LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

ENGAGEMENT OF MILLENNIALS: UNDERSTANDING THE DECLINE WITHIN GREATER HARTFORD AREA CHURCHES

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Victor Thomas

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

August 18, 2021

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ABSTRACT

Recent trends reveal the sharpest decline in Church attendance in the Greater Hartford area has occurred within the population known as the Millennials. A question that is looming and of significance in this decade is what causes this generation to be attracted to some Churches and not others? Ten Protestant inner-city Churches within the Greater Hartford Area were studied to discover if there is a nexus between millennial participation, church leadership, and tools for equipping the millennial population of the church body. This study discovered several factors which impact millennial engagement which include, social influences, political ideologies, technology, and generational gaps as major drivers of Millennial engagement. Authenticity in leadership, acceptance, and technology were the top 3 emergent themes from the coded data. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explore the perceptions of Millennials and senior pastors of the motivating factors which lead to engagement. For the purpose of this study, Millennials are defined as those born between 1981 to 1996 or aged 24-39. The servant leadership authored by Robert K. Greenleaf was helpful in understanding engagement levels for this study. The current study provides Church leaders with a knowledge of the preferences and servant leader characteristics that attract and engage Millennials.

Keywords: Millennials, servant leadership, spiritual formation, spirituality, unchurched

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Dedication

To my eldest brother Leslie Thomas Jr, who passed away in February of 2019, a great example of humility who inspired and role modeled for me at a very early age a love for reading and learning. I owe a tremendous debt to my grandmother, Iola, who prayed unceasingly for me until her death at 101 years of age. To my wife and three children I devote this research to: Danielle Shevon, Victoria Marie, Tommie Isaiah, and Lauryn Ashanti who are the wind beneath my wings. I am forever grateful for their love, grace, and support.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation is result of a life-long encouragement from many mentors to dream big in all aspects of life. But dreams are never accomplished in isolation; they require the help of others along the way who are willing to believe in you, encourage you, and motivate you when needed. I would like to thank my mother, Mary Jean Thomas, for her support and for believing in my potential and encouraging me to pursue my dreams. Additionally, I thank my spiritual mentors, the late Rev. Marshall Williams, the late Bishop Dr. James L. Fenner, Sr., and my spiritual father Pastor Tyler J. Prude who spent countless hours teaching me what passionate devotion to Christ looked like while helping to shape my ministry values and theology. I am also thankful for the support and guidance of my Dissertation Supervisor Dr. Gary Bredfeldt and the dissertation committee members for their guidance, support, and encouragement.

Finally, I am thankful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and all the afore-mentioned angels of hope who encouraged me to become a life-long learner. “Study and do your best to present yourself to God approved, a workman (tested by trial) who has no reason to be ashamed, accurately handling and skillfully teaching the word of truth. II Timothy 2:15 (Amplified Bible).

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List of Abbreviations

American Methodist Episcopal (AME)

Cultural Intelligence (CQ)

Greater Hartford Area (GHA)

Keep It Spiritual Stupid (KISS)

Key-words-in-context (KWIC)

King James Version (KJV)

Liberty University (LU)

Hartford Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance (HIMA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Instagram (IG)

Mount Olive Church Ministries (MOCM)

National Baptist Convention (NBC)

Novel Coronavirus – (COVID – 19)

Olivet Nazarene University – (ONU)

Pew Research Center (PRC)

Semi-structured Interviews (STI)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Songwriter George Benson in 1977, originally wrote the song entitled The Greatest Love All. In this piece of music, he states, "I believe the children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way" Indeed, children need to understand the importance of developing a spiritual life; however, today's churches are seeing a sharp decline of participation from Church Millennials. Without young adult participation, the future of the Church is in jeopardy. "The decline in Millennial's affiliation causes significant management concerns for religious leaders" (Waters & Bortree, 2012, p. 201). According to Hadaway (2006), congregations in which more than 40% of their regular participants are over 60 are very unlikely to grow" (p. 3). Roozen (2011) reported that the aging of Protestant congregations is a factor that has contributed to the decline in Church attendance and will grow worse in coming years.

One of the reasons the Church has experienced the decrease with Millennials is beliefs and behaviors. Millennials embrace, which are different from those of previous generations, such as the Silent Generation and the Baby Boomers. According to Wuthnow (2010), our viewpoints as humans are shaped, to a great extent, by our life situations, experiences, and environment. Wuthnow identified the following trends that have impacted the religious views and behaviors of young adults: "delayed marriage, having children later, uncertainties over work and money, rising education levels, globalization, and the technology information explosion" (Wuthnow, 2013, p.10). Hall and Delport agreed that because of shifting trends, "the spirituality of the contemporary young adult is unlike that of previous generations" (Hall and Delport, 2013, p.3).

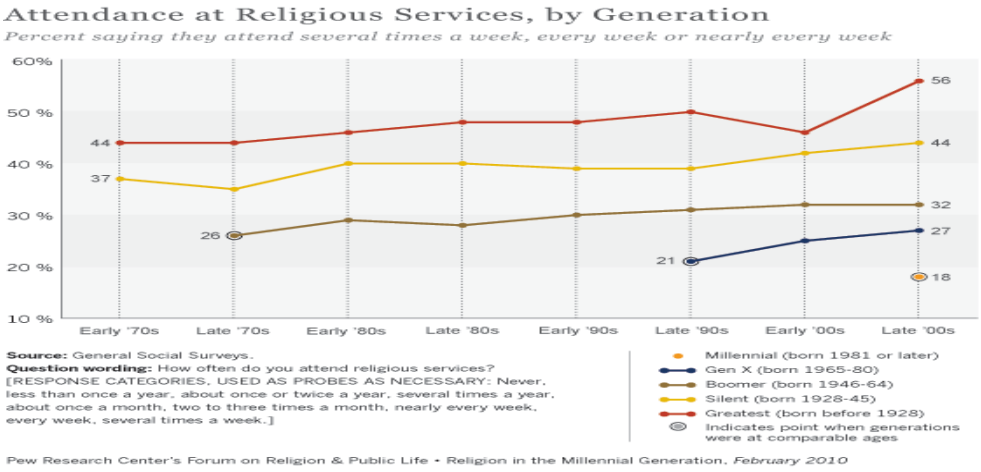
According to Horell (2004), the complexities of postmodernism have created an environment in which the meaning and values of traditional religious structures are no longer adequate for Millennials. This lack of adequacy has affected millennial attitudes regarding the need for institutional religion and Church attendance. Postmodernism has created a feeling that "the established truths of Christian worldviews are less and less helpful as guides for our lives and faith communities" (Horell, 2004, p. 9). The postmodern philosophy, which claims truth is whatever a person deems it to be, rather than what an

institution declares it to be, has led to a questioning of traditional authority structures. This suspicion toward authority structures such as the Church has led Millennials to turn to popular culture for religious guidance (Horell, 2004). Poe (2001) described the shift from a modern to a postmodern sense of authority. This shift has led to a decline in a significant group in the Church, the Millennials.

A nationwide study as far back as 2010 shows the fewer Millennials are attending Church services than ever before. According to a survey by Pew Research, the numbers are staggering across the country, as highlighted in Figure (APA 7th ed, p.55). In the New England area, ten protestant Churches continue to see the same trends as outlined in the approved use of data supplied by Pew Research. (See appendix A)

Figure 1

Attendance in Religious Services



Note. Millennial attendance by generation

Poe (2001) identified a critical issue of generational-centric church attendance that has impacted Churches nationwide and across denominational lines. This study focuses on Churches within the Greater Hartford Area (GHA), which comprises several Churches varying in size, denomination, and local geography. To that extent, Millennials within this area have cited issues with the integrity of leadership as a factor in declining their participation in the Church. "Integrity is important and the presence of an authentic view of serving the community" (D. Williams, personal communication, July 29, 2020). It is evident that one of the major salient

issues that have plagued the Church deals with leadership credibility. In this regard, Kay (2018) states,

> When you practice personal leadership, you use every ounce of your potential with inspiration instead of perspiration, synergy instead of sacrifice, and wisdom instead of work. Personal leadership is so important, in fact, that renowned management expert Peter Drucker once called it the only leadership that's going to matter in the 21st century. (Kay, 2018, p.1)

Dallas Willard explains:

> If we are to be spiritually formed in Christ, we must have and must implement the appropriate vision, intention, and means. Not just any path we take will do. If this "VIM" pattern is not put into place properly and held there, Christ simply will not be formed in us. And here, in a nutshell, is the explanation of the widespread failure to attain Christian maturity among both leaders and followers, referred to earlier. (Willard, 2016, p. 85)

These issues have caused many to doubt and question their faith and led to a falling away from the fold. Credibility in leadership is paramount in developing Church leaders who model the life of Christ and seek to build the kingdom. However, the absence of Christ-like or servant leader traits has caused many to doubt their faith in leadership and more importantly the Church, mainly the Millennials. "The decline in Millennial's affiliation causes significant management concerns for religious leaders" (Waters & Bortree, 2012, p. 201). According to Hadaway (2006), congregations in which more than 40% of their regular participants are over sixty years of age are very unlikely to grow, while Roozen (2011) reported that the aging of protestant congregations is a factor that has contributed to the decline in Church attendance and will grow worse in coming years. These factors have highlighted the greater need for current Church leadership to seek to understand ways to reignite the millennial generation as they witness this population fall away from the Church. The GHA is no exception to this as many of their Millennial population state they have no religious affiliation at all. A study conducted by Barna group (2013) identified religious trends of Millennials.

