States, and 140 million, or 62 percent, were affiliated with a church. However, since the 1980s and 90s, a phenomenon occurred in the American culture as church attendance started to decline. In 2014, four-in-ten, or 40 percent, of the American population indicated that they regularly attended worship service. This decline in attendance is the sharpest drop since 1980, where 62 percent attended weekly worship service.

There has been a rise in recent decades in the United States of those who are religiously unaffiliated. In 2012, Pew Research labeled these people who for various reasons unaffiliated themselves with the church as *nones*. The research found that about 33 percent of those interviewed under the age of thirty had no religious affiliation. A trend shows that the number of *nones* is growing at a dramatic rate. Over a five-year period, from 2007 to 2012, the percentage of *nones* increased from 15 percent to 20 percent respectively. This number includes those who classify themselves as atheist and agnostics and totaled 6 percent of the population, while 14 percent or 33 million people are religiously unaffiliated.

Despite their lack of affiliation with the church, many *nones* still believe in God. In conjunction, there is a new trend among Millennials: 37 percent consider themselves “spiritual but not religious” with 21 percent indicating that they pray daily. Unfortunately, most indicate that they are not looking for a church or a place to worship and are not seeking a religious affiliation.

Preliminary questions were asked of some Millennials inquiring why they dislike church.

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3 Taylor, *The Next America*, 126.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 127.
6 Ibid.
The response was rather interesting: they indicated that they still believe in God but are not passionate about the church. This view is consistent with Barna and Pew Research reports. However, when pressed on the subject, they responded that they consider themselves more “spiritual” while the Baby Boomers consider themselves more “religious.” The “spiritual” response is popular among Millennials when asked why they have disassociated themselves with the church. The concept of “spiritual and not religious” will be discussed later in this study.

Trends in the religious demographics of the United States continue to change at an alarming rate. The number of unchurched or religiously unaffiliated is on a steep incline. In recent years, Generation X (born during the period 1965-1998) and Baby Boomers (1946-1965) have even become more religiously unaffiliated. In a survey conducted by Pew Research, 21 percent of Generation X and 15 percent of Baby Boomers consider themselves religiously unaffiliated, which was up by 3 percent from 2007 in both demographics. This phenomenon of religiously unaffiliated has led to the rise of a new generation called Millennials who are now unaffiliated with the church.

Despite the church’s attempt to chart the moral direction of the country, a drastic change has occurred over the past forty years as children born in America with no religious affiliation continue to rise. Research indicates that only 31 percent of Millennials attend church, which compares to 42 percent of Generation X. This is a double-digit increase in religiously unaffiliated over one generation alone. The large number of Millennials who are unaffiliated with the church has led to declining church attendance.

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7 Taylor, *The Next America*, 127.

Who are the Millennials?

Millennials are young adults, the twenty-somethings who are now trying to decide where they belong in society. They are pondering or pursuing college, contemplating job opportunities, and wondering in what city to look for employment. They are the largest and most diverse generation on record, with more than 40 percent comprised of minorities. In contrast, Generation X and Baby Boomers are comprised of 25 percent minorities, while the oldest generation, the Silent Generation, is 90 percent white. It is apparent that the demographics of America have abruptly changed. There are 27 million more Millennials than Generation X and 17 million more than Baby Boomers. This gap will continue to grow as Baby Boomers age and die.

As Millennials assume control of society, their beliefs will become the dominant beliefs of society. However, critics in society have often ranted against them. For example, Glen Beck, a conservative commentator chooses to blame Millennials for the ills and direction of society saying that “they don’t give a crap about anybody but themselves.” Some have even criticized Millennials as being conceited, feeling entitled yet indecisive. This type of attitude should be expected because, during the 1980s and 1990s, children raised by Beck’s generation were taught to value themselves and be self-confident and overly optimistic.

Despite all the negative criticism hurled at this young generation that some say cares only about themselves, they possess some positive characteristics. Specifically, though not

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11 Ibid., 28.

12 Ibid., 29.

13 Ibid.
publicized in the media, delinquent behavior among the nation’s youth has decreased. For example, juvenile crime rates, teen pregnancy, abortion, and drug abuse are down while academic test scores are higher than those of Generation X and Baby Boomers. They are more diverse and more optimistic and believe that they can solve the problems of society all while serving themselves. They are pragmatic and idealistic, but when it comes to the church, they are somewhat cynical. In other words, Millennials believe that their generation can solve social problems, and many see no use for the church. Finally, despite their belief in God, Millennials have become increasingly unaffiliated with the church.\(^\text{14}\)

**Statement of the Problem**

During the past 30 years, denominations have recorded a decline in church attendance. This decline has persisted over several decades despite a continual increase in the population of the United States. Pew research cited one of the key reasons for this decline is dissatisfaction with church leadership and how it conducts business. However, any effort to fully understand waning church attendance without understanding the demographics of society and the church will likely be unsuccessful. Baby Boomers, once the largest generation, is decreasing due to age, while Generation X and Millennials will become the dominant players in society. As such, the decline of the church, some surmise, is the direct result of the church’s lack of appeal to the younger generation. This research will attempt to outline reasons for dwindling church attendance as it relates to Millennials and offer solutions to make the worship experience more palatable for the unchurched Millennials. Failure to address this phenomenon will result in a continual decrease in church attendance and an increasing number of people with no church affiliation.

The Schaffer Institute of Church Leadership Development (FASICLD) researched why churches have declining membership leading to church failures. FASICLD concluded that the church has become irrelevant and distant from society. Dr. Richard J. Kreijcir, a researcher for FASICLD, indicated that approximately 50 percent of Americans have no church affiliation. Although his statistics are slightly different from Pew Research, they still reflect a drastic drop in church membership by nearly 10 percent in the 80s and 12 percent in the 90s. Further, the report indicated that some denominations lost as much as 40 percent of its membership during this same period.\footnote{Richard Krejcir, “Statistics and Reasons for Church Decline,” Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, 2007, accessed Nov 16, 2018, http://www.churchleadership.org/apps/articles/default.asp?articleid=42346&columnid4545.}

FASICLD reveals that church membership continued to decline in the 21st century. As a result of waning attendance, churches are failing at an alarming rate despite the fact that the US population is steadily increasing. FASICLD highlights staggering US Census Bureau records revealing that there are 1,000 new churches started each year while 4,000 churches are closing in the same year. This results in a loss of 3,000 churches each year serving the US population.\footnote{Ibid.}

Further, approximately 2.7 million church members leave the church each year for various reasons. A more startling statistic is that during the period 1990-2000, while the population of the United States increased by 11 percent or 24 million people, the Protestant denomination decreased by 5 million or 9.5 percent. Moreover, in 1900, there were 27 churches per every 10,000 people in the United States. However, by the year 2000, there were eleven churches per 10,000 people.\footnote{Ibid.} These statistics mean that the number of churches across the United States is steadily declining.
There are a host of reasons offered why churches are on the decline. Walter Sundberg indicated that religious trends in twentieth century America reflect three reasons why church attendance and church membership have declined. First, Sundberg referenced author Dean Kelly, who said that some churches have a “watered down message and have allowed the world to dictate the sermons.”

If this is indeed the case, and the message preached in the church is secular, there is no need for the church. Perhaps this may be why so many Millennials have already left the church. Sundberg makes the point that this liberal message is impotent and offers no compelling reason to join the church.

Secondly, as a result of the church taking sides politically, this has caused dissension in the ranks of the church along political and doctrinal lines. Families frequently split over politics and what candidate to support, whether they should vote red or blue, pro-life or pro-choice. Just as political views can divide a nation, Sundberg suggests that it has also divided the church.

Thirdly, Sundberg indicates that separation of church and state has resulted in the secularization of the church. For example, the issue of abortion has caused a deep divide in the nation and has stimulated division in the church, especially the Protestant church. Moreover, Sundberg's view regarding church decline seems somewhat superficial and does little to facilitate understanding the actual reason for church decline. Sundberg presupposes that separation of church and state is the reason for church decline, yet churches have flourished for 200 years. To fully understand the reason why church attendance is decreasing, this study will obtain qualitative data obtained from direct interaction with Millennials to determine why they have

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19 Ibid., 25.

20 Ibid., 27.

21 Ibid., 29.
disengaged from the church.

Limitations

This research will seek to answer why Millennials are disgruntled with the church. This trend has led to the growth of a demographic label called *nones*. They are comprised mostly of Millennials who have no particular religious affiliation and have little or no adoration for the church. Many of them, however, still believe in God and that He is the author of creation. Unfortunately, for various reasons, they have expressed a distrust of the institution called the church. Although this research will focus primarily on why Millennials have become unaffiliated with the church, it is evident that Generation Xers and Baby Boomers have also lost enthusiasm for the church for many of the same reasons.

There is no “one size fits all” solution to the problem of declining church attendance. The problem is more than just an issue of church demographics regarding Millennials, but there is common concern that runs through the entire issue of declining church attendance. However, this research will focus specifically on ascertaining the reasons why Millennials have disaffiliated themselves with the church. Defining this issue may provide the key to minimizing declining church attendance and limit the failure of existing churches.

Theoretical Basis for the Project

Christians should make every effort to ascertain why Millennials have overwhelmingly rejected the church. To write them off as sinners who are unwilling to accept the gospel without attempting to bring them back into the church is a tactical error and inconsistent with the teachings of Christ. Scripture states that the church must seek out those who have wandered off. When a member of the flock strayed, Jesus offers his followers advice on recovering the lost:
Then Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

In the parable mentioned above of the lost sheep, Jesus tells the story of a man with 100 sheep, and one goes astray. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine sheep to search for the one lost. To ensure his listeners understood the importance of searching for and seeking out the lost, Jesus follows this parable with two other stories of a “Lost Coin” and the “Lost Son.”

The church must stop acting like the Pharisees whose focus was to perfect their righteousness and assist the Lord in seeking out the lost by demonstrating a caring demeanor. They must preach the message of the gospel without compromise and be more inclusive. Instead of criticizing those who have disassociated themselves, the church must demonstrate a level of compassion and show value to those who are unchurched.

Preliminary research indicates that there are three generations mostly affecting church decline, but Millennials have separated from the church in increased numbers. Theologically and biblically, church leadership has a responsibility to reach out to Millennials and those who have disaffiliated themselves with the church. Finally, if the church continues to concern itself only with the people inside the church and fails to reach outside church walls, they may become a statistic in Thomas Rainer’s book, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church.*

Statement of Methodology

This research seeks to understand how the disaffiliation of Millennials has facilitated the

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decline of the Protestant church. This paper will analyze this phenomenon utilizing academic research data compiled by Pew, Barna, and other research organizations. Additionally, this project will gather qualitative research directly from Millennials who currently attend church regularly. Thirdly, the study will concentrate on those who have elected to disassociate themselves with the church. Data from this demographic will be compiled and analyzed to identify fundamental reasons for Millennials not attending church and provide recommendations that can be used by church leadership to start a dialogue and facilitate the revival of Millennial memberships.

Chapter Review

Chapter 1, the introduction, will provide an overview of the church and its rise as the moral compass of the country since its inception. It will also introduce the phenomenon of decades of declining church attendance. Furthermore, this chapter will make the correlation between a drop in church attendance and the disaffiliation of Millennials.

Chapter 2 will introduce the Millennial generation to church leadership. Often Millennials are marginalized and considered insignificant in the church until they can contribute financially. Unfortunately, if the church does not embrace the youth during their teenage years, they will disengage from the church when they become young adults. Furthermore, this chapter will underscore the value of Millennials to the church. This study will hopefully encourage the church to improve communications with Millennials and understand their perspective. Additionally, this chapter will highlight the differences between Millennials, Generation Xers, and Baby Boomers. Finally, this chapter will consolidate data from a variety of sources including the Barna Research Group, Pew Research, and the Hartford Institute of Religion to
understand the Millennial generation and the socio-economic influences that contributed to their generational values.

Chapter 3 will highlight Millennials and their relationship with the church. Specifically, it will look at their perception of the church and how the church perceives them. This chapter will be completed utilizing qualitative data collected from Millennials through surveys and personal interviews. Further, this chapter will discuss what Millennials want in a church worship experience.

Chapter 4 will provide conclusions. It will underscore the key reasons why Millennials have separated from the church and offer alternatives to reestablish the relationship between Millennials and the church. Additionally, it will provide recommendations to re-engage Millennials and welcome them back into the church.

Literature Review

Books

George Barna is the author of the book *Generation Next: What You Need to Know About Today’s Youth*. The author obtained data for the book from primary research including interviews with young people. Barna found that Millennials are serious about life, self-reliant, and profoundly spiritual, but stressed out. They are not excited about the church but are interested in spiritual matters with some dabbling in other faiths. Barna says some Millennials are even modifying their religious beliefs with other religions. Moreover, Millennials consider themselves “spiritual” which to them does not mean Christian. Barna did not offer a precise


definition of the term *spiritual*, but it will be defined later in the course of this study.

The Millennial generation is the most studied generation in history\(^27\) and the Barna Research Group is one of the leading authorities on this generation. This book is beneficial to this study because it assists older generations in understanding Millennials and how and why they are different.

George Barna’s second book in this review, entitled *Re-Churching the Unchurched*, is focused on bringing those who were once church attendees back into the church. According to Barna, there are nearly 100 million people in the United States who are unchurched. The author indicates that there is no silver bullet, special formula, or exclusive program to guarantee the return of the unchurched into a house of worship. However, Barna offers strategies that can be employed to inspire many of the unchurched to return. This book is beneficial because Barna is one of the foremost experts on religious concerns, and the content of the book is a treasure trove of information regarding religious matters and church attendance.\(^28\)

Mark Bauerlein is Professor of Engineering at Emory University and Director of Research for the National Endowment for the Arts. In his book *The Dumbest Generation*, Bauerlein suggests that the youngest generation is suffering academically because of all the technology and insulation and the fact that they are not reading books. Despite calling Millennials the “Dumbest Generation,” Bauerlein acknowledges a trend that Millennial students score higher on the SAT than previous generations. He calls this the “achievement chase” and indicates that the youth are in an overachievement culture, with parents urging them on. Bauerlein stated that despite the high test scores, young people are no smarter, skilled, or


knowledgeable than their predecessors. He indicates that they are not as competent in history or science and they spend less time reading books. 29 This debate continues among scholars regarding the academic ability and maturity of Millennials. However, time will decide their place in history, whether they are the best generation or the “dumbest.”

Finally, Bauerlein’s negative perception of Millennials is a representation of how some Baby Boomers view Millennials. These perceptions must be addressed in this research before viable recommendations can be made to reinvigorate Millennial attendance.

Charles Bayer, the author of Hope for the Mainline Church, indicates that Protestant denominations are experiencing significant problems. They are losing members and cannot seem to stop the bleeding. They have built buildings but struggle to pay the mortgage, and some buildings are left abandoned. Unfortunately, Bayer occasionally gets off track while offering no solutions to church decline. He complains about pay for pastors who are lonely and always giving but never receiving. In effect, he suggests that “clergy bashing” is common and even insinuates that some congregants are “preacher killers.”

Occasionally, Bayer bashes the church while defending the preacher. He indicates that pastors are judged unfairly on budgets, attendance, new members, and buildings. However, he fails to point out that when things go well, the pastor is credited with the success of the church as well. Further, he indicates that those churches that are succeeding are the conservative churches that take the Bible literally and are not deeply involved in social issues.

The mainline church is in a state of uncertainty. Bayer indicates that they have lost their sense of direction. Further, he believes that young people look to the church for guidance and answers but are not nourished spiritually, so they turn elsewhere. However, Bayer is optimistic

and believes that this trend will change. He believes that just as the tide in a tributary rises and falls, churches will recover when the need for the church increases.

Bayer takes the stance that church pastors are often blamed for church failures beyond their control. Understanding his presupposition regarding church failures allows this research to consider all points of views before making conclusions and recommendations in this research.

Robert C. Fuller, the author of *Spiritual but not Religious*, looks at the unchurched population. He indicates that there are three types of unchurched Americans. There are those who do not believe in God because intellectual and scientific advancements make it difficult to believe in God or what some call a religion of blind faith.

Secondly, he says that there are individuals whose relationship with God and religion is ambiguous. They rarely attend church, but when they do, they refuse to join. In other words, they attend church but do not believe the doctrine.

Thirdly, there is the unchurched which he reports totals about 21 percent of the population. They consider themselves spiritual but prefer to look outside the church for spiritual guidance. Thus, they are categorized as “spiritual but not religious.” They believe that religion is not tied to a building but to spiritual philosophies outside the Christian faith. Furthermore, this group does not like the brick and mortar experience with its formalized traditions so sometimes they worship privately.  

Further, some unchurched believe that God resides within them, so there is no need for the church or a traditional organized religion. The unchurched are likely college-educated white-collar individuals with liberal views and had parents who did not attend church. Fuller cites one source, Rodger Finke’s book, that said that people are more affiliated with the church than ever.

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before. This view contradicts Pew and Barna Research which reflects a decline in church
attendance. Finally, the concept of “spiritual but not religious” is not a new phenomenon and is
very popular among Millennials. Understanding this concept is imperative to understanding why
some Millennials have abandoned the Sunday morning worship service.

Samuel Halperin, author of *American Youth Policy Forum*, focuses on the youth who did
not go to college. He calls them the “the forgotten half.” His research reflects that most poor
children were not able to obtain higher education, while 84 percent of the upper-income
population went to college. Further, unemployment rates for youth were staggering and
unacceptable in 1998 while minorities experienced unemployment rates which soared to near 30
percent.

In 2016, young people continued to have concerns about finding employment. While
some Millennials who did not attend college will be fortunate enough to get a job, their pay is
projected to be lower than the compensation received by previous generations. In his book,
Halperin compiles statistical data to outline the realities of life without college and points out the
enormous possibilities in the lives of non-college educated youth in America. Finally, Halperin’s
book is beneficial to this study because it acknowledges distinct differences in young adults who
attend college versus those with no college.32 This difference in education can influence a
person’s perspective on life, including religion.

Neil Howe and William Strauss co-authored the book *Millennials Rising*. Howe and
Strauss take the view that although Millennials are labeled “bad kids,” trends reflect a different
truth regarding this generation. Though often tagged as test cheaters, drug users, and spoiled
brats who wear tongue rings and are unable to read, he reports a good news story. Millennials

are better educated, more affluent, more ethnically diverse and believe more in teamwork than previous generations. Within this generation, projections are that college ranks will increase substantially. Additionally, crime, suicides, and abortions rates have decreased while college test scores have improved when compared to other generations. The authors dispel the notion that Millennials are the worst generation and offers optimism that they may be the best generation ever. 33

The book benefits this research because Howe and Strauss provide an in-depth examination of the most studied generation in history and identifies the unique tendencies of this new cohort. This type of detail is critical to understanding the generational divide between Millennials and other generations.