> Four in ten Millennials now say they are religiously unaffiliated, according to the Pew Research Center (PRC) in 2019. In fact, Millennials (those between the ages of 23 and 38) are now almost as likely to say they have no religion as they are to identify as Christian" (Barna group, 2013). A survey conducted by the Barna Group, 2013, a leading research organization whose focus is on faith and culture, found that less than 1 percent of the young adult population in the United States has a biblical worldview. Even more startling, the data shows that less than one half of one percent of Christians between the ages of 18 and 23 has a biblical worldview. The falling away from the Church and religious skepticism has to do with the practitioners of religion. (Barna, 2013, para.5)

As stated previously, credibility has eroded due to some religious people being immoral, dishonest, and self- serving. Willard remarks, "That is why today, you find many professing Christians, circling back to non- Christian sources to resolve the problems of their inner life" (Willard, 2012), p. 86). The moral fiber of leadership today has eroded because many leaders are concerned about what they left in order to pursue God in their callings. This has caused many leaders to fall to sin when they fail to pursue God and long for the previous appetites of the flesh, they sin.. One of the issues that impacts credibility and has caused many religious skeptics is the fact many have had bad experiences with religion in the past. According to the Barna Group (2013), "The biggest reason religious skepticism has grown among Millennials (those born between 1985 and 2002) rests on personal interactions with "Christians" were perceived to be un-Christian" (Barna Group 2013, para. 5). Leaders must be accountable to the word of God by having and authentic, personal relationship with God.

Reported, religious hypocrisy has left many disillusioned and disengaged from the faith that once solidified the western world. A key issue that is not often talked about is the subtleness of racism and lack of diversity in the church that can cause credibility of the leader's integrity, or completeness to be called into question. Diversity in thought and opinions in American Churches today have created an opportunity for leaders to engage Millennials. These differences further add to the complexities that exist with leaders losing credibility because Sunday mornings are

considered the most segregated time in America across many Churches. “I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ. Mohandas Gandhi” (Slaughter, 2010, p.27). Recapturing the vision of going into the highways and the byways of society must be something Christian leaders begin to focus on. True followers of Jesus Christ must lead like Jesus Christ and have a servant leader mentality if they are to capture the hearts and minds of the Millennials who are leaving their Churches. Slaughter (2010) argues: “Followers of Jesus are committed to relationships of integrity and truth. But somewhere along the way, we have lost sight of the spirit of the one who embodies truth” (p.29). This research examined the participation rates of Millennials within ten Churches in the GHA.

Background to the Problem

Churches throughout the New England area have seen a sharp decline in participation and attendance. “As religious affiliation shrinks among Millennials, here’s how Connecticut residents interact with religion and how institutions are trying to attract younger members” (Vallejo, 2020, p.12) One of the groups most impacted by the decline in attendance in churches in the Greater Hartford Area of Connecticut are the Millennials. The question arises is what causes this age group to be attracted to some Churches and not others? Some Churches in the GHA seem to thrive with millennial engagement while others have seen a sharp decline in overall engagement from the same group. This study examined ten protestant Churches in the Greater Hartford Area, by examining the perception of Millennials and leaders within those Churches as to what leads to engagement levels. Although change is inevitable the question arises at what length is the church willing to accept the change in which Millennials seek. Tickle (2008) argues a new season of radical change has affected every area of society including the church.

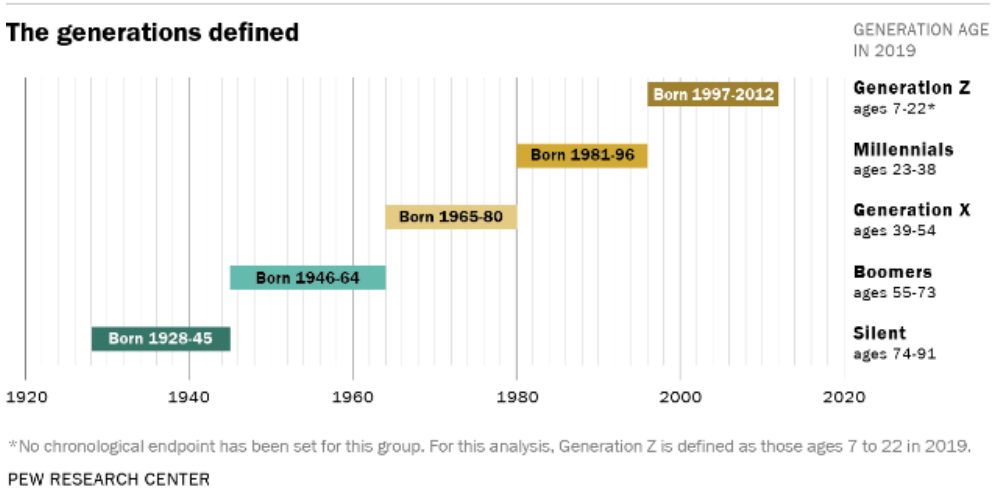
> Those changes have been rapid and all encompassing, intellectually, politically, economically, culturally, sociologically, religiously, psychologically, every part of us and

> how we live has, to some greater or lesser degree, been reconfigured and those changes are now becoming a genuine maelstrom around us. (Tickle, 2008, p. 25)

By their own admission, the beliefs and behaviors of this generation are very different from the generations before them, as stated by a millennial named Archie who said, “We are really different from either Gen X or the Boomers” (Rainer & Rainer, 2011, p.15). The approved use of the following Pew Research diagram defines these generations in figure two (See Figure 2).

Figure 2

Generations Defined



Note. Pew Research Generations defined by year of birth.

These differences extend beyond religious preferences into the overarching worldview of the millennial generation according to Rainer and Rainer (2011). An example of this would be how Millennials view work/life balance compared to previous generations. The issue of work/life balance is important to this generation (Becton, Walker & Jones-Farmer, 2014). While Millennials want to be financially secure and make a good income, they are unwilling to become workaholics in order to get ahead (Rainer & Rainer, 2011). They value time spent with their families and friends more than career advancement. This has led previous generations to label them as lazy and unwilling to do whatever it takes to get the job done. The truth is that they have

chosen to adopt a value system that is the opposite of the Baby Boomer generation, who often sacrificed family time and relationships in pursuit of their careers (Smith & Galbraith, 2012). When given the choice between a 10% raise and two extra days of vacation, Millennials chose the latter in order to be with their families (Smith & Galbraith, 2012).

This generation, unlike previous generations has been affected by the speed of technological advance that has occurred in our culture. Millennials have grown up in the world of the cell phone. “Seven out of ten Millennials say the cell phone is vital in their lives” (Rainer & Rainer, 2011, p.43). Some of the methods of communication they utilize include texting, Facebook®, Snapchat®, and email. According to a Pew Research (2010) study75% of 18–29-year old’s have a profile on a social networking site. These social media sites include Instagram, Facebook®, Twitter® as well as Tik Tok®. Because of their immersion into technology, the Millennials have been referred to as the connected generation (Pew Research Center). According to Booher (2016), Millennials are more connected to technology than any previous generation. One reason this generation communicates more often is because of the high value they place on relationships. According to Rainer and Rainer (2011), when Millennials were asked what was most important in their lives, 61% or 732 of the 1,200 surveyed responded that family was the most important thing in their lives, followed by their friends.

One of the reasons relationships are so important to this age group is because they have seen and experienced the disintegration of the family to a greater degree than any other generation. Surprisingly, millennial views of marriage are traditional with 80% stating that they only plan to marry once (Rainer & Rainer, 2011). When it comes to the subject of religion and the Church, Millennials embrace some beliefs that are very different compared to previous generations, however, they are no different when it comes to some traditional beliefs. “For

instance, out of 1,865 Millennials surveyed, (75% vs. 74%) are just as likely as older adults to believe in life after death, heaven (74% each), hell (62% vs. 59%), and miracles (78% vs. 79%)" (Pond, Smith & Clement, 2010, p. 16). According to Hall (2013), one of the areas where Millennials differ in philosophy with the past is that they do not feel the need to attend Church services. However, 80% indicated that spiritual principles guide their lives (Hall & Delport, 2013). According to Schweitzer (2013), spirituality has increased in postmodern times, but that increase has not occurred in the area of institutional religion.

Statement of the Problem

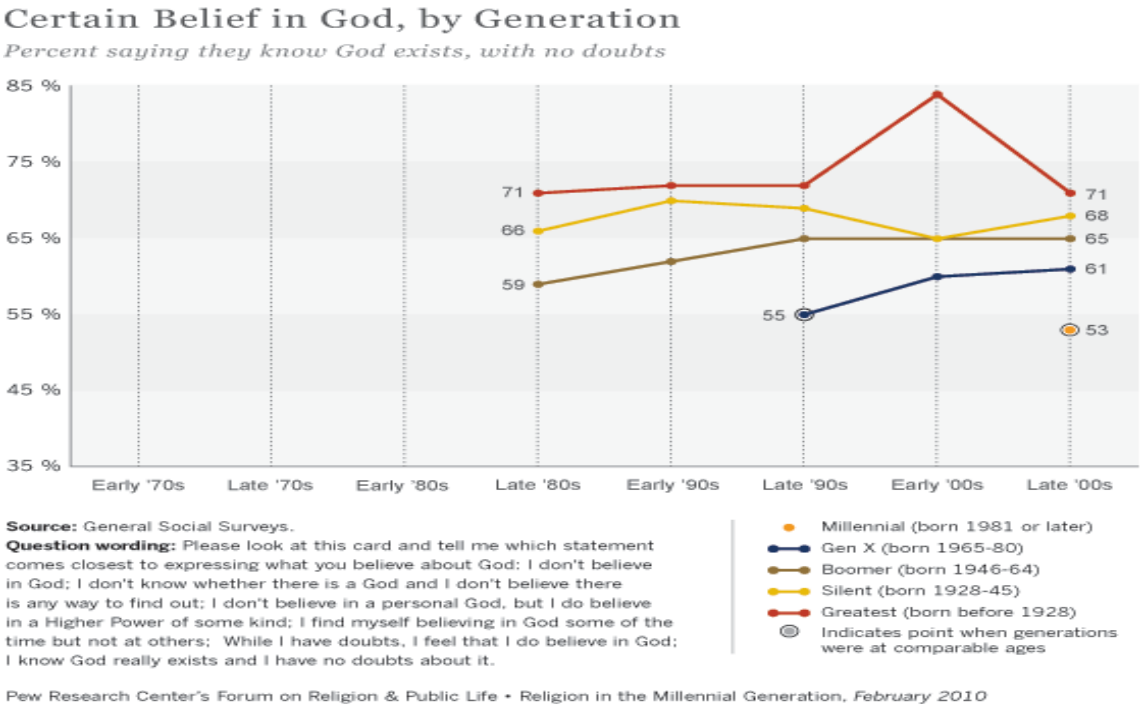
One of the problems facing Churches in the New England area more specifically the Greater Hartford Area, are the perceptions of Millennials and leaders as to what motivates attendance and engagement within the millennial generation. In order to understand the problem, we must define it, and Creswell states: “A problem might be defined as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 50). The future of the Church is at stake, for without young adult participation, the future of the Church is in jeopardy. “The decline in Millennials’ affiliation causes significant management concerns for religious leaders” (Waters & Bortree, 2012, p. 201). According to Hadaway (2006), “congregations in which more than 40% of their regular participants are over 60 are very unlikely to grow” (Hadaway, 2006, p. 3). Roozen (2011) reported that the aging of Protestant congregations is a factor that has contributed to the decline in church attendance and will grow worse in coming years.

Additionally, studies show Millennials are falling away and have no religious affiliation as compared to years past. A study by Pew Research shows how Millennials are increasingly falling away and have a postmodern view of the existence of God. “Young adults are less

convinced of God's existence than their elders are today; 64% of young adults say they are absolutely certain of God's existence, compared with 73% of those ages 30 and older" (Pew Research, 2018). Millennial's belief in an existing God has been eroded with the reemergence of postmodern beliefs which allow them to interpret things based on thought rather than scripture. Churches are surrounded by the challenges of reaching a population of young adults who are shaped by the society in which they live. The emergence of the acceptance of foundational beliefs such as homosexuality (LGBT) movements have rocked the Church and challenged it on how to deal with this belief system and reach not only the millennial population but also a changing dynamic in the nation. Acceptance and nonacceptance of these beliefs as seen in Figure 3 represent Millennials and their belief systems on the existence of God.

Figure 3

Belief in God



Note. Pew Research generational belief in God

Because of this downward trend, Churches need to find ways to reach and involve young adults in the life of the Church. Further research is needed to identify strategies that will enable the Church to attract young adults and subsequently involve them in the life of the Church (Van der Merwe, 2013).

While this is fully not agreed upon theory, other studies show that engagement levels of Millennials are in fact improving.

Staton Stated:

> Wheaton College's Ed Stetzer is among the small group of scholars around the world doing strong and consistent academic work specifically in the area of young adults. While interviewing Stetzer, he explained to me some very important data from the University of Chicago's universally respected General Social Survey (GSS). He said, "If you look at young evangelical adults, eighteen to twenty-nine years old, we are at the highest reported levels since 1972 of regular Church attendance amongst this group" That's a pretty big deal. (Stanton, 2019, p.100)

An expert in the study of young adults, Christian Smith states "emerging adults today appear no less religious than those of previous decades, when it comes to daily prayer, Bible beliefs, and strong religious affiliation" (Smith, 2019, p. 102). Two other scholars in this field share the same view. Lisa D. Pearce and Melinda Denton (2011) advise in their book*, A Faith of their Own*, that faith among adolescents has remained stable over the last few decades.

The opposing views as to perceptions of millennial engagement and attraction further leads to the need to understand this phenomenon in the Greater Hartford area of Protestant Churches who have seen the opposite impact. This study will examine ten Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area of Churches and the perceptions and motivating factors that contribute to the decline of engagement. Two populations will be examined, Millennials who are between the age of 24-39 and the senior pastors of the Protestant Churches identified.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explore the perceptions of Millennials and senior pastors as to motivating factors which lead to engagement. This study within the GHA was comprised of ten Protestant Churches of varied denominations and sizes. At this stage in the research, Millennials were defined as anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 24 to 39 in 2020).

The theory guiding this study is based on Servant leadership. The researcher sought to understand if Millennials are seeking leadership from a biblical world view which is heavily focused on spiritual formation, servant leadership, and integration of technology. Greenleaf first presented the theory in a 1970 essay "The Servant as Leader." Although, many other theorists have contributed to our understanding of servant leadership. One theorist, Larry Spears, outlined ten characteristics of servant leaders by analyzing the writings of Greenleaf. These ten characteristics are listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the motivating factors which lead to participation within the Church?

RQ2. What are the motivating factors which lead to leaving a Church?

RQ3. To what degree does technology play a role in millennial engagement?

RQ4. To what degree does servant leadership play a role in millennial engagement?

RQ5. What are senior pastors' perceptions of motivating factors contributing to engagement of Millennials within their Churches.

Assumptions and Delimitations

Research Assumptions

Assumptions are inherent to the study. The assumptions guiding this study were as followed.

1. The researcher assumed that individuals would respond honestly to the interview questions posed regarding their lack of engagement within the Churches chosen.

2. The researcher assumed that an issue that may arise in the semi-structured interviews is that of response bias. Individuals asked to participate in the study may seek to answer questions in ways that they believed the interviewer wanted them to. Attempts to prevent biased answers to the questions were made by reminding participants that they will have the option to skip or return to a question at a later time, to use clear language, to repeat a question or explain more in-depth, and to remain neutral throughout the interviewing process.

3. The researcher assumed that confidentiality of all participants' identities will encourage open and honest participation.

4. It is assumed that Millennials are disengaging from Church in general and that actions can be taken to reverse this trend.

Delimitations of the Research Design

This research was delimited in the following ways.

1. This research is delimited to ten inner-city Protestant Churches identified within the Greater Hartford Area.

2. The ten Protestant inner-city Churches with five alternate churches.

3. This research was further delimited to Millennials born between 1981 and 1996, within the ages of 24-39 who are actively attending the ten Protestant inner-city Churches identified within the Greater Hartford Area

4. This research was further delimited to Senior pastors within the ten Protestant inner-city Churches within the Greater Hartford area.

Definition of Terms

1. *De-Churched:* Refers to "any individual that once was part of a local congregation but has since neglected the fellowship of the Church" (Rainer & Rainer, 2008).

2. *Drop-Out:* Refers to "an individual that has left the Church between the ages of 18 and 22" (Rainer & Rainer, 2008).

3. *Engagement:* The term is to describe how Millennials engage with religion, causes, and social issues. (The Millennial Impact Report, 2020).

4. *Generational cohorts:* The term is used to "categorize a group of people with similarities, an era in which individuals were born, and when they came of age" (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2012).

5. *High Attraction Churches:* The term is used to describe those Churches who seek to create an appealing Church service and programs that will attract unbelievers and produce events and worship gatherings that are attractive to a demographic (Thinktheology.org, 2016)

6. *Millennial:* This term refers to individuals born after 1981-1996 (Pew Research Center, 2010; Waters & Bortree, 2012).

7. *Spirituality:* "A worldview in which individuals hold a more comprehensive understanding of self and hold belief in a larger reality than what is experienced in the natural world" (Dancy, 2010).

8. *Servant Leadership:* "Servant leadership" was coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in The Servant as Leader, an essay that he first published in 1970. In that essay, Greenleaf said: "The servant-leader is servant first" (Greanleaf,1970).

9. *Unchurched:* Refers to individuals who do not belong to any Church (Rainer & Rainer, 2008, p. 20).

Significance of the Study

Because of the rapidly shifting culture, many Churches have struggled to understand Millennials, and what has led to the inability to attract and maintain Millennial engagement levels within inner-city Greater Hartford area. In many cases, Churches and pastors lack awareness that the environment they have created is not conducive to attracting millennial attendance and participation in their congregations. According to Blank and Ballard (2002), "If the younger generations are going to be impacted with the Christian message, the community of believers must not start with an evaluation of the generation but begin with an evaluation of the Church" (p. 16).

The solution to reversing the declining rate of millennial attendance in Churches is multi-faceted. It must be understood that Churches must take the time to understand the unique beliefs,

behaviors, and needs of this generation, but it cannot end there. Churches must be willing to examine their attitudes, practices, methodologies, and environment and be willing to change if they hope to reverse the current trend and attract Millennials. The purpose of this study was to help Church leaders within the New England Area understand what characteristics attract Millennials to the Church to equip congregations to reach them more effectively. However, this study can be used on a wider scale to assist Churches not within the targeted population. Prior research indicates how Millennials and churches are seeking to solve the relational issues that exist. In understanding what Millennials are seeking Rainer, Blank and Ballard stated the following in regard to Millennial's thoughts on messaging: "Millennials have not lost their faith; they are just tired of Church as usual and are hungry for spiritual experiences that are real, relevant, and authentic" (Rainer & Rainer, 2008). In regard to the same issue, Ballard states, "Churches must do the hard work of translating and presenting the mission and message of Christ to Millennials in a way that is meaningful to their lives" (Blank & Ballard, 2012). This study is significant because effective tools are needed to help Church leaders reach, engage, and disciple younger generations, specifically the Millennials.