George Hunter, author of *Church for the Unchurched*, quotes Lee Strobel that there are four groups of people: churched Christians, churched non-Christians, unchurched Christians, and unchurched non-Christians. Hunter writes that many churches seek to attract unchurched Christians, or those who believe but have no church affiliation. Some churches are more successful than others because of whom they target.

Hunter takes a look at several churches that have been successful in increasing membership. He believes that the Apostolic Church has the right focus, which is to reach the unchurched non-Christian, and he identifies nine churches that have been successful in their efforts to increase memberships. He indicates that any church that preaches the gospel with clarity and is relevant will be successful in obtaining new members. Hunter suggests that churches must not be complacent but take the gospel message to the people to increase...

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membership.\(^{34}\)

Hunter’s suggestion that the church must preach with clarity and relevance is not a unique idea. Millennials often indicate that sermons are ambiguous and irrelevant. Hunter’s book provides insight as to what churches can do to retain existing members and attract new members, including Millennials.

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons co-authored the book *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity…and Why it Matters*. Kinnaman, the former president of the Barna Group, captures the perception of what non-Christians think about the Christian faith. He indicates that Christianity today is unlike the Christianity of Jesus. One person Kinnaman interviewed said that Christians are “nothing more than blind followers that repeat slogans and market fear mongering.” \(^{35}\)

Kinnaman indicates that the church and its followers have an image problem. He believes that if the church is to add more people to the faith, it must stop putting a negative label on the people it wishes to recruit. Further, prospective members must be embraced and accepted for their potential instead of being labeled as flawed.

Finally, this book helps this research study because it provides clear insight as to why some Millennials have stopped attending church. He indicates that some churches put negative labels on potential members which can be characterized as passing judgment on them. Kinnaman reinforces the fact that churches must alter how they treat the new generation or tolerate the fact that Millennials will abandon the church altogether.

David Kinnaman, author of the book *You Lost Me*, attempts to expose why young adults


leave the church and seek other ways to find God. He reports that 59 percent of young adults who previously attended church eventually leave altogether. Kinnaman offers options to pastors and churches that will encourage young adults to return to church. This book is beneficial because it offers fifty ideas pastors and church leaders can employ to reinvigorate millennial attendance.36

David Murrow wrote the book Why Men Hate Going to Church because this issue perplexed him for years. On any given Sunday, he noticed that the majority of church congregants were women. Additionally, most of the ministry heads were women. However, Murrow believes that if the church changes, it can “call the church back to men.”

This book provides beneficial insights on why men have abandoned church. This is important because most Millennials that reject the church are young men. The issue with men not attending church is not so dissimilar from the reasons why Millennials have opted not to attend church.37

Thomas Rainer’s book, Autopsy of a Deceased Church, outlines the characteristics of a dead church and highlights the warning signs of an impending church death. Although less than one hundred pages, it reveals a dark truth about many churches across the United States that unfortunately many refuse to acknowledge. The fact is that most churches are unhealthy with a bleak future. Rainer chronicles the diagnosis of a church as if it were a person receiving a cancer diagnosis. Despite the warning signs, many churches still succumb to the diagnoses of death because of their inability to change.

Sadly, this seems to be a common thread that runs through many unsuccessful churches.

36 David Kinnaman, You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

They are sick but refuse to acknowledge that they need to change. Rainer says that the church was born out of a vision, but if it loses its vision, it will eventually die from what Rainer calls "slow erosion.” Often, the problem is the same; the church leadership will not admit that there is a problem, nor will the pastor acknowledge that there has been a decline. As a result, the church dies a slow death and eventually closes its doors to the public.38

This book is critical to this study because it adds credibility to the need for churches to change. Further, it highlights the fact that churches usually fail because they refuse to change. Finally, Rainer’s book offers an incentive for the Church at large to seek change and stay relevant or cease to exist.

Paul Taylor, the Executive Vice President of the Pew Research Center authored the book The Next America. His book examines an America that has evolved from the Baby Boomer generation to the Millennials. He points out that due to changing demographics, the face of America is changing along with its philosophical, social, and political views. He says that changes in society are occurring because the racial makeup of the country is changing. Whites are losing their majority status coupled with an increase in a non-white Millennial generation. Further, he notes that as demographics change, the religious trends of the nation also change resulting in a society that is more unaffiliated with the church.39

Taylor does more than just examine the superficial aspect of issues; he looks below the surface to outline changing trends and the direction of the country facilitated by the growing Millennial population. His book helps this research understand the philosophical, social, and political views of Millennials. Finally, the author helps this research understand the religious trends of Millennials and how their views impact the church.

38 Rainer, Autopsy of a Deceased Church.

39 Taylor, The Next America.
Kathleen Kennedy Townsend is the daughter of Robert Kennedy and the author of *Failing America’s Faithful: How Today’s Churches are Mixing God with Politics and Losing Their Way*. Although Townsend wrote this book in 2007, she recognized legitimate problems that plagued the church and continue to be a problem today. She argues that the church has an image problem because it focuses too much on its relationship with God at the expense of serving the needs of the less fortunate.  

Other authors have made the same claim, that the church is too inwardly focused.  

Moreover, Kennedy contradicts others who argue that the church is too involved in social issues. She contends that the church must take a stand on matters that involve social justice and political issues. During this research, Millennials will be provided a survey regarding their position on church involvement in social justice and political issues. This book is helpful to this study because Townsend is unafraid to critique the church and acknowledge that society has rejected the church because of its stance on social and political issues.  

Morley Winograd and Michael D. Hais co-authored the book *Millennial Momentum*. The authors identify the millennial generation as a group of young Americans born from 1982 to 2003. They contend that there are about 95 million Millennials in America that are able to vote. While some Millennials say they are not concerned about politics, this was found to be inaccurate as many voted to propel Barrack Obama into the presidency in 2008.  

When Millennials come of age, they will comprise about 36 percent of the population. Winograd points out that most of them have a liberal view of homosexuality, immigration, abortion, and government. Furthermore, Millennials want a government involved in the issues of

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41 Winograd and Hais, *Millennial Momentum*. 
society while Baby Boomers prefer a smaller less-intrusive government. In effect, Winograd argues that Millennials will eventually change America because they are the largest generation ever but with a different mindset. Winograd’s book is useful to this study because he provides insight on many of the issues outlined in this study.

Reports

_Engaging Millennials in Ministry_ was commissioned by the Siebert Lutheran Foundation to address Millennial issues in the Lutheran Church. The report was designed to increase membership by engaging the younger generation with regard to their spiritual beliefs and desires for ministries in the church. The surveys for the report encompassed more than two thousand respondents to ascertain practical ideas that can be used to enhance the growth of Millennials in the church. The report was designed to “act instead of react.” Instead of guessing about the concerns of young adults, the researchers sought to engage Millennials. In short, the Siebert Foundation sought to focus on a “Change or Die” mentality that addressed the rise of the “none” phenomenon in America. In other words, the report is focused on making operational changes in the Lutheran Church which allows them to stay relevant with the younger cohorts.\(^4\) This report is beneficial to this research study because it addresses Millennial concerns and acknowledges that church leadership needs to establish priorities to maintain Millennials’ attendance.

_Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change._ is a detailed examination of religious matters focused on the Millennial generation. Created by Pew Research, the nonpartisan fact tank, thoroughly explored the issues, attitudes, and trends of Millennials in the United States. The data was compiled utilizing social research data and opinion polls from

several thousand respondents.\textsuperscript{43} Pew’s nonpartisan research is critical to this study because it provides an understanding of trends and concerns about religion and how it influences the lives of Millennials and society at large.

The \textit{Religious Landscape Study} (RLS) conducted by Pew Research is derived from a sample size of more than thirty-five thousand respondents to ascertain the composition of adults in America. The scope of the report included a thorough examination of all religious factions and Christian denominations across the United States. The RLS suggests that there is a changing religious landscape in the country. The study identified an overall decline in the percentage of Christians in the United States, including a substantial decline in the number mainline Protestants and Catholics. Along with the decline of the Christian population, the report cited a corresponding increase in the rise of the \textit{nones}, or the religiously unaffiliated. The RLS indicated that a rise in the \textit{none} population is a contributing factor influencing the decline in church attendance.\textsuperscript{44} The Religious Landscape Study is beneficial because it is a comprehensive report that provided insight on a variety of issues including declining attendance among Christian worshippers.

\textit{The State of the Church} is a report created by the Barna Research Group, a private nonpartisan research organization. This thorough report is compiled from nationwide surveys allowing Barna to examine a variety of areas including affiliation, attendance, and practices to ascertain the health of the church, not just in America but throughout the world. Barna is the foremost expert on matters concerning the church, and its research helps the study to address


many of the significant issues that concern Millennials today. For example, the report contrasts the number of adults who claim they are Christian (73 percent) versus the number of people who attend a church service regularly (35 percent). This reveals a substantial variance between what people claim and how they express their faith.\textsuperscript{45} Finally, this report is beneficial to this research because it provides a detailed nonpartisan perspective of the church based upon responses from more than five thousand respondents.

\textit{Articles}

Chad Lakies is the author of the article “Candy Machine God, or, Going to Church without Going to Church: Millennials and the Future of the Christian Faith.” Lakies is a Millennial who decided to address the relationship Millennials have with the church. This article provides a unique perspective on the faith of Millennials and makes it clear that most of them are not atheists but have a distant relationship with the church, regardless of race or denomination. However, due to the high level of non-affiliated Millennials, the church needs to reevaluate its message to embrace this demographic and return to its original focus, which is to teach the gospel of salvation.\textsuperscript{46}

Lakies’ article is relevant to this study because he offers a unique perspective about the church from a Millennial church pastor. He acknowledges that changes are required in the church in order to reach Millennials. Although he did not indicate specifically, Lackies suggests that churches need to alter its pedagogical process to reach its congregation.

Reverend Harold Masback is a professor at Yale Divinity School. He is the author of the

\textsuperscript{45} State of the Church.

article “Twin Calamities: The Declining Churches, Struggling Youth.” Masback links the decline of churches with the social crisis experienced by today’s youth. He contends that failing churches is not a denominational issue but churches are failing because they have yet to embrace the newest demographic in society. As a result, churches and Millennials are both on a downward trajectory. He concludes that the church must reach out to society’s youth and find a way to make them disciples or face a bleak future.  

This article is important to this study because it highlights the fact that declining churches and struggling youth are not mutually exclusive issues. Masback implies that there is a symbiosis between the health of the church and the youth in society that must be addressed. Further, he recommends that the youth in the church must become the churches’ priority.

Randall Reed, a professor at Appalachian State University in North Carolina, writes the article “A Book for None? Teaching Biblical Studies to Millennial Nones.” As a college professor who teaches New Testament Theology, Randall is attempting to understand how to help Millennials gain a contextual understanding of the Bible because he has seen a continual decline in the interest of students registering for theology classes. He focuses on nones, a term used to describe those who have no religious affiliation. Though Millennials are the largest population of nones, all indications are that they still believe in God. Their lack of confidence in religion lies not with God but with the church. Randall believes that the lack of affiliation with the church is the reason church attendance is on the decline.

As a professor of religious studies, Reed’s article is beneficial to this study because it

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provides recommendation on how to engage Millennial *nones* on biblical issues. Further, it recommends innovative ways to teach biblical issues by contextualizing scripture in light of cultural differences.

Walter Sundberg is the author of the article "Religious Trends in Twentieth-Century America.” He contends that there has been a decline in the membership of mainline churches but a double-digit increase in Evangelical churches. Mainline churches include the American Baptist Churches, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, and United Methodist. Conversely, Sundberg contends that Evangelical denominations like the Assemblies of God and the Church of God have experienced dramatic gains in membership from 200 to 300 percent. Further, he indicates that the Church of God in Christ has experienced a 1,232 percent increase. Sundberg believes that this growth is due to a conservative message that focuses more on the message of Christ versus a worldly message.  

This article is beneficial to this study because it provides a detailed overview why Evangelical churches have not experienced the dramatic decline in church attendance experienced by mainline churches.

Mariam Smit, a Millennial, wrote the article “Facing the Void: Millennials Keep Dropping out of Church.” She acknowledges that Millennials are attempting to navigate their way through life. Smit makes a plea to the church to respect her opinion as a young adult because her generation is better educated, motivated, dedicated and passionate about life. Like many other Millennials, she expresses distrust, not of God, but the church. In the article, she asked the church to give her a voice because she genuinely cares for the church. This article is

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49 Sundberg, “Religious Trends in Twentieth-Century America.”

beneficial to this study because it supports the fact that a Millennial presence in churches is a contributing factor in declining church attendance.

*Scriptures*

Luke 15:11-32 is the Parable of the Lost Son. Jesus tells the story of “a certain man had two sons.” The son was separated from his father but eventually returned home. Upon his return, his father welcomed him back with open arms and without condemnation. Similarly, the church must embrace and welcome Millennials without condemnation.51

Luke 15:8-10 is the parable Jesus told about the Lost Silver Coin. The woman had ten silver coins, loses one coin, lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds it. She searched fervently because to her all of the coins were valuable. Just as the coin was lost, many people are lost or separated from God. An intense effort must be made to find those who are lost.52

In Proverbs 22:6, the scripture says to “Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old, he will not depart from it.” To *train* means to instruct or to educate the child starting in his early years. Season his mind before he is filled with unhealthy instructions, and when he is old, he will remember. In other words, he will retain what you have taught him, and he will bear fruit during his life.53

In Romans 8:1, Paul writes that “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Upon the sacrifice of Christ, all now reside under the new covenant which is the Law of the Spirit. Despite man’s sin, God promised that if a man is in Christ, he will not be

condemned.\textsuperscript{54}

In 1 Corinthians 3:16, Paul tells the church, "you are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you.” The purpose of the Christian faith is to make men more like Christ. Followers are to make men, including Millennials, “Disciples of Christ,” so they become more like Christ.\textsuperscript{55}

Proverbs 9:10 reveals that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” This text acknowledges that reverence for God is the first step toward wisdom. The person must accept that God exists, then seek the knowledge of God. Finally, he must understand the things which pertain to God, then follow them.\textsuperscript{56}

In 2 Peter 3:9, it says that the Lord is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” God gives people time to come to the knowledge of him and exercise faith. All Christians must hear the gospel and allow their faith to grow. Likewise, the church must spread the gospel and give Millennials who have no religious affiliation the opportunity to exercise their faith and come to the knowledge of God.\textsuperscript{57}

Proverbs 29:18 tells the church that “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” If there is no preaching of the Word of God, the foundation of the church is weak. A weak church results in a vulnerable society that is ungovernable and both will succumb to secular authority.\textsuperscript{58}

Nehemiah 8:8 says that, “They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.” Ministers must be

\textsuperscript{54} Rom. 8:1.

\textsuperscript{55} 1 Cor. 3:16.

\textsuperscript{56} Prov. 9-10.

\textsuperscript{57} 2 Peter 3:9.

\textsuperscript{58} Prov. 29:1.
schooled in the knowledge of God's Word and explain the scripture so a child can understand it. Some have sadly stood in the pulpit ill-prepared and with a lack of preparation caused some to stumble in their walk with Christ.  

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "on this rock, I will build My church.” Jesus acknowledges that he will build his Church on a firm foundation. Builders know that a strong foundation is the cornerstone of a sturdy building. If there are structural problems with a building, the foundation should be inspected. A failing Christian church means that the spiritual foundation of the structure needs to be examined.

In Romans 10:17, Paul tells us that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Before men can believe the Word, they must hear the Word of God. Hearing the Word causes faith to grow. However, preachers must preach without compromising the Word. A church that lacks faith and is experiencing a declining membership needs to examine whether it is preaching the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul tells the church to “speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind.” He instructs the church to speak with one voice with no division in its ranks. The Church is one body serving one Lord, being led by one Spirit.

In Ephesians 4:13, Paul writes, “come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” There is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. As such, there should be no disunity in the church or

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59 Neh. 8:8.
60 Matt. 16:18.
61 1 Cor. 1:10.
among the followers of Christ. The church unites around the knowledge of Christ.⁶²

In Philippians 2:2, Paul urges the church to “be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” Here he is instructing the church to be like-minded and professing a common love for each other. In effect, he is telling them to seek harmony and obtain perfect unity in Christ while preventing discord and division in the church.⁶³

In 1 Corinthians 12:14, Paul tells the church that “the body does not consist of one member but many.” Segments of the body cannot operate independently but must work jointly as one body. All parts of the body are necessary like the various parts of the Church. No ministry is more important than the other; all are equal.⁶⁴

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⁶³ Phil 2:2.
⁶⁴ Cor. 12:14.
Chapter 2

Meet the Millennials

Demographics

The Pew Research Center highlighted a US Census Bureau report indicating that Millennials have surpassed Baby Boomers and is now the largest living generation in the United States.  

In 2014, the report (fig. 1) indicated that the Millennial population totaled 75.4 million and surpassed the Baby Boomer Generation of 74.9 million. However, generational theorists Neil Howe and William Strauss reported in their book *Millennials Rising* that the number of

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2 Ibid.
Millennials surpassed Baby Boomers in the year 2000, to become the largest generation in history totaling more than 76 million. In addition, Howe and Strauss projected that with the influx of immigrants into the country, the number of Millennials might eventually exceed 100 million. Moreover, they concluded that the Millennial population would continue to grow astronomically while other generations will decrease in size due to the rise in mortality.⁶⁷

In 2000, Howe and Strauss defined Millennials as young adults born between 1982 and 1998, between the ages of 18-29 years old.⁶⁸ However, a 2015 Pew Research study defines Millennials slightly different. According to Pew, Millennials are young adults born between 1981 and 1997 and between the ages of 18-34.⁶⁹ Sociologists have admitted that there is no exact science on defining the inclusive dates of each generation, especially Millennials. This study found that institutions define inclusive dates of each generation differently, and views vary on exactly when one generation stops and another begins. This research will incorporate both definitions focusing on the inclusive dates of Millennials from 1981-1998 and between the ages of 22-37 years old.

Contrasting of Generations

In 2016, Pew provided a chronological contrast of Millennials and other generations:

- The Greatest Generation includes seniors born before 1928. Their ages range from 88-100 years old. A Pew estimate indicates that this generation is about two percent of the US population.
- The Silent Generation includes seniors born during the period 1928 to 1945. Their age ranges

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⁶⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁶⁹ Fry, *Millennials Projected to Overtake Baby Boomers.*
from 70-87 years old. The Silent Generation peaked at 47 million but has significantly declined over time due to mortality rates.