Summary of the Design

This research utilized semi-structured interviews of two populations within ten Protestant Churches within the GHA. The two populations are Millennials and senior pastors. This study also aimed to create new knowledge related to this generation and the perceptions related to engagement through the lens of Millennials and senior pastors. It is also aimed to examine various aspects of the research area, namely why Millennials choose certain Churches and leaders, what role technology has in the decision, and the role servant leadership plays will be included in Chapter One. Also provided in this chapter are the conceptual underpinnings of the study, limitations and assumptions, design controls, and key terms that are important to

understanding the topic. Chapter two presents an in-depth review of the literature about members of the Millennial generation, biblical world views, guiding theories which lead to higher participation rates within the Church. Chapter Three will include an outline of the study methodologies. The study findings are presented in Chapter Four, while conclusions and answers to research questions are presented in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

For Churches to grow, they must accept change and work to understand how to engage every population represented in their congregations. Regardless of denomination or geography, leaders must become innovative in their approaches to attract, retain, and develop the next generation of leaders. Churches will need to be Millennial-ready if they want to succeed in today's technological savvy environment. In addition to providing the foundation and understanding for the necessity of this study, this literature review will provide recommendations for creating the most effective ministry tools that will engage Millennials.

This qualitative phenomenological study discusses the type of church organizational culture to which Millennials are attracted. This study determined the expectations and practices Millennials prefer to remain long-term with their current Churches. This chapter reviewed existing literature to provide a foundation and understanding for the necessity of this study.

Theological Framework for the Study

The Scriptures occupy a central place in all theological literature. A good deal of theological literature is polemical, intended against those who challenged Christian orthodoxy. In reviewing Millennial involvement within the Church, it is important to understand the decisions, doctrinal definitions, and disciplinary canons of the Church councils form another genre of theological literature. This section will identify and discuss key theological literature which addresses or creates a background understanding of the decline in millennial participation in the Church. In order to better understand the radical shifts and changes taking place, and to create a roadmap for the future that will attract and engage millennial participation in society and the Church, it is necessary to examine the existing literature on Millennials. The researcher will

examine the following categories related to the attendance decline in Millennials and how it associates to leadership practices.

1. Biblical Theology Framework
2. Millennials and Church Leadership
3. Leadership Implications
4. Organizational/Community Leadership
5. Biblical Authority and Millennials

Biblical Theology Framework

Biblical theology generally has a focus on the teachings and principles of individual authors in the bible. It adds a historical context of Old and New Testament writers and the theological teachings associated with the authors. Biblical theology attempts to understand the importance of all portions of Scripture and their contributions to the theological message of the Bible. Moreover, it attempts to understand how all portions of Scripture contribute to the redemptive plan of God in Christ. Jesus' statement in Luke 24:27 indicated that all of Scripture testifies concerning him. Biblical theology attempts to take this statement as seriously as when reading Isaiah 53 or the Gospel of Matthew as it does Nehemiah or Genesis. Biblical theology is Christocentric.

To better understand the biblical theology, the researcher focused on the theme of discipleship. Discipleship of Millennials is necessary in order for leaders to better understand how Millennials think and feel about participation in ministry. According to Barna Group, “Years of Barna research show that teens and young adults are willing to listen to stories of injustice and hopeful to be a positive change in the world. But they are also looking to the Church to answer some of their questions” (Barna, para 4, 2020). The answer to their questions involves the doctrinal theme of Discipleship. Discipleship is teaching biblical precepts, while modeling and guiding

others toward living righteously as followers of Jesus Christ. This should be a cyclical process—meaning once we are discipled, we are to disciple others. In order to accomplish this, church leaders must develop strategies which engage Millennials in dialogue of their thoughts and beliefs. This engagement process, involves training, commitment, vision and understanding of scriptures from the leaders of churches as well as the Millennials. Jesus makes this clear in (Matthew 28:18-20), where we see that discipleship is not just an option for believers. "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (King James Version, 2020, KJV Math. 28:18-20).

Millennials and Church Leadership

In Blanchard and Hodges (2008), the authors discuss how Jesus transformed twelve ordinary men into leaders that impacted the world 2000 years later. In this book on leadership, based on the characteristics of leaders, leadership is compared to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. Blanchard and Hodges lay out the foundation for developing others to lead like Christ including Millennials. The book gives an overview of the qualities and commitment necessary for Christ centered leadership. It uses Jesus as the role model and guides the reader to understand how Jesus influenced those around Him to think differently and to be the best version of themselves for the good of mankind. In addition to this, the author uses a transformational leadership model that deals with leadership on a personal, community, one on one, and team leadership perspective. The leadership qualities in this book are relevant to this study, as it outlines the transformational leadership qualities Millennials seek in leaders of the church today. Christ centered leadership which creates opportunities to utilize skills and talents are important

to Millennials. This book helps to outline those skills sets needed to accomplish this goal.

The Bible have several examples of leaders such as David, Abraham, and Paul who served God's people by escorting them through the leadership process. One key is to train people to lead like Jesus and follow his commands. One must surrender their life to Jesus as found in Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not to your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path" (KJV). They must give Jesus complete control of their daily life and allow Him to lead and direct every step.

The lesson of preparation found in Luke 15 is designed to foster healing and restore compassion back to the Church. When the Church is set free, it will be open and receptive to receive Millennials back home as the father did with the prodigal Son. This story highlights several pertinent factors that can be employed by the leadership. First, the father in this story represents Jesus Christ, who exemplifies love, forgiveness, and grace. The second point manifests when the father let his son go and blessed him with an inheritance. There is a season when people must be let go. At this point there is comfort in, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (KJV).

Additionally, Barna Group's president and owner, Kinnaman (2016), details the need for this in his book *You lost me, "*Exposes ways the Christian community has failed to equip young adults to live in but not of the world--to follow Christ in the midst of profound cultural change. This wide-ranging study debunks persistent myths about young dropouts and examines the likely consequences for young adults and for the Church if we maintain the status quo" (Kinnaman, 2016, p. 2).

Christian Theology written by Millard Erickson (2013), presents Christian doctrines that explain man's existence in his relationship with God. These principles relate to the inspired

Word of God, which provides the foundation for truth and faith. These truths seem to resonate with Millennials as they are seeking to understand how their relationship with God can be strengthened so that they serve authentically in the church. “I want to know how to strengthen my relationship with Christ because I want my service to be genuine” (Millennial 4, personal statement, January 4, 2021). Erickson’s work on the tenets of Christian doctrine makes this text a critical element in discerning whether or not Millennials understand and base their faith on biblical foundations, rather than opinion, thereby foregoing the Word of God.

Other key theological literature which addresses or creates a background understanding of the decline in Millennial participation in the Church, is the book *Spiritual formation* written by Diane Le Clerc (2014). In this book the author outlines the process Christians experience in becoming more Christlike. The author identifies the power of prayer and faith in developing an intimate relationship with Christ. Utilizing a Wesleyan perspective, it challenges Christians to identify gaps in the spiritual growth process and become transformed by the Word of God. Through a series of scriptures, the author discusses growing in Christ as a means of grace and how the recipient of this grace grows in self-care, faithful study, prayer, and several other spiritual disciplines. There are several sources of information from a theological standpoint that relates to the participation of Millennials within the Church. Some sources are more popular for reading and are short on scholarly content, however, for purposes of theological research, the precedent literature should be focused on how the Church should concentrate on people, not a building, on community, not programs, on scripture study, not showy worship. Thus, the Church must open their hearts so that God can release revival in the land. This is done primarily through leadership competencies possessed by the leaders of the Church.

Leadership Implications

An area of concern which impacts the participation of Millennials within the 21st century Church is leadership. This research sought to understand which specific leadership competency models amongst Church leaders in the New England Area Churches leads to increased millennial participation. Several authors discuss personal leadership as a critical component of establishing credibility in ministry. Peter Drucker (2010) said that being a self-leader is to serve as chief, captain, or CEO of one's own life. Self-leadership (Personal Mastery) is the answer to how do we develop ourselves to survive and thrive in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world.

Covey described leadership as the following: “Personal leadership is the process of keeping your vision and values before you and aligning your life to be congruent with them (Covey, 2021). It is the ability to define a direction for your leadership and life, and to move in that direction with consistency and clarity. Kay (2018) discusses the importance of personal leadership.

Joelle Kay states:

> When you practice personal leadership, you use every ounce of your potential with inspiration instead of perspiration, synergy instead of sacrifice, and wisdom instead of work. Personal leadership is so important, in fact, that renowned management expert Drucker once called it “the only leadership that’s going to matter in the 21st century. (Kay, 2018, p.1).

In essence the author argues that one must practice what they preach and live out those values they expect in other leaders if they want to engage Millennials to become participants again. Livermore indicates that leadership is an important aspect of engagement. Leadership expertise are important, however other characteristics are needed, “As intuitive sense of leadership and expertise in one’s field continue to be valuable leadership assets, but they’re no longer adequate to leverage the global potential that exists” (Livermore, 2015, p. 14). Another

area of leadership which attract and engage millennial participation in society and the Church is organizational and community leadership.

Organizational and Community Leadership

Being inclusive of others who are not in the immediate realm of one's influence is another way to attract Millennials. "Nothing drives teenagers and young adults from the Church faster than being rejected, and nothing draws them in faster than being accepted" (Jenkins, 2019, p. 123). The Bible commands disciples of Christ (Christian leaders, to go into all the world and make disciples. In order to accomplish this, Christian leaders must lead like Christ. Being inclusive of others in the community who may not look similar to your normal crowd- and engaging them in the process of discipleship involves leaders being genuine in their approach. Churches today are seeking to improve in areas of diversity and acceptance which are important areas of interest to Millennials. Yperen (2002) states the following in relation to the foundation of the church and how it relates to resolving conflict.

> The Church is a living organism, not a machine, a body, not a collection of individuals. In the Church, all interpersonal disputes are symptoms of deeper problems impacting or involving the whole body. This is what makes Church conflict different from all others because the Church is founded upon the oneness in Christ. (Yperen, 2002, p.24)

Although there are many things that differ amongst generations, Millennials seek an inclusive environment where they can contribute. In order to lead follower of Jesus Christ must lead like Christ. "Followers of Jesus are committed to relationships of integrity and truth. But somewhere along the way, we have lost sight of the spirit of the one who embodies truth" (Slaughter, 2010, p.29).

Biblical Authority and Millennials

One of the greatest works of literature is the gospel of Jesus Christ (Holy Bible), which give countless of accounts of leaders who have gone through a maturation process to become effective leaders for the Kingdom. Millennials tend to be skeptical of traditional Church, and anyone or anything claiming to be the authority on life and the world. Thus, they tend to be skeptical about the Bible. Studies show that less than nine percent of Millennials claim to read the Bible daily, and less than thirty percent believe the Bible as the unadulterated Word of God. Therefore, in order to understand the decline in millennial participation in the Church, leaders must focus on the maturity of believers in the community by engaging them in the process of spiritual formation. In the Bible, Paul was a great proponent of this process, Paul saw Church as essential for maturity.

> Since maturation is a work of the Spirit, when believers assemble together, and the Spirit is uniquely or more fully present in the work of maturation is uniquely or more fully facilitated. One of the purposes of this chapter is to confirm this theological proposition by providing exegetical evidence that Paul did indeed believe that participation in the local community was essential to the process of maturation" (Samra, 2006, p. 133).

Perhaps maturity in the faith or lack thereof plays a key role in understanding the declining participation issue of Millennials in the Church. Maturity not on the side of the Millennials themselves, but of the leaders who have remained traditional on their approach and not accepted various forms of reaching them through technology and other social mediums.

One common way Millennials have taken to engaging with the Bible in a digital age is to post Scripture passages on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Unsurprisingly, practicing Christian Millennials are most likely to engage in this practice. A combined 81% have posted Scripture online in the past year: 30% do so a few times a year, 25% a few times a month, 13% a few times a week and 13% do so daily (Ford, 2019). If leaders are to

understand how to reclaim millennial participation, they must begin to critically think how to re-engage them in the work of the Church, by having a thoughtful discussion around values and norms. Christian leaders seem to be concerned about the next generation of Christians and there is a well-documented trend of Millennials leaving Church or turning away from their faith. However, this current study which includes the Biblical authority of the Word of God in the lives of Millennials, gives Church leaders some very good news about the Good Book: "Active young Christians are holding true to historical and orthodox views on the Bible. In many ways, their commitment to the Bible stands in stark contrast to typical stereotypes of younger Christians" (Ford, 2019).

Summary

In reviewing the major themes surrounding Millennial's participation and the importance of credibility in Christian leadership, it is apparent Jesus Christ is the model for this process. Several articles and books lean towards the characteristics of Christ as the model and engage the reader in the ministry of Jesus. Spiritual formation and Christian maturity occur when the Christian leader align the heart and live according to the word of God. It is clear credibility is gained not by personal ability, will or might, but by submission to the Savior. A common theme which appears is personal accountability and the need to address the common thread that unites all believers is the story of Jesus Christ. It is important that believers understand and are obedient to God's Word in regard to how it has commanded them to live. Leaders aid in this process by not looking to their own personal merit system but looking to God's Word for the direction. Leaders become credible when they lead with integrity and engage people of all races to build the kingdom. A gap in the literature exists when addressing some of the areas of opportunity which exist as it relates to non- credible leaders and self-reflection. The dynamics surrounding

the modern Church which has caused Millennials to fall away from the Church maybe of further examination and research. To summarize, the Bible and theoretical findings may serve to answer questions and lay a foundation of spiritual direction for the 21st century Church.

Theoretical Literature

In reviewing other pertinent literature that helps to understand the problem of the decline of millennial participation in the New England area Churches. It is also important to understand theoretical literature which examines biblical theology and doctrinal themes which help to understand the research. The theoretical literature review helps to establish what theories already exist, the relationships between them, to what degree the existing theories have been investigated, and to develop new hypotheses to be tested. The unit of analysis can focus on a theoretical concept or a whole theory or framework. In this case the researcher looks to establish the relationship between this literature. According to DeMaria (2013) in the book *Here comes the Millennials*, Millennials, "will have a unique and transformational impact on the world" (Demaria, 2013, p. 1654). This literary work examines the characteristics, traits, values, and views of those born between 1980 and the early 2000s, commonly referred to as the Millennial generation (Guldalian, 2013; Winograd & Hais, 2011), and how their views differ from previous generations. It helps to examine the theoretical framework for understanding who the Millennial generation represent.

To better understand the theoretical framework of this phenomena, the biblical worldview will contextualize the eventual utility of any or all of the mentioned theories in this research. These theories are important in understanding who the Millennials are and helps to examine their likes, dislikes, norms, values, and influences when it comes to religious practices. Religion in and of itself is about servant leadership, and that approach transcends all beliefs regardless of the one that we choose for ourselves.

Transformational/Servant Leadership and the Millennials

Servant leadership as defined "beginning with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first" (Northouse, 2013). The theoretical foundation of leadership and management is heavily embedded into the fabric of transformational leadership. Researcher, Bernard M. Bass (1985), extended the work of Burns (1978) by explaining the psychological mechanisms that underlie transforming and transactional leadership; Bass also used the term "transformational" instead of "transforming." Bass added to the initial concepts of Burns (1978) to help explain how transformational leadership could be measured, as well as how it impacts follower motivation and performance. "The extent to which a leader is transformational, is measured first, in terms of his influence on the followers. The followers of such a leader feel trust, admiration, loyalty and respect for the leader and because of the qualities of the transformational leader are willing to work harder than originally expected" (Bass,1985. p.234). Leadership that is transformational motivates others regardless of generation to become involved in the change process in order to produce transformation in both the individual and the organization. Millennials who participate on a regular basis within New England area Churches cite leadership style as a major driver in whether they seek to engage fully in the ministry process.

One of the biggest areas of difference is expectations from leadership. This was best defined in a Randstad survey at the end of 2016, where the company's chief human resources officer, Jim Link, claimed:

> Millennials wanted to shape where they work and serve". "Millennials aim to contribute, to see that the role they play has a direct tie to a benefit in society – something which is reliant on inspiration from management. They're thus looking for a leader who is best able to share their mission and vision (Link, 2016)

Nothing has changed since then, but further research has delved into the exact leadership styles Millennials value. Millennial minds, for example, unveiled that they respond better when challenged. It also highlighted their appreciation of bosses who actively sought to inspire and engage. Essentially, "transformational leaders", those who worked with staff to pinpoint needed change and relied on all to guide the process, motivated them the most (40.2 %).
Bass (1985) discussed the theory of transformational leadership and raised the issue of defining leadership's fundamental character without resolving it.

Although the concept of transformational leadership was initially introduced by James V. Downton, the first to coin the term transformational leadership, would be further developed by leadership expert and presidential biographer James MacGregor Burns. According to Burns, transformational leadership can be seen when leaders and followers make each other advance to a higher level of morality and motivation. There are four main components of transformational leadership: individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence. Each of these components are positively related to individual and organizational performance. There are higher levels of transformational leadership which translate into commitment to the organization and trust in the leader. In turn, it is that deep commitment to the organization and trust in leadership that motivates Millennials toward superior performance and participation in ministry and other professional endeavors.
Kyers (2010) states:

> Millennials' attributes and expectations that are likely to affect the development of workplace relationships with team and organizational members from other generations also have become focal issues (e.g., Gursoy et al. 2008; Howe and Strauss 2007; Stein and Berardinelli 2009). Popular literature and empirical research indicate that three Millennial preferences are likely to be especially significant for workplace interaction and the development of work relationships.

Servant Leadership and the Millennials

Servant leadership is defined as a leadership philosophy in which the main goal of the leader is to serve. This is different from traditional leadership where the leader's focus is the thriving of their company or organizations. Parrish (2012) states:

> Servant leadership theory emphasizes service and recognition. The role of organizational leaders is to create people who can build a better tomorrow. This theory resonates with scholars and practitioners who are responding to the growing perceptions that corporate leaders have become selfish and who are seeking a viable leadership theory to help resolve the challenges of the twenty first century (Parrish, 2012, p.79).

The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant; first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. This research seeks to understand what motivates Millennials to participate in ministry and what contributes to the decline in millennial participation amongst the New England area Churches. What can be garnered from the observations of those Churches which attract Millennials and those that are struggled to keep them engaged?

> Observations that Millennials need hand holding (i.e., attention), rapid advancement, and job flexibility offer the possibility that the underlying phenomenon is one of powerful egos and selfish ambition. It is suggested that Millennials will actively seek leadership opportunities as well as extrinsic rewards for leadership roles due to parental messages about the benefits of leadership in terms of individual achievement and success. (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010, p.137)

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Millennials as a generation seek knowledge through an extension of relationships and networks and embedded in those relationship are connections that information technology provides. Author George Barner discusses in his book *Turn – Around Churches* (Barner, 1993) strategies that a Church can use to become revitalized when they realize that they are dying due to the lack of millennial participation. The author presents techniques to assess the healthiness of Church members. The solution revolves around developing balanced spiritual methods that will enable healthy Church growth. An important component in the globalization era which identifies

with the millennial generation is the birth of the gadget generation- a term used to mark the emergence of the millennial generation. Gadgets mean devices, such as cell phones and I-pads, "thus the gadget generation refers to a generation who lives side by side with technological devices. In other words, the devices are inseparable parts of their lives. Indeed, high-tech gadgets become an integral part of the Millennial generation" (Zuhal, 2000, p.65).