• The Baby Boomer generation was born during the period 1946 to 1964. Their ages range from 54 to 72 years old. The Boomer population peaked at 78.8 million in 1999 but has started to decline due to mortality rates.

• Generation X is defined as adults born during the period 1965-1980 and includes adults in the age range of 38-53. The Generation X population is estimated to grow to a total of 65.8 million by 2018.

• In 2014, Pew initially defined Millennials as individuals born between 1982 and 1998. Today, these young adults would be between the ages of 20-36. In 2016, Pew redefined the Millennials as young adults born between 1981 and 1996. Despite how Millennials are defined, research indicates that they are the largest generation in history with current estimates as high as 80 million individuals who today are between the ages of 22-37 years old.70

    Social Economic Influences

    *Shaping a Generation*

    The Millennial generation is different from any cohort in history. Like all cohorts, they are a direct product of their sociocultural environment. Millennials were shaped by a unique culture and a variety of unusual events that influenced their attitudes, values, and worldview. As an example, many were sixth graders during the Clinton administration and the Monica Lewinski scandal. During their adolescent years, Millennials were exposed to the horrific and traumatic acts of terrorism carried out by the Unabomber (Ted Kaczynski), the Oklahoma City bombing

70 Fry, *Millennials Projected to Overtake Baby Boomers.*
orchestrated by Timothy McVeigh, and the Ruby Ridge standoff in Waco Texas.\textsuperscript{71} As preteens and teens, Millennials were also exposed to and traumatized by the Columbine massacre on April 20, 1999, that took the lives of twelve students and one teacher by two psychopathic students.\textsuperscript{72}

Further, Millennials were coming of age during the height of the AIDS epidemic when health organizations around the world struggled to understand the consequences of this deadly disease.\textsuperscript{73} As college students, they were severely traumatized and distraught over the attacks of the DC sniper in 2002 and the Virginia Tech massacre in 2007. In 2008, Millennials experienced the effects of the Great Recession on family finances and the unusually high unemployment rate. However, on a positive note, this generation came of age in households during the era of the home computer introduced by IBM in 1981. These and other historical and sociocultural events in the 1980s and 1990s dramatically influenced the worldview of Millennials (adolescents and young adults) forming unique personalities and a distinctive value system which facilitated the development of a new generation with new perspectives on life, religion, and politics.\textsuperscript{74}

Despite a host of sociocultural events that were traumatizing in nature, the Millennial generation nonetheless embraces several favorable characteristics. For example, they are better educated and more diverse than their parents. Howe and Strauss report that Millennials are more teamwork oriented and have demonstrated better behavior than the past two generations.\textsuperscript{75} A review of crimes and bad behavior among Millennials revealed a decrease in drug and alcohol

\textsuperscript{71} Howe and Strauss, \textit{Millennials Rising}, 4.

\textsuperscript{72} Taylor, \textit{The Next America}, 28.


\textsuperscript{74} Taylor and Keeter, \textit{Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change}.

\textsuperscript{75} Howe and Strauss, \textit{Millennials Rising}, 4.
abuse, lower high school dropout rates, a decrease in teen pregnancy, and an overall lower crime rate. Finally, during the Great Recession, Millennials experienced an unemployment rate that exceeded 37 percent. A recent Pew study indicated that this was the highest unemployment rate for this age group in several decades. Despite these challenges, Millennials are more optimistic than previous generations about their future and the future of the nation. In summary, as a result of the social and cultural influences of the 80s and 90s, Millennials are a uniquely different generation who has chosen to create a distinct path in life that eventually affected their view of society, politics, and religion.

**Societal Diversity**

Millennials are more racially diverse than previous generations. Their diversity is primarily due to the influx of a large immigrant population into the United States. Most immigrants entering the country are young people, predominantly women and children. As such, Millennials are more racially tolerant than previous generations, with 58 percent saying that immigration strengthens the country. Additionally, this cohort is more interrelated because they are more receptive to interracial dating and marriage. This tolerance is in stark contrast to older adults, specifically the Silent Generation, where only 68 percent support interracial dating versus 90 percent for Millennials.

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However, acceptance of interracial dating is not a trend unique to Millennials. Since 1987, the percentage of Americans that approve of interracial dating has shown a dramatic increase from 48 to 83 percent. Today, more people are now more accepting of interracial relationships which are primarily fueled by Millennial demographics and generational replacement. Over time, support for interracial dating has become more acceptable in every cohort since the Silent Generation, which is also becoming more supportive.\(^81\)

\begin{align*}
\text{Figure 2. } & \text{Millennials. Confident. Connected. Open to Change.}
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A 2009 snapshot of Millennial diversity across the United States showed that of those in the ages of 18-29: 19 percent were Hispanic, 14 percent were black, five percent Asian, and two percent other. So, 61 percent of Millennials are white, while minorities comprise about 39 percent of the population. In contrast, in adults ages 30 and older, 70 percent of the population is white with 30 percent minorities.\(^82\) This diversity is in stark contrast to previous generations where 38 percent of Generation X, 27 percent of Baby Boomers, and 20 percent of the Silent Generation are minorities. Also, the large Hispanic population among Millennials is mostly the


\(^{82}\) Almost All Millennials Accept Interracial Dating and Marriage.
result of increases in immigration and has helped to facilitate a more diverse society. Finally, the research in this study suggests that as Millennials have become more diverse, they have become more tolerant and liberal on social, political, and religious issues.

*The Millennial Effect on Politics*

In 2016, Pew estimated that 69.2 million Millennials were of voting age. In contrast, according to the US Census Bureau data, the Baby Boomers totaled 69.7 million voters. Both generations comprised 31 percent of the voting electorate. However, some experts were uncertain if Millennials would exercise their right to vote. Though voter turnout is traditionally low for young adults, the Millennial vote was decisive in the 2008 presidential election.

During this election, Millennials voted in record numbers and overwhelmingly supported Barrack Obama over John McCain by 66 percent to 32 percent. In contrast, young adults over thirty favored Obama over McCain 50 percent to 49 percent. Their vote reflects the largest voting gap between young adults under 30 and those over 30 in four decades.

This support for Obama was not unexpected as Millennials overwhelmingly identify themselves as liberals because they are more focused on a domestic and social agenda versus national security issues.

*Diversity in the Church*

In recent decades, the racial and ethnic landscape of America has changed dramatically for a variety of reasons. Society now reflects diversity in public schools, on college campuses,

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86 Ibid. 4.
and in the workplace. Despite these achievements, the church remains one of the most segregated institutions in the country. Dr. Martin Luther King called “Sunday at 11:00 AM the most segregated hour in America.” Unfortunately, despite efforts to portray diversity in society, many churches continue to operate as predominately segregated institutions based solely on race.

In 2014, Pew Research reported that 80 percent of people attend church services where 80 percent of the congregation is primarily one race or ethnic group. However, a transformation is developing (fig. 3) because congregations with no predominant ethnic group increased from 15 percent in 1998 to 17 percent in 2006. Further, in 1998, all white congregations comprised 20 percent of the churches in the United States. However, by 2012, the percentage of all white congregations had fallen to 11 percent. A similar dynamic exists among churches operated by other ethnic groups including Blacks, Hispanics, and Asians.  

Figure 3. US Congregations Becoming More Racially Diverse

Diversity is a way of life for Millennials, yet most church congregations still have not demonstrated that they have completely embraced the concept. As such, Barna Research indicated that 33 percent of young adults had developed a negative perception of the moral

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failures of the church. Millennials hear sermons about a God who shows no partiality (Acts 10:34 and Romans 2:11), yet in 2018, 80 percent of congregations are still predominantly one racial or ethnic group. This lack of diversity is likely one reason why 44 percent of Millennials think the church is reminiscent of an exclusive club, with 70 percent believing that the church is insensitive to others and 85 percent believing that the church is hypocritical.88

Finally, Barna reports that Millennials are skeptical about the role of church in society, with 35 percent of those surveyed believing that church is not relevant to them. The unfortunate consequence is that one-third of Millennials think that the church not only lacks relevance, but their attitude toward the church leads to ambivalence causing some to look for God elsewhere. Finally, Barna says that some Millennials are very concerned about the moral failures of the church, which often leads to distrust and likely persuades some to stop attending worship services.89 This mounting distrust of the church has likely contributed to the overall decline in church attendance by Millennials.90

Marriage, Family, and Church Attendance

Millennial views and perspectives regarding how they define marriage and family are significantly different from other generations and are based on their own life experiences. To a Millennial, what constitutes a family includes traditional families, single-parent families, cohabitation, and gay marriage. As a result, Millennial family values are markedly different from other generations.


89 What Millennials Want when They Visit the Church.

As a result of their social experiences, Millennials developed a more liberal view of marriage and the concept of the traditional family. Their unique perspective is not surprising since nearly 40 percent of them were a part of a non-traditional family or a household with one or neither parent (fig. 4), while 60 percent were raised in families with both parents. As such, for many Millennials, what constitutes a family is distinctly different from what Baby Boomers or the Silent Generation believes is a family.

The Pew Research Center reported that young adults are delaying marriage until later in life. Although they consider marriage and family a high priority, Millennials are more reluctant than previous generations to marry as young adults. About 21 percent of Millennials marry in their twenties, which is half the rate of their parents at the same age. For example, in the 1960s, the average age that young adults first married was 22.8 years old for men and 21.3 for women.

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In 2011, the median age for marriage had increased to 28 for men and 26 for women. However, by 2018, Pew reported that the median age for marriage rose again to 29.5 for men and 27.4 for women. In addition, figure 5 reveals a significant difference in the percentage of young adults who married between the ages 18 to 32. Earlier generations married at a younger age, while Millennials have chosen to delay marriage until nearly 30 years old. The data depicted in this graph provides a clear indication that the once valued and trusted institution of marriage has decreased in popularity among all generations but has suffered immensely in popularity among Millennials.

Figure 5. Millennials in Adulthood

In 2013, Pew statistics (fig. 5) reflect that at age 18-32, only 26 percent of young adults were married, compared to 65 percent in 1960. Further, during the last five decades, the median age of marriage has increased by six years, so young adults are getting married later in life.

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93 Rosentiel and Cohn, The State of Marriage and Divorce.

94 Ibid.

95 Millennials in Adulthood.
Marriage was once the foundation used to build nations around the world. However, the concept of cohabitation in Scandinavia, for example, has all but replaced marriage. This is consistent with a 2010 Pew study that suggested that 39 percent of Americans and 44 percent of Millennials think that marriage is an obsolete institution.

Unfortunately, the institution of marriage is losing its popularity as one in every three women in their twenties who gave birth tends to be unwed mothers, which exceeds the rate of every previous generation. This high number of unwed mothers in the Millennial generation will only serve to continue the growth of non-traditional families in the United States. Unlike previous generations, non-traditional families have become very common, as 40 percent of Millennials were born in households without one or both parents present.

Robert Wuthnow, a sociology professor at Princeton University, contends that there is a direct correlation between church attendance and marriage. He argues that the decrease in church attendance is a result of young people postponing marriage. Wuthnow believes that once Millennials marry, they will eventually return to church, and he argues that Pew Research polls support his theory. Further, Wuthnow indicates that people who are married are more inclined to attend church than those who are unmarried. Also, since more Millennials are getting married later in life, Wuthnow attempts to use his theory to explain why church attendance is decreasing among young adults. He theorizes that after Millennials marry, they will eventually return to

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97 Ibid., 108.


100 Millennials in Adulthood.
However, Paul Taylor of the Pew Research Center disputes Wuthnow’s conclusions about marriage and church attendance. Taylor indicates that adults do not become more affiliated with the church as they mature and marry. He contends that the percent of religious affiliation is consistent as a generation ages. Taylor indicates that young adults (twenty-somethings) are marrying later because they are concerned about their financial issues. He writes that the decline of traditional marriage is a byproduct of the socioeconomic conditions relating to the 2008 Great Recession.

Both Wuthnow and Taylor agree that marriage affects church attendance. Wuthnow’s theory contends that married people attend church more often, and once married, they eventually return to the church. Taylor, however, alleges that socioeconomic conditions associated with the Great Recession have not only stifled marriage in young adults but has had lasting influences that will negatively impact church attendance in years to come. Further, Taylor’s theory suggests that church attendance will continue to decline because the concept of marriage is becoming more unpopular, as 39 percent of people surveyed indicated that marriage is obsolete in America.

Taylor drills down on the issue of marriage and contends that the most significant obstacle preventing Millennials from marrying is the lack of money. The financial deficit affecting Millennials is a result of the socioeconomic condition created by the 2006 Great Recession.

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102 Ibid., 130-131.
103 Ibid., 12.
104 Ibid., 60.
105 Ibid., 108.
Recession which resulted in a lack of quality job opportunities and increased debt. Taylor believes that Millennials want to marry but do not because of their socioeconomic status. He indicated that Millennials could not afford to marry.\footnote{Taylor, \textit{The Next America}, 109.}

Taylor also concludes that there is a misunderstanding about marriage. He indicates that marriage has been shown to promote values and facilitate economic success. Unfortunately, for several reasons, marriage has lost its cultural appeal, especially among Millennials.\footnote{Ibid.} However, if Wuthnow’s theory is accurate, and Millennials continue to delay or maintain their reluctance toward marriage until the age of thirty, the consequence on church attendance will be catastrophic.

Another voice on the issue of marriage is Dr. Andreas Kostenberger, Director of Ph.D. Studies and Professor of New Testament at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Kostenberger believes that today’s society is in a state of crisis because it has abandoned the institution of marriage. He said that “we can no longer assume that people understand the definition of marriage.”\footnote{Andreas Kostenberger, \textit{The Bible Teaching on Marriage and Family} (Washington, DC: Family Research Council, n.d), accessed Feb 25, 2017, https://www.frc.org/brochure/the-bibles-teaching-on-marriage-and-family.} Kostenberger believes that in this new progressive age of thinking, many young adults fail to understand the advantages of marriage and its connection to society and the church. The lack of understanding of the institution of marriage affects more than just the survival of the institution, but it has significant political, social, economic, and religious implications as well. Further, this misunderstanding of marriage is likely one reason why
Millennials delay marriage, while divorce is at an all-time high among Christians in the church.¹⁰⁹

Why Millennials are the Most Educated Generation

Millennials are set apart from previous generations because they are the most educated generation in history. They are more likely to have completed high school and college than previous generations. A US Chamber of Commerce Foundation report indicated that 72 percent graduated high school, with the highest graduation rate in two decades.¹¹⁰ In addition, by age 28, 55 percent of all Millennials will have some college education versus 49 percent of Generation X, 36 percent of Baby Boomers, and 24 percent of the Silent Generation. Further, trends indicate that in preceding generations, men were more prevalent on college campuses. However, women have now surpassed their male counterparts in college attendance. This increase in female enrollment in college is a new phenomenon that first occurred during the college years of Generation X.¹¹¹

Millennials enrolled in college in record numbers, but it was not because they were enamored with or placed an exceptionally high value on education. The unusually high college enrollment rate is a direct response to the 2008 Great Recession which resulted in the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression. During this recession, Millennials were disproportionately affected.¹¹² Specifically, 24 percent of Millennial college students attended

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¹⁰⁹ Kostenberger, *The Bible Teaching on Marriage and Family.*

¹¹⁰ *The Millennial Generation Research Review.*


college while working a part-time or full-time job to help pay for college expenses. This percentage compares to only eight percent of Generation X who worked and attended college.

Though education is an enormously expensive endeavor, it improves quality of life higher than any other demographic factor. With each level of advanced degree earned, there is a corresponding increase in financial earnings. An advanced degree allows an individual to make millions of dollars more over a lifetime, which can help pay down student debt that on average was approximately $25,000 to $30,000 for Millennials. Despite the high cost of a college education, Millennials enrolled in college in record numbers and are on track to become the best-educated generation in history as more education translates into higher wages and a better quality of life.\textsuperscript{113}

Additionally, during the recession, childhood poverty was at an all-time high as lower and middle-class families suffered tremendous financial devastation. In 2010, surveys of young adults indicated that only 41 percent of them could find a full-time job, and only 31 percent reported that their pay was sufficient to support their lifestyle.\textsuperscript{114} As a result of a weak economy and high unemployment rate, especially among Millennials, many sought educational opportunities because they believed that education was essential to securing a foothold in the labor market.\textsuperscript{115}

Moreover, research indicates that there is a direct relationship between the unemployment rate and college enrollment. A study of four US recessions reveals that a one percent increase in

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} The Millennial Generation Research Review.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Taylor and Keeter, \textit{Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change}, 39.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Schoon and Mortimer, “Youth and the Great Recession,” 11.
\end{itemize}
unemployment correlates to a two percent increase in college enrollment. So, during the Great Recession, as unemployment increased, there was a corresponding increase not only in college enrollment but high school graduations as well. As a result, during the 2008 Great Recession, the United States had the largest high school graduating class at 3.2 million students. This peak in graduations exceeded the largest class in the Baby Boomer Generation in 1979 by 60,000 students. Further, college enrollment soared, not because Millennials cherished education or had some great epiphany about attending college, but they embraced the reality that education could help obtain employment in a sluggish economy.

It is counterintuitive to believe that college enrollment increased during the Great Recession because many families were financially devastated. Family households lost on average $177,000 in net income, which included the equity in their home. Many parents relied on home equity loans to finance college costs. However, during this same period, Pell Grant expenditures rose from $15 billion to $37 billion, and federal loans rose from $75 to $110 billion in three years. In response to the Great Recession which caused increased economic instability and a lack of quality job opportunities, high school graduation rates and college enrollment for young adults rose dramatically. These statistics revealed that Millennials resorted to secondary and post-secondary education to lift them out of their socioeconomic condition caused by the Great Recession.

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117 Ibid., 216.

118 Ibid., 214.

119 Ibid., 216.

120 Ibid.
The Millennial Perspective

Religion

Research indicates that Millennials are not as religious as older generations. When making comparisons with other generations at the same age, Millennials are less likely to belong to a church. Many lack interest in the traditional form of worship and are two times as likely as Baby Boomers to become unaffiliated with the church. Generation X followed a similar path a decade earlier and became unaffiliated with the church.

However, the good news is that though Millennials pray less often than other generations, they still believe in God and in heaven and hell. Furthermore, the percentage of Millennials that believe in God has not declined since surveying Generation X ten years earlier. Pew Research surmises in one extensive report that Millennial aloofness toward religion may not be generational but the result of older generations placing more emphasis on religion as they age. 121

In his book You Lost Me, David Kinnaman indicates that teens are some of the most religiously active people in America. Conversely, the twenty-something cohort is the least religious. After the teen years, Kinnaman reports that church attendance for Millennials declines dramatically. He calls this period, from ages 18-29, a black hole. Kinnaman indicates that church attendance bottoms out after high school, reflecting a 43 percent drop in attendance. This drop equates to about 8 million young adults who were previously active during their teen years but have stopped attending church by the age of thirty. Kinnaman argues that they are not less churched than earlier generations, but they have less spiritual energy in their twenties. 122

Further, Kinnaman indicated that most teens identify as Christian, but their connection to

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120 Religion Among Millennials.

122 David Kinnaman, You Lost Me. Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2011). 22.
the church early in life is the result of a cultural identification versus a sincere faith. In other words, cultural identity is when the teen attends church because it is their family's tradition on Sunday. Surveys by Kinnaman reflect that 59 percent of churchgoers who stopped attending church had a Christian background. Most people, or about 57 percent of those surveyed, indicated that they are less active in the church than in their teen years. When queried why they stopped attending church, 38 percent said that they have serious doubt about their faith, and 32 percent indicated that they had rejected their parents’ religion.\(^{123}\)

Kinnaman reports that young adults reject church for a variety of reasons. One interviewee indicated that he stopped attending church because he disagreed with church leadership over science. The church viewed his actions as a sign of disrespect, and the individual eventually became disgruntled and ended up leaving the church.\(^{124}\)

According to Kinnaman, in most cases when individuals leave the church, it is not an indictment of their Christian beliefs or the church but an expression of discontentment with church leadership.\(^{125}\) Kinnaman suggests that faith is not a one-size-fits-all deal, but every person and every story matters. Additionally, he points out that Millennials in their twenties, known as the twenty-somethings, have not walked away from the church but are putting their involvement on hold. According to Kinnaman, the twenty-somethings are not rejecting Christianity but rejecting their experiences in the church.\(^{126}\)

Further, Millennials classify themselves as spiritual but not religious. They traditionally do not believe there is a correlation between being spiritual and attending church. Thirty-nine

\(^{123}\) Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 23.

\(^{124}\) Ibid., 26.

\(^{125}\) Ibid.

\(^{126}\) Ibid., 27.
percent of Millennials ages 20-29 and 27 percent of the thirty-and-above age group do not believe that church goers are more spiritual than those who do not attend. Also, 73 percent of the 20-29-year-olds think that because they want to know more about God, they are spiritual.\textsuperscript{127}

Finally, Ed Stetzer the author of \textit{Lost and Found} writes that Millennials believe that Christianity is more about the traditions of the church than about loving God and the people.\textsuperscript{128} He indicated that many young adults would prefer instead to read an inspirational book or watch a worship service on television than attend a church service in person.\textsuperscript{129} As such, many Millennials are not convinced that the church is relevant to how they live their lives. Their beliefs suggest they lack the biblical knowledge regarding God, scripture, and what it means to be spiritual. Even though most Millennials believe that God exists, 58 percent of those who consider themselves spiritual and religious think that the God of the Bible is the same as gods of the other religions.\textsuperscript{130} These Millennial views indicate that the church has been mostly unsuccessful in teaching the doctrine of the Bible to young adults. It is apparent that the church must improve its ability to communicate with Millennials, address why they are disillusioned with the church, and identify measures that must be taken to reinvigorate their attendance.

\textit{Discipleship}

Kinnaman writes that the overall knowledge of scripture, doctrine, and church history among all Christians including young adults is inadequate.\textsuperscript{131} He indicated some Christians have

\textsuperscript{127} Ed Stetzer, \textit{Lost and Found: The Young Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them} (Nashville, TN.: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 57.

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 58.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 24.

\textsuperscript{131} Kinnaman, \textit{You Lost Me}, 27.
a shallow faith that cannot survive in the world. This spiritual immaturity calls into question the extent, credibility, or superficial faith that eventually succumbs to the pressures of society. Unfortunately, many young adults sent into the world appear unable to live their convictions of faith after leaving home. Kinnaman indicated that they are spiritually ill-equipped or unwilling to acknowledge and defend their faith in public.\textsuperscript{132}

One issue highlighted by Kinnaman is Millennial relationships in the church. He indicates that even though Millennials are highly relational and have a positive relationship with their family, they are sometimes isolated from parents who do not understand their perspective. Further, he indicated that most twenty-somethings have never experienced mentorship by adults other than their parents. This lack of adult relationship extends into the church, limiting its ability to make disciples of Millennials.\textsuperscript{133}

\textit{Secularization and the Rise of the Nones}

According to Gallup polls (fig. 6), during the 1950s, when Baby Boomers were growing up, \textit{nones}, or those who were religiously unaffiliated with a particular faith, comprised about two percent of the population.\textsuperscript{134} This percentage rose to about seven percent in the 1970s and increased to about 20 percent of the US population or approximately 36.1 million people in 2013.\textsuperscript{135} However, another report by Pew (fig. 7) indicated that the \textit{none} population had eclipsed

\textsuperscript{132} Kinnaman, \textit{You Lost Me}, 28.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 29.


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55.8 million across America. Research indicates that all regions in the United States have shown a growth in the *none* population, particularly among young white men. In fact, 56 percent of all *nones* are males, and 71% are white.  

![Removed to comply with copyright.](image)

Figure 6. Percentage Reporting “none” or “Undesignated” as Religious Preference

The growth of *nones* has been consistently rising resulting in a decline of religious observance, specifically, church attendance. In an article by Dr. Jim Eckman, president emeritus of Grace University, Eckman suggests that the rise of the *nones* is a direct correlation to the rise of the religious right. Further, Eckman indicated that Millennials had lost faith in all religious institutions, especially the church.  

Pew Research Center looked extensively at the secularization of America. Their research suggests that the growth of the *nones* is in part due to the secularization of society. Secularization is the conversion of a society from religious values and institutions toward nonreligious values and secular institutions. Pew revealed that during the past two decades, the number of *nones* has

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increased. In 1987, when the first Millennials were approximately five years old, eight percent of the US population was considered unaffiliated or secular. However, by 2006, when the first Millennials were 24 years old, 12 percent of Americans were considered *nones* or secular.

Further, Pew research indicates that the rise in the percentage of *nones* is to some extent generational. For example, according to Pew Research, in 1946, during the childhood of the Baby Boomer generation, five percent of people were secular or unaffiliated. However, today Pew estimates that the most secular generation is the Millennial generation and the most secular Americans are young Americans under 30 years old with 19 percent of them having no religious preference, commonly labeled a *none*.139

As the trend of adults who say they have no religious affiliation continues to grow, 78 percent indicate that they were involved in religion before becoming a *none*. When questioned why they terminated their association with religion there were many typical responses. Forty-nine percent of the respondents said they did not believe in religion. Others indicated that science was the reason they doubted Christian doctrine and its teachings. Still another respondent

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stated that he did not believe in miracles. Further, one respondent indicated that he believed in “common sense” and “logic” but could not believe in religion because of a lack of evidence regarding the existence of God.  

Approximately 20 percent of other respondents indicated that they oppose organized religion and the structure of the church because it has too many scandals and operates too much like a business. Eighteen percent of the respondents indicated that they were religious and believed in God but had doubts about Christianity. According to Michael Lipka of Pew Research, these are the individuals that often classify themselves as spiritual but not religious; they no longer identify with a particular religious group and are referred to as *nones*.  

Theories why *Nones* are on the Rise

*Generational Replacement*

Two sociologists, Michael Hout and Claude S. Fisher from the University of California Berkley, wrote an article outlining several theories to explain the rapid rise of *nones* in society. The article “Why more Americans have no Religious Preference: Politics and Generations” indicates that the increase in the *none* population was in part due to generational replacement. This theory contends that as young people come of age and older generations age and dies off, there is a gradual replacement resulting in a rise in the *none* population.  

However, *nones* have increased at a phenomenal rate. In 2007, *nones* were roughly 16 percent of the national population, but by 2015, the percentage increased to approximately 23

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141 Lipka, *Why America’s “Nones” Left Religion Behind*.

percent. This increase is largely a result of the large percentage of *nones* in the Millennial cohort, estimated at 35 percent. Thus, as more Silent and Baby Boomers die off, the rate of growth of *nones* increases in the general population.  

*Political Backlash*

The Pew Research Center believes that the rise of *nones* in the United States is in part due to what they call political backlash. Pew looked at research from Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer that suggests that the rise in the *none* population may be the result of people, specifically young adults, avoiding organized religion because they have rejected how churches involve themselves in conservative politics. Hout and Fischer indicate that they believe that the increase in the *nones* population is a symbolic response to oppose the “Religious Right.” Pew claims that Hout and Fischer found evidence from various surveys supporting their thesis.  

Additionally, the Pew Center cites studies conducted by Robert Putnam from Harvard University and David Campbell from Notre Dame regarding the increase in the *none* population. Pew maintains that Putnam and Campbell compiled evidence from studies that confirm their thesis that religion became so intertwined in partisan politics that it caused division in the United States. They noted that the rise of religious conservatism or the moral majority occurred in the 70’s and the 80’s and became extremely popular after the social rejection of God in the 1960’s. The result, the authors suggested, was a backlash of rebellion and disaffection with religion which polarized the landscape of America. 

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Delays in Marriage

The Pew Research Center suggests that Millennials choosing to delay marriage has also facilitated the rise of the *nones*. Their research points to the possibility that low marriage rates correlated to a rise in the unaffiliated or *nones*. As indicated earlier, Robert Wuthnow, a Princeton University sociologist, studied the effects of marriage on declining church attendance since the 1970’s. He noted demographic trends such as delaying marriage and parenthood was a contributing factor in declining attendance.146

Pew polls show that among adults under 30 years old, married people are more inclined to attend church than unmarried people. However, about 30 percent of young adults are postponing marriage while simultaneously avoiding the church. Pew reports that once separated from their faith, even after marriage, young adults are not likely to return to the church.147

Proverbs 22:6 states, “train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart.” This scripture leads the reader to believe that when appropriately trained, the child will eventually return to the church. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow agrees that upon maturity, young adults will subsequently return to church. However, Pew Research disagrees with this theory and concludes that young adults are not finding their way back to the church.148 Pew’s conclusion is perhaps a wake-up call that the church needs to take an introspective look at how it trains and interacts with young adults or brace for a continuing rise in the *none* population and a continued decline in church attendance.

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147 *Nones on the Rise.*

Broad Social Disengagement

Another theory some observers believed contributed to the rise of the *nones* is a decline of social capital. In other words, Americans digressed to live more separate lives. This social disengagement, according to Pew Research, facilitated an increase in the rate of *nones*. In short, Pew indicates that the rate of *nones* grew because people were less inclined to belong to a community creating what they called social disengagement.\(^{149}\)

Secularization

In 1966, Time Magazine asked the question on the cover of its magazine with the caption “IS GOD DEAD?” Two years later in 1968, Peter Berger along with other highly regarded sociologists of the 1960's predicted the downfall of religion as we know it. They suggested that by the 21st century, the religion practiced by most Americans would vanish. Berger even went so far as to suggest that people would be “huddled in small groups” to practice their religion.\(^ {150}\)

Berger defended the secularization theory that religion would lose its influence on politics, economics and the culture in America, and eventually “fade into oblivion.” He even suggested that religion would eventually become extinct. Other versions of the secularization theory suggested that religion could not survive because it is "irrational, violent and oppressive." However, this theory has fallen by the wayside. One author, Ivan Strenski suggest in his book *Why Politics Can't be free from Religion* that secularization, not religion is dying. Strenski indicates that religion will continue to influence society and politics and cannot be easily

\(^{149}\) *Nones on the Rise.*

Decades later, Berger realized the flaws in the theory of secularization and amended his support for it because religion in America continued to flourish.  

Many believe that secularization is still a threat to Christianity in the US. Ninety-two percent of evangelical leaders think that secularization is a significant threat to evangelical Christianity with 82 percent of European leaders acknowledging a similar concern. Their concerns may be valid as studies by Pew indicate that Millennials are becoming less religious and more secular as they become of age. Secularization is becoming more widespread because of generational replacement as the large Millennial cohort continues to replace a declining number of Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation. The result is a continual growth of the religiously unaffiliated or *nones* and declining church attendance.

## Conclusion

Research organizations have studied the Millennial Generation for more than two decades, and there is more than an abundance of research on them. Ignoring the en masse ascent of Millennials into the social order, even for the church, would be a huge oversight with enormous consequences. Projected to exceed 80 million, Millennials are larger than any other generation in history. They have emerged as a dominant participant in society and have influenced America’s views on politics, diversity, education, marriage, voting, employment, technology and even church attendance.

Moreover, Millennials are rapidly becoming the new face of society. According to Pew

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154 Lipka, Religious “Nones” are Not Only Growing They are Becoming More Secular.
Research, Millennials are the largest generation in the US workforce at 35 percent\textsuperscript{155} and is projected to become America’s largest generation in the voting electorate with 62 million eligible voters.\textsuperscript{156} As eighty million Millennials come of age, they must no longer be underestimated or delegitimized by society because their attitudes, values, and worldviews will become the attitudes, values, and views of America. Finally, like other institutions in society, churches, and religious institutions must also seek to understand and embrace this cohort, or research has shown that these young adults can have a catastrophic or irreversible effect on church attendance.


Chapter 3

Millennial Survey

The Millennial survey supporting this research project was disseminated to respondents ages 22-37 to ascertain their perception of the church and why they are less likely to attend than previous generations. National data from Pew and Barna Research Centers both indicate that a large percentage of the Millennial population has become unaffiliated with the church. This declining rate of attendance among young adults cannot be addressed or resolved unless young adults are approached, queried, and allowed to express their views, perspective, and expectations concerning the church.

It is the view of this research project that the church must engage Millennials to understand their perspective about the institution rather than making conclusions based on presuppositions. Any systematized research that ignores the personal opinion of Millennials will be of minimal value and serve no purpose in addressing the issue of church attendance. Further, studies indicate that Millennials will eventually become the largest generation in US history, and it would be a catastrophic blunder by the church to ignore their concerns.

Research Process

The survey used in this research sought to validate and confirm Millennial likes and dislikes about the church, how it affected their behavior, and reason for their attendance or lack thereof. Additionally, the research sought to ascertain what Millennials are looking for when they visit a church. Finally, this study wanted to document and compare the responses of this survey with professional research organizations like Barna and Pew Research, utilizing data from multiple sources to improve church attendance.
The goal of the study was to secure twenty to twenty-five Millennial respondents to participate in the study. After obtaining completed surveys from twenty-four respondents, qualitative data was analyzed, collated, and imported into an Excel spreadsheet used to produce the fifteen graphs for this study. Finally, patterns and trends were compared to other corresponding qualitative analyses conducted by Barna Research Group and the Pew Research Center.

Surveys were collected from respondents within the greater Richmond area, primarily the Chesterfield County area, in the state of Virginia. Although some of the respondents currently resided in the Hampton Roads area, other respondents included college students from Virginia Commonwealth University, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, and John Tyler Junior College in Chester, Virginia. Still, other respondents are currently serving in the military, working as government employees, and one individual worked on the staff of a 2017 gubernatorial candidate for the state of Virginia.

Finally, participants were encouraged to provide detailed, honest answers to the questions. Respondents will not be identified by name, and their identity will not be associated with their responses. Each respondent was asked to read the consent form before taking the survey and was reminded that all answers are completely confidential. As an incentive, respondents who completed the survey received a $10.00 gift card.

Analysis of Millennial Survey Questions

Question 1: What is your gender?
Question 2: What is your age?

Figure 8 reflects responses from questions one and two of the Millennial survey. Twenty-four Millennials participated in the survey, including fourteen female respondents and ten male
respondents. However, three male respondents did not indicate their age. The average age of male respondents is 29.1, while the average age of female respondents is 27.9 years of age.

Age and Gender of Millennial Respondents

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents who completed the Millennial survey were female and 42 percent male, which equals a 16 percent variance. The disparity between the percentages of males versus female respondents is unusual considering the gender parity within the United States and the Millennial cohort. In 2017, a US Census Bureau comparison of the male and female gender population indicated that although there are slightly more females than males in the United States (49 percent to 51 percent).

157 Regarding Millennials, there is near absolute gender parity among 22-37-year-olds. The variation in the number of females versus males who submitted to this test is likely because females are considerably more religious than their


male counterparts,\textsuperscript{159} and were more amenable to participating in this church survey.

Question 3: What is your Denomination?

![Religious Denominations]

Figure 9. Religious Denominations

Overwhelmingly, 42 percent of Millennials indicated that they are Baptist. Seventeen percent indicated that they are non-denominational, while 13 percent indicated that they are either atheist or agnostic. Nine percent of respondents indicated they are Methodist, Catholic or Pentecostal.

Forty-two percent of respondents in this study overwhelmingly indicated their denomination as Baptist. The denominational percentages found in this study were also documented in a national study. For example, in a report published by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), the organization found a similar pattern of denominational membership. The report authored by Daniel Cox, Ph.D. and Robert P. Jones, Ph.D., entitled “America’s Changing Religious Identity,” indicates that “44 percent of Protestants in the South affiliate with the Baptist denomination.” In comparison, the research for this study found that 42 percent of local respondents are affiliated with the Baptist religion.
Furthermore, the PRRI study indicated that 17.1 percent of the nation is non-denominational, 9 percent Methodist, and 9 percent Pentecostal. Similarly, the Millennial survey found that 17 percent of respondents identified as non-denominational, while 9 percent were Methodist and 9 percent Pentecostal. In short, the Millennial survey and the national trends outlined in the PRRI report regarding denominational membership are strikingly similar and seem to validate the data collected by this survey.

Question 4: Are you currently (active, affiliated but seldom attend or have no affiliation) with a church?

![Millennial Church Activity](image)

**Figure 10. Church Activity Among Millennials**

Forty-three percent of respondents (34 percent female, 9 percent male) indicated that they are active members of a church. Thirty percent of respondents (13 percent female and 17 percent male) indicated they are affiliated but seldom attend church. Twenty-six percent of respondents (13 percent female and 13 percent male) indicated no church affiliation.

In a 2015 Pew Research reported, over 35 percent of adult Millennials are unaffiliated with a particular religion. In comparison, 26 percent of respondents in this research (13 percent female and 13 percent male) indicated no church affiliation.

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male and 13 percent female), have no church affiliation. Additionally, 30 percent of respondents (13 percent female and 17 percent male) are affiliated but seldom attend church further compounding the issue of attendance. Based upon the results for this survey, 56 percent of Millennials (affiliated but seldom attend and those with no church affiliation) do not attend church or they attend sparingly. In other words, 56 percent of respondents do not attend or seldom attend church. Unfortunately, the percentage of unaffiliated adults continues to rise and has doubled since the Baby Boomer generation, further decreasing church attendance.\footnote{161\textsuperscript{1}}

Moreover, the Millennial survey and Pew Research indicated that some Millennials raised in a religious environment later become unaffiliated during adulthood. Consequently, when compared with other cohorts, the percentage of unaffiliated Millennials is higher than all previous generations. As more adults become unaffiliated, there is a corresponding decrease in worship attendance among all Americans, especially Millennials. Lastly, although women are traditionally considered more religious than men, there has been a decline in female attendance in the church as well. This trend is likely due to an increased number of women entering the workforce and attending higher education.\footnote{162\textsuperscript{2}}

Question 5: Do you believe in God?