The question arises why are Millennials leaving? Why is the decline so sharp? Stetzer et al. (2009), Rainer and Rainer (2011), and Barna (2014) have identified numerous reasons why Millennials have left the Church citing busyness, disagreements with Church stances on politics and social issues, and wanting a break from Church. Millennials are leaving because they feel neglected and unaccepted. Some of the feelings involve Millennials stating they are not being utilized or their ideas are not acknowledged. Many have stated they feel unempowered to effect change. These sentiments have forced leaders to become focused on engaging Millennials. Leaders are intentionally seeking to give this generation a seat at the table by forming ministries that focuses itself on the concerns and ideas. Leaders have become more intentional about giving Millennials a voice in the affairs of the Church. The issue occurs when leaders struggle to figure out the most impactful way to engage Millennials without losing credibility. Morgan (2018) discussed this dynamic about Millennials and how they desire to lead and have an impact on the Churches they attend without having to be micromanaged by senior leadership.

> It's similar to when a parent conforms to the desires of a child, giving in to the expressed needs of the one under authority rather than leading the way. The child knows inherently that he/she shouldn't be in charge, just as the Millennial knows he/she isn't qualified to lead a Church family. They want to have a voice but know they shouldn't be the center of the Church's attention. Today's young people are smart and can see through attempts to cater to their expressed needs versus standing firm in biblical principles. They recognize Church plans and programs designed to attract and retain them and they're not buying it – 2/3 in a Gallup poll said Church is of little to no value. They know what's real and what's not. (Morgan, 2018)

Even though Millennials feel they are not valued, there are other issues they are dealing with such as their beliefs about religion. Barna's (2001) book titled, *Real Teens*, paints a very realistic picture of the youth culture and their future across America. Churches regardless of denomination, geography, and tenure show evidence to support the alienation theory, to a point. "They're not all atheists. About one-third of U.S. none's (no religious affiliation)7 say religion is somewhat or very important in their lives and most say they believe in God, though the percentage holding theistic beliefs is falling" (Reis, 2018).

Reiss (2018) states "that's the key: no religious affiliation" (Reiss, 2018). The author believes the alienation theory might be the reason behind the decline of Millennials within American religion. So, if the "strict Churches" theory does not explain why many conservative denominations are experiencing losses, and the "alienation" theory doesn't account for why people are exiting religion entirely rather than merely switching to a faith that's more suitable, what does explain it? He discusses the challenges they face and what strategies are needed to meet them where they are. The summation of this book is placed upon youth knowing the absolute truth about Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Formation and Millennials

Spiritual formation is the process of sanctification in which God uses every circumstance in the lives of all believers for the purpose of conforming them to the image of Christ and making them into loving members of His family. In scripture, the Apostle Paul states that spiritual formation is about the heart and minds of the believer and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote in the book of Romans:

> And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. (*Holy Bible*, *New King James Translation*, 1996/2015, Romans 8:27-29)

Theologically, spiritual formation is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit upon the redeemed human heart which produces the fruit of the character of Christ. However, the theory of spiritual formation concludes that we live in a culture which is particularly charged to pursue spiritual activities and enlightenment, in order to find spiritual meaning in life. The movement toward spiritual formation began in the late 1970's with what Foster (2018) called *Celebration of Discipline*. Foster (2018), in the forward of his book, acknowledges the influence of Dallas Willard in helping him to understand and practice spiritual disciplines that deeply affected his relationship with God. Foster's book and testimony resonated (and continues to resonate) with many Christians who were looking for something more in their spiritual lives. This theory coincides with the spiritual component that Millennials are seeking according to several studies. White states: "Statistics are declaring the decline of religion in America; However, Millennials do care about spirituality. It just looks different." (White, 2020, p.65).

A dissertation entitled, Rescuing the Millennials four essential lessons learned and eight key principles to reclaiming this generation, submitted by Simmons (2018) at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, is an example of precedent literature focused on understanding the decline of millennial participation. It also a practical approach to reclaiming Millennials. Simmons (2018) states:

> Millennials want to be able to participate and contribute to church activities. They desire two-way lines of communication where they will be able to talk, listen, and feel free to ask questions. They want to serve and volunteer where needed in their communities as well as globally (Simmons, 2018, p. 66).

In addition to Simmons, there are other theoretical literature that deals with the decline of Millennial participation within churches. Hansen (2018**)** wrote in response to the decline in millennial involvement within the Assembly of God Churches, "Because of this downward trend, Churches need to find ways to reach and involve young adults in the life of the Church. Further research is needed to identify strategies that will enable the Church to attract young adults and subsequently involve them in the life of the Church" (Van der Merwe, 2013, p.47). The purpose of this research was to determine the factors that caused Millennials to be attracted to some Churches and not others. In this study, the characteristics, and strategies of ten (10) Churches deemed successful in attracting Millennials were examined to identify the reasons for their success. The information was contrasted with the same number of Churches who were identified as unsuccessful in attracting Millennials. It is another form of thematic literature that aided the researcher in understanding the decline and engagement factors of millennial participation within the New England area Churches.

This generation, unlike previous generations has been affected by the speed of technological advance that has occurred in our culture. Previous generations had their own versions of technological advancement, such as the development of automobiles, and rockets into space. However, Millennials have grown up in the world of cell phone data, communication, and having access to that information instantaneously. "Seven out of 10 Millennials say the cell phone is vital in their lives" (Rainer & Rainer, 2011, p.43). Some of the methods of communication they utilize include texting, Facebook, Snapchat, and email. According to a Pew Research (2010) study, 75% of 18 – 29-year old's have a profile on a social networking site. Because of their immersion into technology, the Millennials have been referred to as the connected generation (Pew Research Center, 2010 para.5).

According to Booher (2016), the connection to technology for Millennials continues to rise and be a source of participation in worship more than any other generation. It essentially has become a way for them to build relationships in ways that do not require face to face interactions. According to Rainer and Rainer (2011), when Millennials were asked what was most important in their lives, 61% or 732 of the 1,200 surveyed responded that family was the most important thing in their lives, followed by their friends. One of the reasons relationships are so important to this age group is because they have seen and experienced the disintegration of the family to a greater degree than any other generation.

Surprisingly, millennial views of marriage are traditional with 80% stating that they only plan to marry once (Rainer & Rainer). When it comes to the subject of religion and the Church, Millennials have beliefs that are very different compared to previous generations, however, they are no different when it comes to some traditional beliefs. For instance, out of 1,865 Millennials surveyed, (75% vs. 74%) are just as likely as older adults to believe in life after death, heaven (74% each), hell (62% vs. 59%), and miracles (78% vs. 79%) (Pond, Smith & Clement, 2010, p. 16). According to Hall and Delport (2013), one of the areas where Millennials differ in philosophy with the past is that they do not feel the need to attend Church services. However, 80% indicated that spiritual principles guide their lives (Hall & Delport). According to Schweitzer (as cited in Hall & Delport), spirituality has increased in postmodern times, but that increase has not occurred in the area of institutional religion. Millennials have a vastly different view of religion and the worship experience as related to older populations within the Church. However, there are other factors to consider to better understand the motivating factors which lead to Millennial engagement.

Millennial Exclusion and Disaffiliation

An area of concern for ministries and organizations across denominations is the emerging phenomena of Millennial inclusion and engagement. The issue of the decline of Millennial participation has occurred for various reasons. There is a need to understand the role of leaders as it pertains to developing strategies to engage Millennials in participating in worship and church activities. The construct for this research is to understand the role of the Christian leader as the chief engagement leader for all generations. It is critical for leaders to develop strategies for all generations of believers so that they will fulfill the Great Commission as a unified team. The lack of inclusion has created conflicts amongst the Millennial generation and church leaders.

The existing and steadily growing conflict surrounding religion among Millennials has contributed to plummeting rates of church attendance and participation (Baart, 2018; Gullickson, 2018; Hughes, 2014). According to Hughes (2014), little understanding exists regarding the high rate of religious abandonment in the United States. This lack of inclusion has caused Millennial disaffiliation within the church. Religious disaffiliation in a way that millennials are increasingly less likely participate in ministries who are falling behind in areas such as technology, authentic worship, and progressive with narrowing the generational gaps within their churches. According to Gullickson, "Religious disaffiliation has increased over the past 20 years" (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016; Gullickson, 2018). Increasingly, Millennials lack religious membership or accountability (LeCount, 2017), with several factors being associated with this decline. Lack of acceptance of leaders in Churches in regard to political issues, and the ever-increasing lack of acceptance of LGBTQ issues, lack of opportunities to utilize skills and talents are at the forefront of the disaffiliation.

"Politics, the religious right becoming extreme, and the inflexibility of the Church towards LGBT and other minority groups, were just some of the factors that affect Millennials' departure from religion" (Baart, 2018; Packard & Ferguson, 2018).

Although this is not an all-inclusive list, other factors which have contributed to the decline of Millennial participation, or this religious non-affiliation includes a radically different view on socially and religious accepted practices within the Church. It is essentially a reconfiguration of faith by the Millennials. Fisher stated, "Millennials have adopted changes that lead to opposition of previously held religious beliefs, and doubt regarding previously held faith beliefs" (Fisher, 2017, p. 123). Additional contributors to religious disaffiliation include Millennials becoming more global and inclusive, while Churches become more insular and exclusive (Djupe et al., 2018).