Eighty-seven percent of Millennials overwhelmingly indicated that they believe in God, while 12 percent do not believe in God. Specifically, 80 percent of male respondents and 93 percent of female respondents answered yes to this question. Twenty percent of male


\footnote{162\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.}
respondents and 7 percent of female respondents indicated that they do not believe in God because they are agnostic or atheist.

![Belief in God](image)

**Figure 11. Belief in God**

In 1966, Time magazine published an article titled “Is God Dead?” The article predicted that religion as we know it would all but disappear. However, this prediction was proven wrong as a 2014 Pew Research study reported that 89 percent of adults still believe in God. Additionally, 80 percent of young adults in the Pew study indicated that they believe in God. In comparison, 87 percent of respondents for this research study indicated they believe in God. In the Pew study, even among the unaffiliated, 61 percent of Millennials indicated that they still believe in God.\(^{163}\)

**Question 6: How often do you attend church each month?**

Twenty-two percent of males versus 14 percent of females indicated that they attended church 1-2 times monthly. Thirty-three percent of males and 21 percent of females indicated that they attend church three to four times a month. At this point, male attendance decreases

dramatically as 7 percent of females and no male respondents attend church five to six times monthly. Further, 0 percent males but 29 percent of females attend church seven to eight times a month. Finally, of the respondents that do not attend church, 44 percent are male and 29 percent female.

![Frequency of Attendance](image)

**Figure 12. Frequency of Attendance**

The Religious Landscape Study conducted by Pew Research Center measured the religious attendance for males and females and found that females are more religious than males. In the Landscape study, 64 percent of male and 73 percent of female respondents attended worship service monthly. In comparison, this study found that 55 percent of male respondents (22 percent + 33 percent) versus 71 percent of females (14 percent + 21 percent + 29 percent + 7 percent) attend worship service monthly. Furthermore, the Religious Landscape Study found that 35 percent of male versus 28 percent of female respondents did not attend church. Comparatively, this study found 44 percent of males and 29 percent of females respondents did not attend church. Based on the measure of attendance from both studies, females are more

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164 *The Religious Landscape Study.*

165 Ibid.
religious than their male counterparts who tend to harbor a greater distrust for traditional worship service.\textsuperscript{166}

Question 7: How would you describe your worst church experience?

![Worst Church Experience](image)

Respondents listed a host of church experiences that likely had a negative impact on their church attendance. Twenty-one percent of respondents indicated that they had no bad experiences. However, 14 percent indicated that they experienced hypocrisy, while another 14 percent indicated that their worst church experience involved church materialism. Twelve percent indicated that sermons were uninspiring, while 7 percent indicated that they endured non-doctrinal teachings. Five percent of responses indicated that they do not believe in God while 19 percent of responses indicated other negative church experiences.

There is no single explanation why Millennials distrust the Church and become unaffiliated with their faith. However, their experiences can cause them to lose faith in religious institutions but not necessarily in God. This exploratory question is the first of several that seek

qualitative responses to understand thoughts, feelings, and perspective of Millennials about the church. Rather than structured responses with the typical multiple choice or yes/no response, Millennials must answer questions in their own words regarding their feelings and relationship with the church.

Responses to this question regarding unpleasant church experiences were strikingly similar to responses recorded by Pew and Barna Research Centers. Barna indicates that somewhere between 44 and 52 percent of Millennials have trended away from church for a variety of reasons. Barna Research often focuses on the perceptions of Millennial respondents regarding their church experiences. Sometimes these experiences can cause them to abstain from attending or eschew the church altogether. For example, Barna indicates that Millennials overwhelmingly think that faith institutions are overly concerned about money and power, too focused on rules, and too caught up in politics. Further, 23 percent believe that the church is too judgmental. Twenty-two percent say that the church ignores the problems of the real world, while 18 percent indicate that the church is too concerned with music, movies, and video games. Moreover, 31 percent of respondents indicate that the church is boring, while 24 percent believed that it is not relevant to their career. Twenty-three percent responded that the Bible is not taught clearly while 20 percent indicate that they believe that God is missing from the church worship experience.

While 21 percent of the respondents in this study indicated no “worst church experience,” the top three concerns respondents outlined in this survey were hypocrisy (14 percent), materialism (14 percent), and uninspiring sermons (12 percent). Most respondents seem to imply

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that their concerns were a major reason that contributed to their distrust of the church.

Unfortunately, church leadership, specifically the pastor, received the majority of the criticism from Millennials. For example, one respondent indicated that his pastor acknowledged that he could forgive the sin of adultery but not for being gay. This respondent expressed concern that the pastor was being hypocritical and not representing a loving God. Another respondent recalling his worst experience involved materialism. He indicated that he had to endure a church “pastor brag about buying expensive cars for one hour.” Many of the concerns outlined by Barna are similar to those highlighted in this study with the overall concern that Millennials see no immediate benefit in attending church and how it will improve their life.

Question 8: If you regularly attend church, name three reasons why you attend?

![Reasons Millennials Regularly Attend Church](image)

Figure 14. Why Millennials Attend Church.

Respondents had a variety of replies to this question. Most Millennials, 21 percent, indicated that they attended church to fellowship with others. Thirteen percent indicated that they wanted spiritual fulfillment, and 13 percent wanted to be uplifted. Nine percent of Millennials seek a relationship with God, and 6 percent desire encouragement. Nineteen percent of respondents do not attend church, and 19 percent provided a variety of other answers.
When the Barna Group asked Millennials why they attended church, the responses were very similar to the Millennial research survey used for this thesis. Barna indicated that 44 percent of young adults reveal that they wanted to be closer to God. Similarly, almost every respondent in the Millennial survey indicated that they desired a closer relationship with God. Barna also found that 27 percent of respondents wanted to learn more about God. However, after a worship service, 61 percent of the Barna respondents indicate that they had learned nothing new about God or their faith.  

Further, Barna indicated that 22 percent responded that they attend church for the fellowship. This percentage corresponds with the Millennial survey as 21 percent of Millennials in this study indicated that they attend church to fellowship with other believers. Finally, Barna reports that if Millennials believe that God is not present in the church, they will resolve to seek God somewhere other than the church. This acknowledgment by Millennials that they might seek God elsewhere should be a red flag to all denominations to open a dialogue with Millennials to understand their spiritual needs and expectations.

Question 9: If you are affiliated with a church but do not attend regularly, identify three reasons why you do not attend?

When asked this question, 31 percent of respondents affiliated with a church overwhelmingly indicated that the reason why they do not attend church was that sermons were not clear or not relevant. Ten percent of respondents indicated that materialism and lack of diversity were reasons that would cause them to avoid church. Thirteen percent of Millennials cited work schedule issues, and 13 percent of respondents were atheist or agnostic. Twenty-three

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170 Ibid.
percent cited other reasons why they have stopped attending church.

![Why Affiliated But Don’t Attend?](image)

Figure 15. Affiliated but Do Not Attend Church

Millennials who are affiliated but do not attend church indicated that they desire sermons that are relevant to their lifestyle and easy to understand. Thirty-one percent of the respondents for this study indicated that they do not attend church because sermons are unclear or not relevant to them. When Pew Research asked Americans why they do not attend church, 37 percent indicated that they practiced their faith in other ways, but 18 percent indicated that they did not like the sermons.\(^{171}\) A Barna study indicated that 20 percent of Americans said God is missing from church while 35 percent indicated that the church is irrelevant, hypocritical, or has moral failures.\(^{172}\)

Finally, Barna uncovers a critical revelation discovered during the research for this thesis. Less than 6 percent of churchgoers said they learned something new about God or Jesus during their last worship experience, and 61 percent indicated they “received no new knowledge regarding their faith” and God. These insights focused on the Millennial perspective help to


explain why adults, including Millennials, are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the church’s ability to satisfy their spiritual needs. Further, this is likely the reason why 31 percent of respondents in a Barna study indicated that sermons are irrelevant or unclear.\textsuperscript{173}

Question 10: If you have no church affiliation, list three reasons why you are unaffiliated?

![Figure 16. Why Millennials are not Affiliated with a Church](image)

The term \textit{unaffiliated} includes Millennials who are atheist or agnostic (those who do not believe or are unsure of God’s existence) and those who claim no particular religious affiliation. Respondents indicated a variety of reasons why they are not affiliated with a church. In this study, the responses were identical across that board in percentages as to why Millennials are unaffiliated. Thirteen percent of respondents were either atheist or agnostic. Thirteen percent do not like church, and 13 percent indicated that church leaders are not adequately trained in the knowledge of God. Finally, 13 percent highlighted hypocrisy in the church.

The responses to this question are consistent with those outlined in a 2012 Pew Research Center report.

\textsuperscript{173} Barna Research Center, “Americans Divided on the Importance of the Church.”
Center survey. One of the reasons why Millennials are unaffiliated with the church is disbelief in God. Thirteen percent of respondents for this research indicated that they do not believe in God while the Pew study found that 6 percent of Millennials did not believe in God.

Additionally, thirteen percent of Millennials in this study indicated that they dislike church. Perhaps an explanation why Millennials are dissatisfied with church is likely because it does not meet their spiritual needs. A Barna Research article said that most church ministries are insufficient to meet the spiritual needs of Millennials, with 70 percent saying that they cannot find a church that can help them grow spiritually. Further, the article maintained that the church needs to overhaul its teaching methods while focusing on teens before graduation because they tend to abandon their faith after high school.175

Question 11: Do you believe that biblical teachings in the church have practical application in your life?

Nearly all respondents indicated that they believe that biblical teachings have practical application in their lives but for various reasons. Thirty-two percent of respondents indicate that biblical teachings are relevant to their lives. Sixteen percent believe that biblical teachings will help them overcome problems. Eleven percent believe that it will help increase their standard of living. Eleven percent of responses say that it will help them follow Christ, while 11 percent indicate that they do not believe in God.

According to the Barna Research Group, in the State of the Bible in 2017, 19 percent of people are skeptical of the Bible. These individuals do not have high regard for the Bible as the Word of God and believe it to be no more than a book of moral teachings. However, 56 percent

174 Nones on the Rise.
of Barna respondents indicated that reading the Bible enhances their faith. Thirty-nine percent believe that they could find answers to life’s problems, compared to 16 percent of respondents for this study. Thirty percent of respondents in the Barna study believe that biblical teachings can change a person’s life for the better, while 11 percent responded similarly to this study. Additionally, 30 percent believe that during difficult times, searching the Bible can help them find answers to problems in life, versus 16 percent for this research study. Based upon responses for this research and the Barna report, it is clear that many adults, including Millennials, still view the Bible as more than a book of moral teachings. Despite where people are spiritually, most still believe that biblical teachings can help them confront and improve life’s dilemmas and thus have practical application for life.  

![Figure 17. Biblical Teachings and Practical Application](image)

Question 12: What worship experience caused you to distrust God?

Overwhelmingly, 44 percent of respondents indicated that they do not distrust God. However, thirteen percent of respondents indicated that a lack of faith causes them to distrust God. Further, 6 percent indicated that self-centeredness, suffering a loss, or the absence of God...

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caused them to distrust God. Twenty-five percent of the remaining responses included hypocrisy, homophobia, materialism, and being judgmental could cause distrust of God.

![Graph showing what caused people to distrust God](image)

**Figure 18. Distrust of God**

Since the majority of Millennials for this study indicated that they believe in God, this was a probing question to ascertain what would cause them to distrust God. Most respondents could not identify a scenario, but several individuals recalled catastrophic experiences that, at one time, challenged their trust in God. One respondent indicated that she suffered the loss of a loved one that challenged her faith in God. Another respondent indicated that the absence of God in her life or God not responding to prayer could shake her faith and cause her to distrust God. Six percent of respondents indicated that self-centeredness or the absence of God in the church could shake their trust in God. However, the good news is that the vast majority of Millennials could not envision distrusting God.

Question 13: What worship experience caused you to distrust the church?

Thirty percent of respondents overwhelmingly indicated that they do not distrust the church. However, 20 percent indicated that materialism in the church causes them to distrust the institution. Sixteen percent indicated that hypocrisy in the church causes distrust. Seven percent
of respondents indicated that they experienced a judgmental, self-centered, and a non-inclusive environment which could cause distrust of the church.

![Why Distrust the Church?](image)

Figure 19. Why Millennials Distrust the Church

Millennial trust of the church has declined in recent years. In 2010, 73 percent of Millennials believed that the church had a positive impact on society, but by 2016, only 55 percent of Millennials believed the same. When the Barna Research group asked a group of Millennials who no longer attended church about their negative perceptions of the institution, the responses were dreadful. Thirty-five percent said that the church lacked moral standards, 87 percent said the church was too judgmental, 85 percent said too hypocritical, 91 percent said too homophobic, and 70 percent said the church is too insensitive to others. Although the data for the Barna study is different from the data for this research, the areas of concern are similar and usually include judgmental behavior, hypocrisy, and lack of inclusiveness.  

Question 14: If you became less active in your church after graduation, explain why.

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177 *What Millennials Want when They Visit the Church.*
Millennials provided a variety of answers as to why they became less active after their high school graduation. Twenty-three percent of respondents indicated that job-related responsibilities were the primary reason they became less active after graduation. Thirteen percent of respondents cited a dislike of the church, while 13 percent cited college obligations. Sixteen percent indicated that a more active lifestyle facilitated a reduction in church activity, while 6 percent wanted the opportunity to make their own decisions.

Figure 20. Why Millennials are Less Active after Graduation

This question was posed to gain a clearer understanding why Millennial attendance dramatically declines after graduation. Pew and Barna Research have reported that Millennials become less active in church upon graduating high school. In a Pew publication entitled *Confident. Connected. Open to Change*, 20 percent of young adults decide to leave their parents’ religion for a variety of reasons without seeking another faith. Although once active in the church, trends show that Millennials are leaving the religion of their parents, becoming unaffiliated and identifying themselves as having “no particular religion.”

Millennials likely leave the church because they believe that the church is too judgmental.

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and its doctrinal teachings are too antiquated. As a result, young people are severing connections with the church after age fifteen.\textsuperscript{179} In addition to feeling disconnected from the church, Millennial respondents in this research project indicated that they experienced a lifestyle change after graduation. For example, 36 percent of the respondents are less active in the church because they serve in the military while others have college obligations or full-time jobs. Still, others just felt liberated after graduation and are now permitted to make their own decisions about attending church. However, the good news story is that only 13 percent of respondents in this study indicated that they stopped attending church because they dislike it, and 87 percent (fig. 4) still believe in God.

Question 15: What ministries would you like to see for members in your age group?

Twenty percent of responses indicated that Millennials would like to see more young adult ministries. Fifteen percent would like to have ministries that focus on job fairs and career development. Ten percent of responses indicate that they would like to have a social fellowship ministry for young adults, while 15 percent of respondents did not address this question because they are atheist or agnostic.

Since 35 percent of Millennials frequently conclude that the church is irrelevant and does not address issues they experience on a daily basis,\textsuperscript{180} this question was raised to ascertain the Millennial perspective on ministries that would address their particular needs. In response, Millennials identified specific ministries they believed would facilitate or enhance their careers and help them feel comfortable in a thriving worship environment. Twenty percent of respondents desired the formation of young adult ministries, while 15 percent desired a job and

\textsuperscript{179} Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church.

\textsuperscript{180} What Millennials Want when They Visit the Church.
career fair sponsored by the church. Upon the creation of these types of ministries, it is likely
that the negative perspective of some Millennials who believe that the church is irrelevant and
unimportant might evolve over time.

![Ministries Desired by Millennials](image)

**Figure 21. Ministries Desired by Millennials**

Question 16: What actions can church leadership take to reinvigorate the membership of
Millennials?

Participants provided a variety of responses to this question. Twenty-six percent of the
respondents indicated that churches need to be less judgmental. Ten percent of respondents
indicated that the church needs to be more receptive of others, while 10 percent suggest that the
church needs to be more accepting. Seven percent indicated that the service and sermon need to
be more relevant to the issues of today. Five percent of respondents indicated that the church
needs more youth-oriented ministries, while 5 percent indicated that the service needs to be less
traditional. Five percent indicate that the church needs mentorship programs for their age group.
Finally, thirty-two percent of the suggestions listed as “other responses” recommended a host of
ideas Millennial believe could help revive their membership in the church.

The final question in this survey sought the Millennial perspective on what they believe
will motivate young adults to reconsider attending church. Their responses indicate that Millennials want a variation of the typical church currently available on Sunday morning. Respondents did not request dramatic changes, like reorganizing the traditional worship service or converting the congregation to house churches, but they desire a church that will address their issues and needs while being less judgmental and more accepting of others. Specifically, Millennials in this study said they desire a church that is relevant and has ministries that focus on solving problems they face in the world every day while also addressing issues in the community. In other words, Millennials want a church that is less traditional, less judgmental, but more receptive and accepting of others with legitimate youth ministries and mentorship programs.

![Figure 22. Actions to Reinvigorate Millennial Membership](image)

Finally, the responses to this question were analogous to a Barna report, specifically that churches should have a mentoring program for teens and young adults to guide and teach them about God while navigating the issues of everyday life. Further, Barna found that Millennials who participated in a mentorship program were twice as likely to remain in church. Also, Millennials that learned how the Bible applies to their career were four times as likely to remain
active in a church. Lastly, Millennials who were personally engaged by church leadership were four times as likely to remain active in the church.\footnote{Five Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church.}

**Conclusion**

No single ministry program will stop the mass departure of Millennials or any other generation from the church. However, Barna Research suggests establishing a relational environment that engages Millennials before graduating high school that may convince young adults to stay connected to the church. According to statistics from Barna Research, 59 percent of Millennials who stayed in church after graduation had a friendship with an adult in the church, and 28 percent who stayed had an adult mentor. Barna suggests that the most positive experiences in the church for Millennials will center on relationships.\footnote{Five Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church.} In conclusion, the benefit of establishing cultivated meaningful relationships with Millennials in the church is that they are more likely to stay, resulting in the development of deeper faith and spiritual growth.
Chapter 4

Reviewing and Analyzing Data

The purpose of this research study was to collect qualitative data to ascertain why Millennials have stopped attending church or have abandoned church altogether. A sixteen-question survey consisting primarily of qualitative and open-ended questions was devised to allow respondents to be reflective and introspective in their responses. Quantitative and multiple-choice questions were not utilized because of the possibility of receiving superficial or cursory responses, without understanding their beliefs, perceptions, and suppositions regarding the church.

The survey was disseminated via the internet through a recently formed community men’s fellowship group. This organization was comprised mostly of mid-level Baby Boomer church leaders who understood the importance and recognized the consequences of Millennials rejecting the church. So, these godly men disseminated the survey via the internet to their young adult offspring and urged a response. Previous attempts to disseminate the survey without using the internet were unsuccessful, perhaps because Millennials are much more comfortable using internet technology or social media to communicate versus responding by pen and paper.

In chapter 3, data for each question was compiled, collated, and spread-sheeted to identify themes, beliefs, perceptions, and suppositions about Millennials and their unique affiliation with the church. Individual responses for each question were then categorized and coded, reviewed, and evaluated, allowing the researcher to form presuppositions. Finally, the study attempted to compare the beliefs, perceptions, presuppositions, and corresponding actions of Millennials regarding the church with national research groups such as the Pew and Barna research organizations. The study also attempted to triangulate the data to gain further insights.
and understanding the phenomenon of Millennials disassociating themselves with the church.

**Millennial Demographics**

The data collected for this study was based upon sixteen questions posed to twenty-four Millennial respondents between the ages of 22-37 years old. Questions one and two of the study were demographic inquiries about the respondents regarding age and gender. Most of the respondents were female, with fourteen females and ten males. The average age of female respondents was 27.4 years old, while the average age of males was slightly older at 28.4 years old.

In this survey, several Millennials did not respond to question 2 when asked their age. The individuals who neglected to respond to this question were all 22 years old, the youngest of this generation. The possibility exists that these respondents reasoned that revealing their age would diminish the importance of their responses, or perhaps they did not want to share personal information about themselves with the church. Barna reports that Millennials are often hesitant to share personal data, especially with a church. The report indicated that 82 percent of Millennials feel comfortable sharing only their first name with the church, while 53 percent are willing to share their last name.  

Additionally, 66 percent did not want to share their e-mail address, while only 19 percent were willing to share their home address, and 6 percent willing to provide access to their social media accounts like Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. Finally, 15 percent of Millennials preferred sharing no data about themselves. It is ironic that despite sharing a vast amount of data on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, Millennials continue to be extremely hesitant about sharing

\[\text{183} \quad \text{What Millennials Want when They Visit the Church.}\]

\[\text{184} \quad \text{Ibid.}\]
personal data about themselves with the church.

Does College Education Undermine Religion?

The survey for this study eventually found its way to several local college campuses, Ivey League schools, and graduates of the United States Military Academy. Consistent with national data, nearly all respondents were college students or college graduates. A national survey conducted by Pew research estimated that in 2016, 40 percent of Millennials were college graduates, compared to 32 percent of Generation Xers and 26 percent of Baby Boomers at the same age. Further, Pew reported that in 2016 nearly half of working Millennial women under the age of thirty possessed at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 36 percent of Generation X women at the same age. Finally, in 2016, Millennial women were more likely to possess a bachelor’s degree than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{185} The fact that Millennials are the most educated generation in history underscores the fact that nearly all respondents in this study were college students or graduates.\textsuperscript{186}

Some polling data from Pew Research indicated that adults with higher education levels, including some college, are less religious than those with a high school degree. Further, the report indicated that adults with higher education levels are not as likely to believe in God. However, those Americans who possess a college degree attend church at the same frequency as those with less education. The report also indicated that college graduates are less likely to say that religion is “very important.” Finally, college graduates are less likely to report that they

\textsuperscript{185} Nikki Graff, \textit{Today’s Young Workers are More Likely than ever to have a Bachelor’s Degree} (Washington, DC: Pew Research Group, 2017), accessed Feb. 20, 2019, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/16/todays-young-workers-are-more-likely-than-ever-to-have-a-bachelors-degree/.

\textsuperscript{186} \textit{Millennials in Adulthood}.
believe in God and more likely to identify as an atheist or agnostic.\textsuperscript{187}

However, after scrutinizing the questions and answers of all respondents, this research surmised that attending college or possessing a college degree played no direct role in influencing the beliefs, perceptions, and presuppositions with regards to God or the church. When Millennials were asked in question 14 why they were less active in church after high school graduation, 13 percent of Millennials cited time constraints while attending college. These time constraints contributed to reduced attendance, but there were no direct references by any respondent that attending college influenced their beliefs. However, this study did reveal that time constraints associated with the college lifestyle, which included academic studies and a new change in social lifestyle, did seem to impede or distract Millennials from attending church.

Dr. Tim Clydesdale, Professor of Sociology at the College of New Jersey, writes that the religious beliefs of most college students are not altered while attending college. What changes are their priorities, including relationships, finances, focusing on grades, and completing their degree. Further, a poll by the Harvard University Institute of Politics reported that 66 percent of students said that their college experiences did not alter their religiosity. The report indicated that some students became more religious, while only a small percentage became less religious.\textsuperscript{188}

Additionally, Millennials were asked in question 9, “If you are affiliated with a church but do not attend regularly, identify three reasons why you don’t attend?” In response, Millennials did not indicate that their college academics and experiences played a role in their decision not to attend church, nor did it influence their belief in God or their trust in the church.


Although Pew reported in the 2014 *Religious Landscape Study* that adults with college are less likely to believe in God with absolute certainty, it also points out that 52 percent of college graduates attended service weekly, while 45 percent of students with some college attend services weekly, and 46 percent of high school graduates attend services weekly. These results indicate that college graduates attend church worship services more often than less-educated people, debunking the claim that education undermines religion.\(^{189}\)

Once again, there are contradictory views on whether college education undermines religion. The previously mentioned poll by the Harvard University Institute of Politics reported that attending college did not alter their religiosity. The poll indicated that students often became more religious and spiritual while in college, while a small percentage became less religious.\(^{190}\) Finally, there were no specific responses in this study indicating that a secular college curriculum, liberal professors, or college life undermined church attendance or altered their belief in God.

In Isaiah 55:11, God says, “My word that proceeds from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please, and it will prosper where I send it.” This scripture indicates that the Word of God is powerful and effective enough to produce its intended results. Church leadership must teach God's Word to young adults without compromise, prompting them to accept salvation from an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Lord before entering college. In accordance with Romans 12:2, if young adults are transformed with a renewed mind and are literate in scripture, the Holy Spirit will bring to their remembrance\(^{191}\) that

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\(^{189}\) *In America, Does More Education Equal Less Religion.*


\(^{191}\) John 14:26.
they are under no obligation to live according to the flesh but according to the spirit.\textsuperscript{192} Finally, in response to questions asked in this study, this research revealed no indication that the college experience, liberal college curriculums or liberal professors had any influence on Millennials attending church nor did it alter Millennial thoughts or beliefs on God or the church. Despite this claim, some entities in society continue to blame education for a declining interest of Millennials in the church.

\textbf{Religion and Belief in God}

Question 3 of the survey asked Millennials, “What is your denomination?” Forty-two percent of the respondents were Baptist, while 17 percent were non-denominational, 9 percent were Pentecostal, 9 percent Catholic, and 9 percent Methodist. In addition, 13 percent of respondents were atheist or agnostic, which means that they did not believe in God and had doubts about the existence of God. In responses to this question, the preponderance of respondents (42 percent) identified themselves as Baptist while another 36 percent were identified as other Protestant faiths. So, in this study, 78 percent of Millennials identified themselves as Protestant, while the \textit{Religious Landscape Study}, which surveyed more than 35,000 individuals in fifty states, reported that 68 percent of all religions in the United States as a form of the Protestant faith.\textsuperscript{193}

Further, in question 3, 87 percent of respondents in this study indicated they were affiliated with a faith or denomination (42 percent Baptist, 17 percent non-denominational, 9 percent Methodist, 9 percent Catholic, 9 percent Pentecostal, 1 percent Presbyterian) while 13 percent indicated no religious affiliation or considered themselves atheist or agnostic. The

\textsuperscript{192} Rom. 8:12-13.

\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Religious Landscape Study}. 
response to this question reveals a direct correlation with other responses in the survey questions. For example, when respondents were asked if they believe in God (question 5), 87 percent indicated that they believe in God, while 12 percent identified themselves as atheist or agnostic. When comparing both question five and three, 87 percent of respondents have a religious affiliation with a denomination, while 87 percent of respondents indicated that they believe in God. It can be surmised from this comparison that Millennials who are affiliated with a denomination also believe in God.

Additionally, in a national study conducted in 2017 by Pew Research, the study found that 90 percent of Evangelical Protestants believe in God with absolute certainty, with 87 percent considering themselves to be very religious. The study also found that Mormons and Historically Black Protestants were also extremely religious and had a high level of belief in God. In fact, 90 percent of college graduates indicated a belief in God with absolute certainty. Unfortunately, Catholics were found to be the least religious, resulting in a low weekly attendance rate of 39 percent, even though 64 percent believe in God. The Catholic statistics were found to be the lowest of any Christian religious group.194

Results from this Pew survey reveal that there is no direct correlation between “believing in God” and church attendance. In other words, because Millennials responded that they believe in God does not mean that they will regularly attend church. For example, when Millennials were asked in question 4 if they were active in the church, affiliated but seldom attend or have no affiliation with a church, only 44 percent of respondents indicated that they are active in the church, while 56 percent indicated no church affiliation. In summary, 87 percent of Millennials believe in God, but only 44 percent attend church regularly, while 56 percent seldom or never

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194 Religious Landscape Study.
attend church. Based on these responses, it is evident that believing in God does not translate into church attendance.

A possible explanation for this disparity is that not everyone who says that they believe in God believes in the God of the Bible. A new Pew research survey of 4,700 adults indicate that nearly 90 percent of respondents indicated that they believe in God, but only 56 percent indicate that they believe in the God of the Bible, while 33 percent believe in a higher power or a spiritual force at work in the universe. The results of the Pew study revealed some parallels to this research study. Both reports indicate that a large number of respondents believe in God; however, not everybody who expresses a belief in God believes in the God of the Bible. So, it is highly unlikely that 33 percent of respondents who question the existence of the God of the Bible will attend a religious service or worship God they do not know.

The Apostle Paul found a similar scenario in Acts 17:22 where the residence and leaders of Athens were considered religious and believed in gods, but did not believe in the God of the Bible. The Athenians believed in god but did not know the one true God.

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.
24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

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In this text, Paul is preaching in the city of Athens. He had great concern for the city because of their beliefs in deities other than the God of the Bible. Paul first preached to the Jews and Gentiles in the synagogues but later traveled to the Council of the Areopagus, where he preached to the city council to explain and introduce them the God of the Bible. He was reminded that while in the city, he saw an altar “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.” The Greeks had so many Gods that they decided to “erect an altar to the god they had inadvertently missed in the pantheon.” Paul used the inscription on the altar “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” as an introduction to preach to the Athenians about the one true God who does not dwell in temples and is the creator of heaven and earth. Although many rejected Paul’s message of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Acts 17:22 says that a man named Dionysius and a woman called Damaris, among others, converted to the faith.

Although Paul was disturbed by the idols and false gods worshiped by the Athenians in the city, he did not relent in his mission to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world. The church of the 21st century needs to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, and in accordance with 1 Corinthians 9:22, preach the God of the Bible so that some might be saved.

Relevancy of the Gospel

In Acts 17:22, Paul utilized an innovative technique to introduce the gospel to the city of Athens and the Council of the Areopagus. He refers to the altar in Athens with the inscription “TO AN UNKNOWN GOD” to introduce the God of the universe. In other words, Paul made the gospel he presented to the Athenians relevant to those in attendance, which resulted in some accepting the gospel.

One of the concerns identified by Pew and Barna research is that Millennials do not believe that the gospel is relevant to them. Respondents were asked question 9, “If you are
affiliated with a church but do not attend regularly, identify three reasons why you do not attend?” Multiple responses were provided, but 31 percent of respondents indicated that sermons were not relevant or clear. This percentage is consistent with an October 2013 Barna survey conducted with Millennials who do not attend church. Thirty-five percent of respondents indicated that the church is not relevant to them. Further, 31 percent of these same respondents said that the church is boring, and twenty percent said that the church is missing God. When comparing the Barna study to this research study, the percentage of respondents who take the position that the church is not relevant is analogous: 31 percent versus 35 percent.

Relevance is defined as something that has meaning or can be used to meet a given requirement. So, if the church is relevant, it will meet the needs of the people. Based on responses from multiple questions in this study, it can be concluded that Millennials do not believe their needs are being addressed in the church. These needs are not only spiritual but include human needs such as physical, mental, social, and emotional. In this study, Millennial respondents alluded that the church needed to address more than just spiritual concerns. Unfortunately, more than 30 percent of Millennials said that the church failed to meet or address their array of needs.

For example, in question 10, when Millennials were asked why they were unaffiliated with a church, 13 percent of respondents indicated that church leaders were not trained on the knowledge of God. In other words, some Millennials did not believe that church leadership could minister to them because they did not demonstrate or possess the knowledge of God. Secondly, a Barna report said that most ministries, in their current configuration, are inadequate to meet the spiritual needs of Millennials with 70 percent of them indicating that they cannot find a church.

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196 What Millennials Want when They Visit the Church.
that can help them grow spiritually.\textsuperscript{197}

David Kinnaman of Barna Research hinted that perhaps ministries for young people need an overhaul.\textsuperscript{198} A likely reason that churches are ineffective in ministering to Millennials is that churches and their ministries have not or will not change. The church was once very successful and now refuses to embrace new ideas. Thomas Rainer writes in his book \textit{Autopsy of a Deceased Church} that up to 100,000 churches across the United States are “showing signs of declining toward death” because they refuse to change.\textsuperscript{199}

Millennials are a representation of the change in society. By all accounts, Millennials display different characteristics than other generations. They will eclipse Baby Boomers as the largest generation in history; they are better educated, usually not married, more tech-savvy than their predecessors, and are more racially diverse than all other generations.\textsuperscript{200} As they complete their educational journey and enter the job market, many of them are leaving the church because churches are just not willing to change. The implication is that the church may need to change the method or venue by which it teaches the Word of God while addressing the issues young adults experience in everyday life.

When assessing the health of a church, Thom Rainer said that for churches to exist in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, they must embrace change. If churches continue to cling to the past, they will eventually die. What Rainer reveals in his book, \textit{Autopsy of a Deceased Church}, is that dying


\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{199} Rainer, \textit{Autopsy of a Deceased Church}, 7.

churches often operate in the past instead of embracing the future.\textsuperscript{201} Embracing the future does not mean questioning church doctrine, biblical truths, or Christian morals; it is focusing on issues that concern the people as the number one priority versus church business.

Finally, in an article in the \textit{Pyrex Journal of Education Research and Review} entitled “Teaching Millennials how to Study Under the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Sky,” the author P. Olszewski writes that with the Millennial generation, the old method of teaching needs to be revised. Similar to the thoughts outlined in Rainer’s book, Olszewski concludes that teaching methods used twenty years ago are no longer practical to train the Millennial generation. He points out that there is a gap between the expectation of how professors think Millennials learn and how they learn. If major college institutions tasked with the responsibility to train young adults are experiencing difficulty adopting innovative teaching methods to reach Millennials, the expectation is that churches will experience similar challenges as they seek to educate young adults on biblical matters. So, churches must revisit the antiquated methods of teaching Millennials by modernizing teaching techniques to improve the biblical knowledge of its youth if they want to retain Millennials in the congregation.\textsuperscript{202} However, if churches fail to acknowledge the necessity for change, this will likely stimulate sustained erosion inside the church facilitated by generational replacement by a younger cohort that altogether rejects the church and its traditions.

\textbf{Trust in the Church}

A series of questions were posed to Millennials to ascertain their level of trust for the church. Many view the church as a force for good in society that plays an essential role in

\textsuperscript{201} Rainer, \textit{Autopsy of a Deceased Church}, 18.

assisting the poor and needy. However, preliminary reports indicate that Millennials do not have a high level of trust for most institutions, including the church. Although nearly 90 percent of people think that the church and religious organizations strengthen the community, many young Americans are traditionally less trusting than other generations.\textsuperscript{203} There has been an enormous erosion of social trust for institutions in this country among Millennials. Further, trust exhibited by older generations has fallen over recent decades with the most significant decline recorded for individuals over 30 years old.\textsuperscript{204} Unfortunately many, including those affiliated with the Church, have adopted the position that religious organizations like churches are too focused on money, materialism, rules, and politics.\textsuperscript{205}

In the survey conducted for this study, respondents were asked four specific questions regarding the church. These questions prompted respondents to communicate their uncensored views and concerns regarding the church. Four principal areas emerged that have eradicated Millennial trust in the church: hypocrisy, materialism, ineffective sermons, and non-doctrinal teachings. These negative characteristics were evident in the responses to several questions where Millennials were queried regarding how they viewed the church. Specifically, in question 7, respondents were asked to recall their worst church experience. Respondents frequently communicated their belief that the church is too focused on money and materialism (14 percent), hypocrisy (14 percent), uninspiring sermons (12 percent), and non-doctrinal teachings (7 percent). These were a few of the concerns that revealed a generally negative perception that Millennials have concerning the church and should alarm pastors and church leadership. In this

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\textsuperscript{204} Taylor and Keeter, Millennials: Confident. Connected. Open to Change, 23-24

\textsuperscript{205} Views of Religious Institutions.
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study, these perceptions were so egregious in the minds of Millennials that, even though 87 percent of them believe in God, 56 percent have avoided or suspended the practice of attending worship services because they believed that church practices were antithetical to what Jesus preached.

For example, in Matthew 23:27-28, Jesus warned his followers about the hypocrisy they would experience by church leaders, including the teachers of the law and Pharisees:

Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First, clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside, you appear to people as righteous, but on the inside, you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.

Matthew Henry describes a hypocrite as a “person who personates or acts the part that he neither is nor maybe, or perhaps he neither is nor would be.” He goes on to say that the men Christ called hypocrites, attempted to keep people from believing in Christ and the Kingdom of God. Based upon Henry’s definition of the term hypocrite and the perception by Millennials that church members and leaders are hypocrites, this demonstrates and exposes a dismal relationship between the church and the largest generation in the American workforce.