Several other studies indicate there are many other reasons why Millennials may disaffiliate from religious activities. Some of the precedent literature suggests whites, low socio-economic individuals, and those who reside in the geographical region of the Northeastern United States are more likely to experience low rates of religious affiliation. "Alternatively, Millennials who identify as African American and are politically conservative are more likely to be affiliated with a religion" (Twenge, et al., 2015; Waters & Bortree, 2012).

Other reasons for this disaffiliation include Millennials view on authenticity and the lack of technology in some churches. Millennials are tech-savvy and have access to a wealth of information due to social media and other platforms. Many studies have focused on why Millennials leave their church more so than previous generations and have highlighted some important results. Vaughn (2016) discussed that many Millennials leave a church or an entire religious organization, deciding to move into a category of *none's*. The term *None's consist of*

those individuals who disassociate with Churches due to lack of inclusion. These unaffiliated religious individuals have been on the rise throughout the United States, with Millennials moving into this category due to deep spiritual hurts and wounds they experienced at the hands of the Church. These spiritual wounds are derived from ill treatment from older populations, exclusion from leadership roles, and a plethora of other issues.

The attitudes and disaffiliation of Millennials are due to the lack of inclusion and the fact that they view the church as has having a lack of authenticity. This study along with others identified authenticity as one of the major drivers behind Millennial disengagement. Additionally, Fosse (2015) supports the notion of Millennials becoming disaffiliated from religion and cited that due to the increasing trends of science and technology, combined with growing up in a non-traditional household is why the United States is seeing approximately 40% of Millennials moving into a category of *none*. Brauer (2018) purported that many Millennials may decide to disaffiliate due to identifying as religious, but unable to accurately describe their beliefs.

Disaffiliation and Access to Information

Precedent literatures shows that Millennials are the most diverse generation of students in U.S. history (Howe and Strauss 2000), and they have access to more information than any other generation. Consequently, they believe that everyone's voices should be heard and valued (Twenge 2006). Social Media has provided a platform for Millennials to share, their thoughts, opinions, and daily activities by posting them on social media platforms. Researcher's state: "It is a stark example of this belief in action. Millennials are the first generation to grow up digitally (Roehling, Kooi, Dykema, Quisenberry, & Vandlen, 2011). Roehling, et al. (2011) found that several focus groups on the topic of engagement discovered Millennial students value

discussions that are genuine and provide meaning. Millennials are critical thinkers and utilize reflection as a way of forming their core values. With access to information at their fingertips, this group is able to access data faster than any other generation. According to Shaw's (2013) studies, Millennials spend more than fifty-three hours a week on some type of media device.

Miller and Washington (2011) add to those findings by reporting that 91% of Millennials used the Internet in 2010, an increase from 89% who did so 4 years prior. In comparison, older generation had to learn how to use computers, especially at work and Church in the last year due to the COVID pandemic. The Millennials were born into technology as it was built directly into their toys and entertainment (Howe & Strauss, 2000). For Millennials, a smartphone is a "bodily appendage" (Shaw, 2013, p. 101). Shaw's (2013) research exposed that 83% of Millennials sleep with their smartphones by their bedsides, while only 50% of the Boomer generation felt the need to be constantly connected. Shaw (2013) maintains, and Miller and Washington (2011) concur that Millennials are obsessed with technology. Miller and Washington's (2011) report depicts that texting is a more popular activity among Millennials than communicating either by email or social networks, with text exchanges of 18-to-25-year-olds exceedingly more than 200 messages a day. Shaw (2013) also states that technology is important to Millennials for four main reasons: it makes them seem indispensable to older generations, it gives them more freedom from parental control, it allows them to easily assemble their group, and it makes their reach global. Churches who are not embracing the technology age, appear to be alienating this generation of leaders from being engaged in ministry activities. The next section will address the literature associated with the mechanisms which cause disaffiliation amongst the Millennial population.

Disaffiliation and Technology

It is important for ministry leaders to understand the learning style and preferred methods of communication of Millennials in order to facilitate effective ministry (Phillips & Trainor, 2014). Millennial's love learning environments that are engaging, interactive, and experiential (Skiba, 2005). In order for churches to keep up with the ever-changing landscape of communication, they must adapt to the learning styles of Millennials who by default were born into the technology age. Millennials communicate in drastically different ways than those born before them. Adapting to this change in communication, many leaders in the religious community have grappled with dealing with the complexities in which technology has brought to the Christian community. The Church itself has been placed in the position where it has two choices: The Church can decide to reflect or reject the dominant culture of technology. What is meant by this is that the Church is able to choose whether they will begin to adapt to culture and embrace it, or they can decide to become countercultural and reject it completely. Technology has become central to the Millennial movement in that it intersects in many points of their daily lives. Millennials use technology for personal, work related and social reasons, and now the church must develop a meaningful way of using this to disciple others.

Richard Niebhur states,

> Given these two complex realities – Christ and culture – an infinite dialogue must develop in the Christian conscience and the Christian community. In his single-minded direction toward God, Christ leads men away from the temporality and pluralism of culture. In its concern for the conservation of the many values of the past, culture rejects the Christ who bids men rely on grace. Yet the Son of God is himself child of a religious culture and sends his disciples to tend his lambs and sheep, who cannot be guarded without cultural work (Niebhur, 2001. p.78)

Millennials and technology have dominated the changing landscape of communication in various ways. The use of social media platforms, advancement of cell phone technology, texting,

tweeting, video chatting applications and a plethora of other mechanisms has made it necessary for Churches to adapt. According to a study done by Barna Group "Seven out of 10 of practicing Christian Millennials (70%) read Scripture on a screen" (Barna, 2013, para. 4). Additionally, one-third of all Millennials says they read sacred Scripture on a phone or online, demonstrating how broadly the digital trends are shaping this generation.

The following excerpt from an article six years ago shows a comparison to the technology just mentioned to technology advancement six years ago. The comparison shows just how far technology has come and demonstrates why it is crucial for churches and leaders to adapt to the changes. This was made clear by the recent COVID 19 pandemic which forced churches to adopt to others forms of worship to meet social distancing guidelines set for by local, state, and national governments. Churches utilized zoom meetings, teleconferences, and social media to continue their ministries. These events showed how critically important it is for leaders and Churches to embrace new technology so they are prepared should disaster strike.

Lisa Allen-McLaurin (2015) explains the advancement of technology six years ago.

> The use of digital technology has become standard in worship services. For decades now, churches have played CDs and MP3 recordings in worship, to enhance music, dance, and drama ministries, and to fill in when musicians are not available. Video clips and PowerPoint presentations are used to help ministers drive home the sermonic focus, especially for those who may be visual learners. They are also used to lend a contemporary feeling to worship, saving us from using hymnbooks or worship bulletins. Services are recorded and made available on CD and DVD for those who might want to view it again, and now, some churches are using digital technology to live-stream their services. If you can't get to the church, the church comes to you. Many, if not most of us, would agree that the use of digital technology in worship has positive aspects and results (McLaurin, 2015, p.101).

Needless to say, technology continues to rapidly change, and Millennials are more adept at understanding and utilizing these upgrades to meet their spiritual needs. Technology is used in just about every aspect of the lives of Millennials including worship. This daily use makes it

critically important for Churches to evolve with the change and provide training to the older population of the congregation. All generations of the Church need to understand the use of technology and why it is important to embrace the theology behind its advancement.

Consequently, technology and theology should not be rivals against each other, but instead, complementary of each other in the worship experience. Stephen Garner states advises that God is present in all things, this includes technology. The goal of technology is to transform the reality that is necessary, and that there is theology in technology that needs to be understood. Garner calls for an openness in the church community to begin discussing the effects of new technologies within the church.

Disaffiliation and Marketing

In understanding motivating factors that contribute to engagement levels of Millennials, one of the areas precedent literature discusses is how marketing factors into the equation. Churches that attract Millennials have tapped into the power of word-of-mouth advertising. Millennials talk to each other and are brutally honest about what they see and feel in the worship experience. Marketing techniques are essential in educating Millennials on what the Church offers for their spiritual development.

According to Bucuta (2015), churches and companies who experienced success in marketing to Millennial's were those "that succeeded in building a relationship with them" (p. 43). Millennials are attracted to Churches who invest in marketing literature that captures a wholistic view of their ministry. The problem is many Churches skimp when it comes to producing high quality literature. They do not realize Millennials see Church literature as an extension of the quality they can expect to see in the church. According to Habibi, Laroche & Richard (2014), companies can develop a following among Millennials through the use of social

media groups. High attraction Churches are creative in marketing to, by creating online groups with Millennials in their church to help build a larger community of Millennials.

Churches that provide information sharing, and a social support system that creates an avenue to reach out to Millennials, enhance relationships, and engagement activities, will succeed in keeping them.

Disaffiliation and Leadership

One of the most important factors that lead to engagement with Millennials is leadership. Leaders who are transformational in nature and who have servant leader qualities attract Millennials more often than those who are not. “Churches that have attracted Millennials are those that have typically been led by transformational servant leaders, whose style emphasizes the concepts of teamwork, collaboration, humility, creativity, and relationship” (Ferri-Reed, 2013, p. 147). These qualities seem to resonate with Millennials as they seek to find their place in the church of leaders who are from an era drastically different from their own. This generation is drawn to leadership that is willing to engage their thoughts and ideas on spiritual matters. Graham states: “Millennials are drawn to leadership that is willing to empower them and give them opportunities to exercise their gifts and talents to lead” (Graham, 2014, para. 4).