In each area of concern identified by Millennials, the Bible provides a doctrinal response. For example, materialism is a preoccupation with the treasures of this world. In Matthew 6:19-20, Jesus said, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. However, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

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207 Fry, Millennials are the Largest Generation in the US Labor Force.
this text, Jesus addresses the issue of being self-absorbed or focused on earthly treasures instead of focusing on obtaining treasures in heaven. Take, for example, the pericope in Luke 18:18-23 about the “Rich Young Ruler” who approached Jesus and wanted to obtain eternal life. The scripture reads as follows:

   Now a certain ruler asked Him, saying, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” So Jesus said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not bear false witness,’ ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ ” And he said, “All these things I have kept from my youth.” So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, “You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

   The story of the Rich Young Ruler is recorded in each of the synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. During this encounter with a young man with great wealth, Jesus instructed the man what he must do to inherit eternal life. Unfortunately, the man’s desire to retain his wealth overrides his desire for eternal life. This story is a biblical example of materialism at its worst where the young man had a decision to make, and he chose materialism over salvation. The young man could not secure eternal salvation because of his desire to retain material possessions and earthly prosperity over eternal life.

   The Bible provides definitive guidance to help the church address the negative perceptions and concerns that Millennials have with the church. Further, it is significant to note that no respondent in this study suggested altering the mission of the church, nor did they question church doctrine. However, in response to their worst church experience, Millennials questioned church traditions and whether it was deviating from the gospel and preaching the same message that Jesus preached. Finally, it is incumbent upon church leadership to address these concerns to stem the tide of a mass departure of young adults leaving the church or risk damaging an already sensitive relationship between Millennials and the church.
Trust in God

In this survey, two questions were posed to Millennials regarding God. Millennials were asked if they believed in God and what would cause them to distrust God. Interestingly enough, there were no negative responses to either question. When asked if they believed in God, overwhelmingly, 87 percent of young adults indicated a belief in God. This high percentage is consistent with data collected by both Pew and Barna Research, which suggest that most Americans believe in God. According to a Pew Research report entitled “When Americans Say They Believe in God What Do They Mean?” two of the main religious groups that say they believe in God are evangelical Protestants at 91 percent and Historically Black Protestants at 92 percent. Catholics and mainline Protestants also indicated that they believed in God, but many believe in “some other higher power.”

According to a Pew report, on average, 90 percent of Americans say they believe in God, but only 56 percent believe in the God of the Bible, while 23 percent indicate that they believe in a higher power. The word believe can often be ambiguous because it has different meanings for different groups. Though a person might indicate that they believe in God, they may not believe in the God as depicted in the Bible, who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. It is incumbent upon the church to facilitate the understanding of the uneducated about God as described in the Bible.

Nehemiah 8:7-8 said that the Levites or priests taught the people from the Old Testament so they understood God's Word:

The Levites—Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah—instructed the people in the Law while the
people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read.

This text informs the reader that ministers are to instruct the people regarding God. Perhaps the ambiguity in understanding what people believe and whom they believe in may be the result of some churches deviating from these instructions. Pointing out this shortfall is not intended to be an incitement of the church. However, when worship centers lose sight of the mission of spreading the gospel and attendees indicate that God is missing from the worship service, perhaps this is an indication that changes are essential to maintaining the health of the church.

Furthermore, different faith groups tend to have their distinct perspective regarding belief in God. In the article by Pew Research, “When Americans Say They Believe in God What Do They Mean?” Pew concludes that the title, designation, or term God means different things to different people. As such, Pew poses two questions: what does it mean to believe in God, and when people reject God, what are they rejecting? According to their study, those who say they believe in the God of the Bible believe in an omnipotent, omniscient, and loving God who orchestrates the activities in their lives and provides divine protection. Further, 60 percent indicate that they believe that God will execute judgment over man for his sins.210

Despite the ambiguity about God or uncertainty about what Americans believe, this is a good news story because most Americans, including Millennials in this study, believe in God. The concern is how churches will address the ambiguity about God and convince the unaffiliated that believing in Christ is paramount to knowing the God of the Bible. The Church must address the fact that knowing and believing in Christ Jesus is essential to knowing God and obtaining salvation.

210 When Americans Say They Believe in God, What Do They Mean?
In Acts 16:31, the Roman jailer asks the Apostle Paul, “what must I do to be saved.” Paul responded, “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” Moreover, John 3:16 instructs all men that everyone who believes in God’s Son Jesus Christ has everlasting life. These scriptures acknowledge that followers of Christ do not just believe in the existence of God or his Son. They believe that the Son was the propitiation for the sins of the world at a place called Golgotha. In other words, belief means acknowledging the gospel of Christ and his works on the cross for the sins of the world. When followers of Christ believe in God, it means believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the God of the Bible.

The second question in this study about God asked Millennials what would cause them to distrust God. When asked this question, 44 percent of respondents indicated that nothing could cause them to distrust God. Respondents indicated that they could not identify any action by God that would erode their trust in him. Other responses to this question suggest that actions by the church or sins of the individual might lead to an erosion of trust in God. Thirteen percent of respondents for this study indicated that a lack of faith could cause distrust in God. A lack of faith, however, is not an abject failure of God but of the individual.

Further, other responses that could cause distrust in God include experiencing self-centeredness in the church (6 percent), or the absence of God in the church (6 percent) could cause them to distrust God. In other words, Millennials in this survey could think of no action by God that would shake their faith in him. In effect, this is good news as the preponderance of Millennials in this study appeared to demonstrate a strong allegiance to God. This allegiance to God indicated that they possess a requisite amount of strong faith that could increase if adequately educated by the church on the Word of God.

A large percentage of Americans indicated that they exercise trust in God. It is not
unremarkable that Americans are bound to their faith and trust in God. In 1864, Congress approved the US Treasury to place the motto “In God We Trust” on some US currency. Initially, silver and gold coins were first graced with the inscription, but the motto was later expanded for use on paper money. In 1956, Congress passed a bill approved by the President declaring “In God We Trust” as the national motto for the dollar bill. Placing the motto on its coin was intended to recognized and demonstrate the nation’s allegiance to God. For centuries Americans have been expressing the fact that they trust God. However, if Americans legitimately trusted God, their actions would likely be reflected, as a minimum, in a weekly worship service.

The Bible provides several scriptures that facilitate the Christian understanding of the term trust. Proverbs 3:5-6 says that men should “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” This text instructs man that he must have full confidence in God. He must trust the one true God who is the Supreme God and demonstrate an unwavering assurance and confidence in him. The scripture goes on to say that godly men must lean on God because he is immovable, realizing that man cannot stand alone. When a person becomes fully committed and chooses to follow God, he promises that dangerous and even blocked roads will no longer be obstacles because God will direct their paths. As indicated by this proverb written by Solomon to his son, teaching young adults to understand what it means to believe in and trust in the God of the Bible is one of the primary responsibilities of the church. This mission will only be accomplished if churches follow the instructions outlined in Matthew 28:16-20. In this text known as the great commission, Jesus Christ instructs his followers to “teach them to observe all things I [Jesus Christ] have commanded you.”

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Reason Millennials Regularly Attend Church

When Millennials were asked why they regularly attended church, they provided a variety of responses. Overwhelmingly, 21 percent of Millennials indicated they attended church to fellowship with other believers their age. This is not a new revelation. The Barna Research Group reported that the most effective way to engage Millennials is to cultivate relationships with them. Christians are frequently told to develop a relationship with God, but seldom are told to cultivate a relationship with young people in the church. The likely reason Millennials leave the church is that there are no established relationships with adults in the congregation other than their parents. Barna indicated that one of the main reasons Millennials stay connected to the church is because they have fostered a meaningful relationship with other adults in the church. In his book Re-Churching the Unchurched, Barna indicated that the unchurched needs to feel relationally attached to other people in a loving, caring environment. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, authors of the book Unchristian: What a New Generation Thinks about Christianity, believe that Jesus utilized relationships and friendship to influence and lead his disciples who help to lay the foundation of the original church. The implication is that Millennials want a relationship with the church and are not interested in the flamboyant looking sanctuary. According to Nancy Flory, associate editor of Stream, Millennials want a church that functions under the “relational community model” with a simple task of loving God and the

212 Five Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church.


214 Five Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church.


Finally, Cary Neuwhof, pastor of Connexux Church, one of the largest churches in Canada, indicated that the church needs to be relational to attract Millennials. He recommends a small group strategy where everybody knows somebody in the church.\textsuperscript{218}

One way to improve interactions within the church is to develop an affinity group that can be used to help other generations understand Millennial traditions and customs. The group can be used to help participants understand young cohorts, prevent conflicts, and sharpen expectations in the church. However, the greatest expectation is to facilitate the development of relationships, friendship, and mentoring programs that have been successful in keeping young adults in the congregation. Finally, Millennials must experience relationship in the church to feel accepted by the church.

Ministries Desired by Millennials

When Millennials were asked what ministries they desired in the church, the most frequent response was young adult ministries (20 percent) followed by job fairs (15 percent) and a social fellowship ministry (10 percent). As indicated earlier, Millennials desire a relational church. A Barna report said that the most likely factor that will influence Millennials to remain at a church revolves around relationships. Millennials need to feel some connection to the church and those that leave the church usually have no friends or mentors, so they do not feel accepted. Barna reports that seven out of ten young adults who drop out of church after high school did not have a close friend in the church. Additionally, nine out of ten did not have a mentor.\textsuperscript{219}


\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Five Reasons Millennials Stay Connected to Church}. 

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The Siebert Foundation said that ministries must reflect more than a traditional worship service but must facilitate the development of relationships that allow Millennials to experience God. For Millennials, the church can double as a social institution because it can gather scores of people together to address relationships. One young adult minister said that with all the technological resources at the disposal of young adults, they do not need the church for knowledge, but relationships.\textsuperscript{220}

Ministries can create and develop techniques to modify the typical worship experience to appeal to Millennials. Options include retreats, Bible studies, small groups, mentoring programs, and discipleship training. Millennials should help plan and structure these events and be allowed to invite their friends.\textsuperscript{221} These types of venues help deepen the trust of Millennials because it creates a relational environment and proposes a sense of belonging.\textsuperscript{222}

\textbf{Actions to Reinvigorate Millennial Attendance}

When asked what actions should church do to reinvigorate young adult attendance, the most popular response by Millennials was that churches need to be less judgmental. Twenty-six percent of Millennials in this study felt that churches were too judgmental. Ten percent of Millennials responded that churches needed to be more receptive of the younger generation, while 10 percent said that the church needed to be more accepting of others. Seven percent said that church sermons need to be relevant, 5 percent focused on youth ministries, 5 percent wanted less traditional churches, and 5 percent mentioned a mentorship program.


\textsuperscript{221} Ibid., 25.

\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., 18.
A preponderance of respondents in this study said that churches need to be less judgmental. From their perspective, being judgmental appears to be the greatest flaw of the church. Unfortunately, people, including church members, seem to believe that they can judge the flaws in others, but they often struggle in recognizing their faults. This is evident in Matthew 7:5, where Jesus indicates that a person cannot see clearly to cast out the splinter in the other person’s eye because of the log in his own eye. Jesus said that a man must first remove the log from his own eye before removing the splinter from someone else.

Matthew 7:5 addresses the issue of hypocrisy and judgmental characteristics. In essence, when Jesus makes this statement, he is informing his audience that before passing judgment on others, one must first resolve one’s own faults. In John 8:7, Jesus acknowledged that all are guilty of sin, so no man has the authority to judge another. Further, in Mathew 7:1-2, Jesus said that people who judge others will receive the same judgment upon themselves. Paul further clarified judging others in Romans 2:1, telling readers that if a man judges others, he condemns himself.

Forming negative opinions about others is a common problem in society. Often, people who formulate these opinions are not fully conversant on all the crucial information needed to pass judgment and arrive at the right conclusions. Often, these judgments lead to negative impressions and are frequently flawed. Judgmental attitudes are so prevalent today that society cannot escape the fact that people, groups, or generations irrationally judge others without all the facts. The concern by Millennials that church members are judgmental may only be their perception. However, the perception of Millennials is a legitimate concern for the church because their perception is truth to them, and has resulted in a negative influence on church

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attendance. Continually ignoring this phenomenon will likely have a catastrophic effect on the life of the church.

Revising the Worship Experience

In a report by the Siebert Foundation, some churches have altered their Sunday worship format to appeal to Millennials. While some churches have reverted to small group Bible studies, others have created programs led by Millennials in the community. Additionally, other churches have opted to utilize social media and other technologies to connect to other young adults in the community.

The Siebert Report, sponsored by the Lutheran Church, indicated that “while the Church and Christ will never die, congregations can and do.” To confront the decline of the church and save their congregations, the Lutheran Church has decided to focus on changing the paradigm in the church from a trend of declining membership to one of growth. Their goal was to understand the practices and worship traditions that appealed to Millennials, so the research team looked at ministries that are effective in attracting younger cohorts into their worship service.

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Figure 23. Church Comparisons

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224 C.S. Lewis Institute, “Reflections: Judging Others.”

This study decided to observe multiple churches in the Richmond and Chesterfield County areas who have altered their worship services to appeal to the younger generation. Several churches were visited during their Sunday morning worship service, and observations were recorded. Trends found in these worship centers are displayed in figure 23.

Each church visited embrace an extremely relaxed dress code similar to what is seen in a college classroom. Most worship attendees wore jeans with a t-shirt or sweatshirt. Staff members typically wore matching t-shirts with khaki slacks or jeans. In column two, each worship center utilized more technology than the traditional church. Five out of five worship centers used overhead projection technology in addition to two large screen TVs, despite the size of the sanctuary or auditorium. Three of the five facilities used automated multicolor stage lighting during their worship experience. Again, despite the size of the worship area, it was apparent that stage lighting in some facilities was utilized more for aesthetics and imaginary and was not obligatory to conduct the service. In addition, each worship center had abandoned the traditional pulpit in favor of a stage. The stage served as a pulpit for the pastor and as a platform to accommodate a band which played non-traditional music that appeared to be more appealing to the younger cohorts.\textsuperscript{226}

Although every church in this visual survey employed the preponderance of these and other techniques to appeal to Millennials, only two of the five worship centers appeared to have achieved a high level of success. Two of the churches exhibited moderate success while one worship center, although designed specifically for Millennials, struggled to attract parishioners.\textsuperscript{227} Even though utilizing these techniques appears to be more successful than the

\textsuperscript{226} Five Local Worship Centers observed during Sunday morning worship service by Charles Sumpter in Chesterfield County and Richmond Va., Dec. 23 to March 10, 2019.

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid.
traditional worship service in attracting Millennials, none of the respondents in this study indicated that these techniques impacted their decision to attend or not to attend church. Thus, any recommendation to revive Millennial membership will not include data revealed in the visual survey of the five worship centers but will be based strictly upon answers from the Millennial respondents for this study.

Recommendations to Reinvigorate Millennial Attendance

To ascertain how churches can reinvigorate Millennial attendance, the final step in this research process is to acknowledge the most widely shared responses from each survey question. These most common and broadly shared responses are trends and themes emerging from the beliefs and perceptions of Millennials. A review of the various responses from each question reveals that Millennials are not monolithic in their thought process. Their views differ by race, ethnicity, class, gender, and political party.

Further, their views often differ on particular subjects, including homosexuality, marriage, and interracial dating. However, despite their differences, most Millennials tend to agree on specific themes or trends. Based upon their perspectives, recommendations to reinvigorate Millennial membership were extracted directly from the most common and widely shared responses provided by Millennials participating in this study. From these widely shared responses evolved recommendations that, if addressed, will likely stimulate Millennial attendance.

The five recommendations to reinvigorate Millennial attendance are as follows:

1. Make sermons relevant and clear for the Millennial generation. The definition of the term *relevant*, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, means to be consistent with the
appropriate time, period, circumstance, or relating to contemporary interest.\footnote{Oxford English Dictionary s.v. “relevant,” accessed Feb. 8, 2019, http://www.oed.com/} Despite some church leadership taking the position that God’s Word is already relevant, the term does not suggest compromising the scripture but suggests that one must seek to contextualize the Word so the younger generation can understand and identify with it.\footnote{Rick Ezell, “5 Ways to Make Your Preaching More Practical and Relevant,” Sermon Central, accessed Dec 20, 2018, https://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/rick-ezell-5-ways-to-make-your-preaching-more-practical-and-relevant-813?ref=PreachingArticleSerps.} An article by Josh Ott, Lead Pastor of Grace Free Church in Schuylkill, Pennsylvania, states that sermons must communicate effectively with the younger generation. There is no requirement for the speaker to be the same age as the listeners because communication is not age dependent.\footnote{Josh Ott, “10 ways to Preach to Millennials,” Evangelical Free Church of America,” accessed March 12, 2019, https://www.efca.org/blog/engaging-culture/10-ways-preach-millennials.} The sermon, however, must reflect the current culture and the audience, and the pastor must understand the demographics of the listeners.\footnote{Ezell, “5 Ways to Make Your Preaching More Practical and Relevant.”} Finally, church leadership must revise their pedagogical process to facilitate learning for Millennials, similar to how colleges and universities have adapted to training their students.\footnote{Douglas Richardson, “The Pedagogy of Andragogy: The Art and Science of Teaching Millennials,” Medic-CE, accessed Feb. 16, 2019, https://blog.medic-ce.com/blog/pedagogy-andragogy-art-science-teaching-adults-part-1/.}

2. The church needs to be relational and include opportunities for social fellowship that connects all generations. Initially, the church must develop a genuine relationship with God while not compromising his Word. Subsequently, to establishing a relationship with God, the church can now be prepared to commune with others with the ultimate intent to lead them to Christ. The goal in the church should be to create a network of relationships, not only inside the church but outside as well that enable the church to grow while glorifying the Son. Facilitating
the growth of relationships requires treating others with dignity and respect, which ultimately honors God. The focus of the relational church is how it relates to and treats others. The building of healthy relationships will result in building a healthy church.\textsuperscript{233} This healthy relationship is accomplished by striking a healthy balance between caring for believers and caring for the community.

3. Take steps to remove judgmental attitudes from the worship experience in the church altogether. According to Barna surveys, judgmental behavior is the most dominant negative perception that Millennials have toward the church.\textsuperscript{234} It was also the most dominant negative perception in the Millennials survey, where 26 percent of Millennials indicated that they would revitalize their worship attendance if the church could dispense with its judgmental nature. Although church leadership might not agree with the perception that Christians are judgmental, they must accept the fact that “perception can drive reality.”\textsuperscript{235} Judgmental behavior is making derogatory assumptions about others without knowing the facts. This character flaw may evolve from a feeling of self-righteousness and the desire to elevate self over others. When interrogated about this subject, 53 percent of young Christians said that their religion appears to focus on the faults of others.\textsuperscript{236}

When addressing the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:12-13, “What right do I have to pronounce judgment on unbelievers? That is God's responsibility. However, those who are inside the church family have the responsibility to hold Christian accountable. So it is a Christian duty to remove the wicked one from among you.” Paul notes

\textsuperscript{233} Richard J Krejcir, “The Relational Church.”

\textsuperscript{234} *What Millennials Want when They Visit the Church.*

\textsuperscript{235} Kinnaman and Lyons, *Unchristian*, 182.

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 183.
here that Christians are not to judge non-Christians or the unbeliever. The authority to judge belongs to God alone. Judgmental behavior is a reflection of biases and stereotypes about other people. The church instead must focus on reflecting Jesus versus catering to other Christians. The most important action the church can take to minimize the existence of judgmental behavior in its ranks is to understand what the Bible declares regarding the subject.

4. Establish young adult ministries that are focused socially but include job fairs and career seminars as well. This study indicates that it is imperative that churches focus on developing ministries for young adults to facilitate a healthy future for the church. According to a 2008 study sponsored by the United Church of Christ, young adults comprised 14 percent of church congregations. In 2010, the percentage of young adults in congregations had dropped to 13.5 percent, and by 2015 the percentage had fallen to 11.3 percent. At the current rate of decline, Millennial attendance will eventually fall into the single digits. To combat this decline, churches must broaden their perspective of what it means to engage Millennials while seeking to serve God and the community. In short, young adult ministries must serve a relational purpose while supporting and connecting to this cohort with like-minded individuals. Also, these ministries should focus on helping Millennials understanding their gifts and who they are in their relationship with Christ. Finally, respondents in this study were genuinely interested in their church addressing their specific needs of establishing career and job seminars that could assist them in finding suitable employment during and after college.

5. Creating opportunities for mentoring young adults in the church. Establish a mentorship

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237 Kinnaman, Unchristian, 186.


program for teens and young adults before they leave for college. Studies indicate that 59 percent of Millennials who stay in the church have a close friendship with an older adult in the church which creates a venue to establish a mentoring relationship. There are a variety of mentorship programs which include formal meeting, reverse mentoring, group mentoring, sponsorship, and peer to peer mentoring. Churches that have an established formal mentoring program tend to achieve a higher retention rate among Millennials.\textsuperscript{240}

Additionally, relationships with older adults can assist Millennials in understanding the process of how to make contributions to society and serve the community. For example, activities supporting the community helps them to understand their purpose in life and place in the community and the church.\textsuperscript{241} Further, mentoring is beneficial to both generations because it creates intergenerational interaction by not only educating the younger generation, but it also teaches the older cohorts about the younger generation.\textsuperscript{242}

To maintain a resilient church, mentorship must be a priority in the church. Mentorship is an investment in the younger generation. Churches that fail to mentor and invest in Millennials will likely lose the battle to attract and retain the younger generation. So, the church has a choice, invest in the younger generation, or lose them completely.\textsuperscript{243}

Conclusion

Based on data collected, this research concludes that Millennials are not monolithic in

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\textsuperscript{243} Hernandez, Poole and Grys, “Discussion: Mentoring Millennials for Future Leadership.”
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what they believe about God or about how they perceive the church. In one city, Millennials may sporadically attend one church but flock to another. It is clear that Millennial expectations regarding their desired worship experience have changed when compared to their parents. They are not seeking entertainment worship but one that speaks to their needs and desire to know God. They are not impressed with memberships but are more concerned with relationships and belonging to a group where they feel welcomed. In other words, they seek to belong before deciding to conform to institutional norms.

Baby Boomers and Millennials have different perspectives on church worship. While Boomers seek a church that is consistent with their beliefs, Millennials are looking for a church where they can belong. The Siebert Reports comes to the same conclusion as the researcher for this study that churches need to change their approach on how to minister to Millennials because though God's Church will not die, congregations do. Further, the report concludes that it is not about telling them what to believe but about how they should live their lives.\textsuperscript{244} The bottom line of this research is that churches need to modify how they minister to Millennials and accept change. Implementation of the aforementioned recommendations is not an all-inclusive strategy for every church aimed at resolving declining Millennials attendance. However, it initiates a conversation that engages young adults to ensure their needs are being addressed by the church. Finally, the failure of a church to change and address the needs of the largest living generation in the United States will likely prove catastrophic\textsuperscript{245} and may warrant a chapter in Thom S. Rainer’s book \textit{Autopsy of a Deceased Church}.

\textsuperscript{244} Siebert Lutheran Foundation. \textit{Engaging Millennials in Ministry Research Report}.

\textsuperscript{245} Fry, \textit{Millennials Projected to Overtake Baby Boomers}. 

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Appendix A

Survey Questions Date:

Declining Church Attendance: Five Reasons Why Millennials Have Stopped Attending Church.

1. What is your gender?
   a. ______ Male
   b. ______ Female

2. What is your age?

3. What is your denomination?
   a. ______ Baptist
   b. ______ Methodist
   c. ______ Pentecostal
   d. ______ Presbyterian
   e. ______ Catholic
   f. ______ Other

4. Are you currently (an) ……………of a church? How long have you been a member?
   a. ______ Active member
   b. ______ Affiliated but seldom attend
   c. ______ No church affiliation

5. Do you believe in God?
   a. ______ Yes
   b. ______ No

6. How often do you attend church each month?
   a. ______ 1 to 2 times monthly
   b. ______ 3 to 4 times monthly
   c. ______ 5 to 6 times monthly
   d. ______ 7 to 8 times monthly
   e. ______ don’t attend church

7. How would you describe your worst church experience? Please be specific.

________________________________________________________________________

8. If you regularly attend church, name the three reasons why you attend.
   (spiritual experience, to be uplifted, to receive support and encouragement, Sunday tradition, fellowship, music, etc.) Please explain.

________________________________________________________________________
9. If you are affiliated with a church but do not attend regularly, identify the top three reasons why you do not attend.

10. If you currently have no church affiliation, list three reasons why you are unaffiliated.

11. Do you believe that biblical teachings in the Church have practical application in your life? Explain.

12. What worship experiences have caused you to distrust God? Please explain.

13. What worship experiences have caused you to distrust the Church? Please explain.

14. If you became less active in your church after graduation (high school or college), please explain why.

15. What ministries would you like to see for members in your age group? ---

16. What actions can church leadership take to reinvigorate the membership of Millennials (ages 18-29)? Please explain.

17. If you are willing to submit to a personal interview, please contact Rev Sumpter at Sumpterc135@aol.com or (804)717-2297.
Appendix B

Interview Questions

Declining Church Attendance: Five Reasons Why Millennials Have Stopped Attending Church.

1. Do you believe in God? Yes ____ No _____ If no, why?

2. Is knowing God important in how you make decisions that affect your life?  
   Yes ____ No ____ If yes, in what way is it important?

3. Does the Church play a role in how you live your life? Yes ___ No _____.  
   If yes, do you feel that it makes you a better person?

4. Do you believe that the Church has any influence or importance in society?  
   Yes _____ No _____.

5. Are the scriptural teachings of the Church relevant to the way people live their lives today?  
   Yes ___ No ____? In what ways are they relevant.

6. Has Church doctrine shaped your views of right and wrong? Yes ___ No ____  
   If yes, in what areas did your views change?

7. Do you believe that some in society have a dim view of the Church? Yes ___ No ___  
   If yes, what are some of the reasons given?
8. Some Millennials (ages 18-29) have described church members as judgmental, hypocritical, homophobic and insensitive. In your own words, how would you describe them? Be honest.

9. Millennials have been described as self-absorbed, wasteful, idealistic, cynical, entrepreneurial, environmentally conscious and tolerant. How would you describe the Millennial generation?

10. Do you believe the Church should express its views on gay marriage? Why or why not.

11. Should the Church express its political views or stay out of politics? Explain.

12. Thank you for submitting to this survey. Your participation will be extremely helpful in reinvigorating Millennial attendance in local churches. Please forward all written responses to Sumpterc135@aol.com.
Appendix C

Pastoral Survey

1. How long have you been the Pastor of your church?

2. What prompted you to form a non-traditional, non-denominational church versus a traditional church?

3. What makes your church worship experience different from the traditional local church?

4. What makes your worship service more appealing to Millennials and other young adults?

5. In your estimation, what percentage of your congregation is comprised of Millennials?

6. Some churches now call their sanctuary an auditorium. Is there a specific reason for this change?

7. Your worship auditorium does not resemble the sanctuary of a traditional church. Why have you discarded the carpet, pews, and the stained glass windows?
8. The music at your church is different from that in the traditional church. How would you describe the music in your worship service and what prompted you to deviate from traditional worship music?

9. Your church has thoroughly integrated the use of technology in the worship service. How did you conclude that Millennials would embrace technology in their worship experience?

10. Do you have a mentorship program at your church? Please explain.

11. During my visits to your church, I found the congregation to be extremely friendly and welcoming. How did you cultivate this atmosphere?

12. Your church has abandoned the traditional coat and tie and many other traditions of the mainline Baptist church. Why do you believe this concept has been successful?

13. In a 2015 article by Barna Research, Millennials were extremely critical of the traditional Church. Common criticisms included: Church is not relevant, it is boring, God is missing from the Church, or it is out of date. Other criticisms included moral failures, hypocrisy, materialism, homophobic behavior and insensitive to others. How have you addressed these issues at your church?
14. What five changes do you believe the traditional Church should concentrate on to reinvigorate Millennial attendance?

15. Thank you for submitting to this survey. Your participation will be extremely helpful in reinvigorating Millennial attendance in local churches. Please forward all written responses to Sumpterc135@aol.com.
Appendix D

Oral Defense

Declining Church Attendance:
Five Reasons Why Millennials Have Stopped Attending Church

ABSTRACT

- Declining church attendance despite rise in US population.
- Review Research data collected by Barna Group, Pew Research, Hartford Institute
- Conduct surveys on Millennial attendance
- Identify top five reasons and offer solutions to mitigate decline.
Church History

- Attendance declining since the 1980s
- 1980, 62% attended weekly service
- 2014, 40% attend weekly service
- Rise of the nones (*religiously unaffiliated*)
- 31% Millennials attend weekly service vs 42% of Generation X

Who are the Millennials?

- Young adults ages 22 to 37 years old
- Largest most diverse generation; 40% minorities
- Gen X and Baby Boomers are 25% minorities
- More diverse, more optimistic, better educated
- Lower delinquent behavior, juvenile crime rate, teen pregnancy, abortion rate, drug abuse
Statement of the Problem

- Declining attendance among Millennials
- Failure to act will result in decrease in attendance and number of churches needed
- 1,000 start-up churches with 4,000 closing each year; net loss of 3,000 each year (Schaffer Institute)
- 1990, 27 churches/10,000 people; 2000, 11/10,000 (Schaffer Institute)

Methodology

- Increase disaffiliation of Millennials results in declining attendance.
- Gather secondary data from research organizations like Pew and Barna Research and the Hartford Institute of Religious Research
- Gather primary data from the Millennial survey seeking qualitative answers only
- Compile/analyze data to ascertain why Millennials stopped attending church
Meet the Millennials
(Chapter 2)

• Most studied generation in history
• Largest generation in US; In 2014, Millennials totaled 75.4m vs Boomers@ 74.9m (Pew, US Census)
• Size of Boomers decreasing due to mortality rates
• For this study; Millennials are 22-37 years old

Contrasting Generations

• Greatest Generation born before 1928; 80-100 yrs old, 2% of us Population
• Silent Generation – 1928 to 1945; 70-87 yrs old
• Baby Boomers – 1946 to 1964; 54-72 yrs old
• Generation X – 1965 to 1980; 38-53 years old
• Millennials – 1981 to 1998; 22-37 yrs old
Socioeconomic Influence

- Socioeconomic environment
- Clinton/ Lewinski scandal, Unabomber, OKC bombing, Ruby Ridge, Columbine, Aids epidemic, DC Sniper, VT Massacre, home computer, Great Recession
- Lower drop-out rate, drug use, crime rate and team oriented
- More tolerant and liberal on social, political and religious views

Marriage, Family and the Church

- Millennials have different family values
- 40% of Millennials vs 20% of Boomers lived in non-traditional families (1 or both parent missing in home)
- 1960 Average age of marriage; Men 22.8, Women 21.3
- 2018 Men 29.5, Women 27.4
- Reluctance toward marriage w/44% calling it obsolete (Taylor, Next America)
- Married adults attend church more often than singles
Most Educated Generation

• 72% Graduated HS, highest in 2 decades
• **55% Will have some college by age 28 versus**
• 49% of Gen X, 36% of Boomers, 24% of Silent
• Females surpassed males on college campuses
• *Increased education fueled by Great Recession*

Religion

• Less religious than older generations
• Teens extremely active in church
• Between ages 18-29, 43% drop in attendance
• Equates to about 8 million young adults
• Discontentment with church/leadership not God
Secularization /Rise of the *Nones*

- *Nones* are the religiously unaffiliated
- 1950, *Nones* were 2% of the population
- 1970, *Nones* were 7% of the population
- 2013, *Nones* were 20% of the population
- 2014, *None* population estimated at 55.8 million (25-28 million Millennials)

Theories why *Nones* on the Rise

- Generational replacement (35% Millennials are *nones*)
- Political Backlash- rejection of conservative or partisan politics
- Delays in Marriage- singles don’t do church
- Broad social disengagement- decline in social capital, people rejecting community
- Secularization-“Is God Dead?”
Conclusions
(Chapter 2)

- Must not delegitimize/underestimate approx. 80 million Millennials
- *Largest* Generation in US
- 35% of the workforce
- Will become *largest* voting electorate
- Need to understand and embrace or feel the catastrophic effects on church attendance

Q4/Are you active, affiliated but seldom attend or have no affiliation?

- 43% Active
- 30% Affiliated but seldom attend
- 26% No affiliation compared to 35% (Pew)
- 56% *seldom or don’t attend*
- Influences church attendance
Q5/Do you believe in God?

- **87% Believe in God**
- 89% Believe in God (Pew)
- Key question- When people say they believe in God, what do they mean? (Pew)
- Belief in God does not translate into church attendance

Q7/Worst Church Experience

- 21% Had no bad experiences
- **14% Perceived hypocrisy**
- 14% Perceived materialism
- **12% Perceived uninspiring sermons**
- 7% experienced non-doctrinal teachings
Q8/ Three Reasons Why you Attend Church

- **21% Millennials overwhelmingly want fellowship with other Millennials** (Barna, 22%)
- 13% Want spiritual fulfillment
- 9% Seek a relationship w/God
- 13% Want to be uplifted
- 6% Want encouragement
- 38% Don’t attend

Q9/ Why Affiliated but Don’t Attend

- **31% Sermons not clear or relevant**
- 13% Work schedule
- 13% Atheist/Agnostic
- 10% Lack of diversity
- 10% Materialism
### Q12/ What Could Cause you to Distrust God?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nothing, don’t distrust God</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of faith</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-centeredness</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suffering a loss</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence of God</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Q13/ Worship Experience Caused you to Distrust the Church?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materialism</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypocrisy</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgmental</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-centeredness</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not inclusive</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-believers (atheist and agnostic)</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q14/ Why less active after Graduation

• **23% Job/Military**
• 16% More active lifestyle
• 13% College obligations (classes, homework)
• 6% Make own decisions
• *Having a job was the number 1 reason why Millennials were less active*
• Reflective of change in priorities

Q15/ Desired Ministries

• 20% Young adult ministries
• 15% Job fairs or career seminars
• 10% Social Fellowship
• These ministries point to the desire for a relational church that is relevant and tackles the needs of Millennials
Q16/ Actions to Reinvigorate Attendance in the Church

- **26% Overwhelmingly, said less Judgmental**
- 10% Be more receptive
- 10% Be more accepting of others
- **7% Relevant sermons**
- **5% Young adult ministries**
- 5% Less Traditional
- **5% Mentorship Program**
  - Millennials did not mention a change to service protocols or Christian doctrine

Conclusion

(Chapter 3)

Millennials
- Desire a relational church that speaks to their needs
- Want social fellowship and a place where they feel they belong
- Need a mentorship program and desires friendship in the church.
- Fellowship, friendship and mentorship are anchors that help retain Millennials after graduation
Does College Education Undermine Religion?  (Chapter 4)

- 40% of Millennials are college grads (Pew, 2016)
- 32% Gen X, 26% Boomers are college grads
- Most respondents in this study were college students or college graduates
- No respondent said that college influenced their religiosity or belief in God
- Harvard study said college did not alter the religiosity of Millennials

Religion and Belief in God

- **87% Believe in God**
- 44% Regularly attend church
- 56% Believe in the God of the Bible (Pew)
- Acts 17:22-23 Belief in an “UNKNOWN GOD”
- No linear correlation between belief in God and church attendance
Relevancy of the Gospel

- **31% Sermons not relevant or clear**
- 31% Church is boring
- 20% Church is missing God
- Millennials said sermons have no meaning and their needs are not being addressed (Barna survey)
- Barna Research and Thomas Rainer said churches need to overhaul how they teach Millennials

Trust in the Church

- 90% People overwhelmingly think the church is a force for good (Pew)
- However, all generations losing trust in the church
- *Millennials distrust institutions including the church*
- Reasons why; hypocrisy, materialism, judgmental, ineffective sermons, non-doctrinal teachings
Trust in God
(Good News/Bad News)

• 87% In this survey, Millennials overwhelmingly believe in God (Barna found 90% for all adults)
• 44% Expressed strong trust in God
• Responses that could shake their trust in God were individual failures, not God’s
• Only 56% of adults believe in the God of the Bible (Pew)
• 44% Believe in a deity or a higher power

Reason Millennials Attend Church

• **21% Overwhelmingly said Fellowship**
• Millennials want a relational church where they can belong and feel welcomed
• They are not concerned about a flamboyant sanctuary
• Relationship, Friendship, Mentorship
Ministries Desired by Millennials

- **Relational Church that addresses their needs**
- Young Adult ministries, job fairs, social fellowship events
- Friends or fellowship help them feel accepted and valued
- 7 of 10 drop out of church w/o a close friend
- Techniques include retreats, small groups, social events, mentoring programs, discipleship training

Actions to Reinvigorate Millennial Attendance

- 26% Overwhelmingly said *less judgmental* (greatest perceived flaw of the church)
- 10% More receptive (listen)
- 7% More accepting of their friends
- 7% Relevant sermons
- 5% Young adult ministries
- 5% Less traditional Church
- 5% Mentorship programs
## Recommendations

- Millennials not monolithic in their view of the church/most widely shared views extracted from research
- Make sermons relevant and clear
- Make church relational w/social fellowship
- Minimize judgmental behavior/ greatest negative perception of Millennials
- Establish Young Adult Ministries
- Establish Mentorship programs


February 14, 2017

Charles Sumpter

IRB Approval 2767.021417: Declining Church Attendance: Five Reasons Why Millennials Have Stopped Attending Church

Dear Charles Sumpter,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971