In addition to transformational leadership, there are other leadership qualities Millennials are drawn to in ministry. One of those being, leaders who possess an accepting form of leadership is equally important. Tidsworth (2018) said, “If we are going to invite people who are members of different generations to be involved in church and we want to make space for them, it means we can’t insist that they do church the way we have always done it”(Tidsworth, 2018, p.65) . Authentic leaders provide an avenue for Millennials to express their views and are inclusive in nature.

One of the problems facing the church are the generational gaps which cause two worlds to be at polar opposites in the church. The old guard or traditional worshipers who are not accepting to change and the Millennials who are more open to issues in which the Church has regarded as unacceptable. Issues such as homosexuality, worship styles and music have placed a divide between the generations. “Christendom is divided today between Old World Churches and New World Churches. They move at different speeds. They prize different values. They measure success differently” (Sweet, 2000, p. 140). Church leaders have to bridge the gap between generations in order to create an environment of teamwork that motivates Millennials to get involved in ministry. Lack of an inclusive leadership style has caused some Millennials to disengage from ministries they have been affiliated with their entire life.

Millennials who are looking for an inclusive leadership style where they are allowed to utilize their skills and talents. In order to make this happen they need mentoring from current leaders in the church. Parks discussed the importance of church leaders being mentors in the life of young adults. Parks stated, “It is the combination of the emerging truth of the young adult with the example and encouragement of the mentor” (Parks, 1986, p. 89). Mentoring serves as a critical role for Millennials in affirming their abilities and emerging faith. Leaders need to create safe space for Millennials to learn and grow in a way they are not criticized and looked down upon for mistakes. Daloz, Keen, Keen and Parks (1997) explained, “Central to our understanding of human development is that it matters who our partners are in the dance of life” (Parks, 1997, p.27).

In summary, Millennials are attracted to leaders who are transformational leaders. If the church is going to continue to grow and fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission, it will need to develop strategies of reaching all generations. Those strategies will need to resonate with

Millennials, while at the same time emphasizing utilization of their skills and talents. In order to accomplish this in the Millennial response, current leaders must require a response of inclusion toward Millennial consideration. Churches and denominations must consider methods of addressing and incorporating Millennial values into their ministry vision and practices.

Other Disaffiliation Factors

Literature suggests there are various reasons as to why Millennials have been disaffiliating with local assemblies in recent years. To understand the decline in Millennial engagement within the religious sector, researchers have considered several contributing reasons as to why this phenomenon is occurring. Putnam and Campbell viewed religious disaffiliation amongst Millennials being on the rise due to the lack of credibility in leadership. Putnam and Campbell said,

> In a religious cafeteria in which rapidly growing numbers of young Americans are manifestly unhappy with a menu that is too political or hypocritical for their taste, religious entrepreneurs have a powerful incentive to concoct more palatable offerings. To these entrepreneurs the rapidly proliferating none's are an underserved niche, or in more appropriate language, souls to be saved (Campbell, 2010, p.98)

Understanding the Millennial engagement levels within the local church is a complex subject, it requires one to evaluate political, moral, and social ideologies that the church has rejected as being against the Word of God. Sexual orientation, worship styles, music selections, and technology all plays a role in the rate disaffiliation has occurred amongst Millennials.

One of the most difficult subjects Churches have had to address is how to deal with the issue of sexual orientation. While Millennials are more liberal in the matter, Churches have long stood against same sex marriage as well as homosexuality. Dealing with this phenomenon has caused a divide between Millennials and the traditional church, as they are more accepting of practices in which the church has stood against.

Jones and Cox (2011) said,

> Millennials (Americans aged 18 to 29) are at the vanguard of the shift that is occurring on attitudes about gay and lesbian people and homosexuality. On basic questions of policy, views about gay and lesbian people in the church and in society, and moral judgments about homosexuality, Millennials are much more liberal than the general public and dramatically more so than seniors (Americans aged 65 or older). It is difficult to find another issue on which there is deeper generational disagreement than on the issue of homosexuality and rights for gay and lesbian people. (Jones and Cox, 2011, p.49)

Another impact of this issue the author identified is the damage churches inflict on Millennials because of negative messages regarding practice homosexuality.

Jones and Cox (2011) said,

> More than 6-in-10 Americans believe the messages about homosexuality coming from America's places of worship contribute either a lot (23%) or a little (40%) to higher rates of suicide among gay and lesbian youth. Just over one-fourth (27%) say these messages do not contribute at all to higher rates of youth suicide. (Jones and Cox, 2011, p.54)

Millennials view on this subject in comparison to the church are vastly different. In researching reasons as to why Millennials choose to leave or disaffiliate with some churches, homosexuality comes to the forefront because of the negative impact on practicing homosexuals. Messages that are demeaning in nature have impacts not only on Millennials but also could cause longstanding psychological issues for those involved.

Millennials are more accepting and compassionate to social issues that affect those who practice this behavior even if they do not practice it themselves.

Churches seeking to engage the Millennial generation must examine how they will adjust to the changing landscape on social and moral issues that cause controversy within the church. Simply stating values and mission statements are not enough. Churches have the awesome responsibility of demonstrating an inclusive pursuit of community both inside and outside the four walls. In order to reach the Millennials and to stop the disaffiliation, programs will need to be implemented that teach all generations how to minister to all regardless of race, religion, or

sexual orientation. The vision of the church must serve people. As more Boomers approach retirement and the church turns to Millennials to fill critical leadership roles, additional research and understanding of the impact of these changes is necessary. Churches must be willing to consider adjustments that reflect the values of this rising generation of leaders.

Summary

Millennials, the generation of next leaders are defecting from the Church are no longer interested in attending worship service or participating in the Church culture (Sandfort & Haworth, 2002). Unfortunately, leaders within Greater Hartford Area of Churches are grappling with how to re-attract Millennials to the Church to understand their perspective. Some Millennials view the Church as outdated and irrelevant. Millennials were reported as being raised in traditional religion, but now considered as unaffiliated with any religious institution (Pew 35 Research Center, Social & Demographic Trends, 2010). This research study seeks to extend to the body of research specific to Greater Hartford area to further understand the trends and issues found in the apparent disconnect from organized religion among the Millennial generation within ten Protestant Churches.

Related Literature Framework

The researcher has identified key thematic and theoretical literature which addresses and creates a background understanding the problem of attracting Millennials within Greater Hartford Area Churches. In order to understand the guiding aspects of theories presented in the research, the following related literature has been reviewed and found relevant to the problem of the decline of millennial participation and leadership principles which contribute and negatively impact millennial engagement.

Ministries appear to be struggling in making the connection with all the generations represented within their local assemblies. Some of the themes within theoretical literature that

may hinder the lack of connection with Millennials include music style, worship style, leadership style, and others. Studies have shown this lack of connection is a contributor to the decline of participation and engagement of members, more specifically the millennial generation. "Millennials are creating spaces beyond traditional communities of faith where they can encounter God on their own terms, spaces like the music of their generation" (Mosby, 2018). The Washington Post reported in 2019:

> The data comes from the findings of two surveys released this month. Analyzing 2017 data from the American Time Use Survey, economist Michelle Freeman of the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that while Millennials are more highly educated and spend more time working than their older counterparts, they have stepped back dramatically from religious activities (Emba, 2019, para. 4).

The researcher examined related literature to understand how worship styles, leadership competencies, and lack of identity has impacted the engagement of Millennials within the New England area.

Millennials and the Worship Experience

Worship in Christianity is defined as the act of attributing reverent honor and homage to God. In the New Testament, various words are used to refer to the term worship. One is proskuneo (to worship) which means to bow down to God or kings. Worship is theologically defined as the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity or the worship of God. It is important to understand the various types of worship before forming a question as to how worship impacts engagement for Millennials for today's leadership for the Churches within the New England area. To that end there are seven types of worship that give honor and glory to the risen Savior.

1. Barak (baw-rak')–to bow down to, or kneel before, the Lord
2. Halal (haw-lal')–to shine, boast, rave about, to celebrate

3. Shabach (shaw-bakh') – to shout loudly or command,

4. Tehillah (teh-hil-law') – to sing unrehearsed, unplanned praise,

5. Towdah (to-daw')–to extend or raise your hands in thanksgiving for something that has yet occurred or that you have yet received.

6. Yadah (yaw-daw') – to extend your hands vigorously as in complete surrender.

7. Zamar (zaw-mar') – to touch the strings, mostly rejoicing (Worship Ways, 2018, p.1)

Millennials are looking for a different type of worship style, that is varied from traditional worship. Although they are different in their thought patterns, many have been raised in the Church and understand what true worship mean. True worship must be in spirit, that is, engaging the whole heart. "God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth" (John 4:24, NIV). Unless there's a real passion for God, there is no worship in spirit. "At the same time, worship must be in truth, that is, properly informed" (gotquestions.org, 2017, p.3). The biblical foundation of worship is evident throughout scripture. Christians are created to lead like Jesus. Scripture details the ministry of Jesus and the attributes of leadership he possessed that led others to change their mindset and lifestyles to become true followers of Christ. Millennials within the New England area are looking not only worshiping as a Sunday morning event, but a lifestyle that fundamentally seeks to please God by living according to the Word of God. Blanchard and Hodges discuss the hand, heart, hand theory to explain how believers seek to live according to the Word of God.

> Leading like Jesus involves the alignment of four leadership domains: heart, head, hands, and habits. The internal domains, the motivations of your heart and the leadership perspectives of the head, are things you keep inside or even disguise if it suits your purpose. The external domains, your public leadership behavior or hands, and your habits as experienced by others, will determine whether people will follow you. When your head, heart, hands, and habits are aligned, extraordinary levels of loyalty, trust and productivity will result. (Blanchard & Hodges, 2008, p. 31)

Individuals may look at worship as a Sunday morning experience, however, Millennials view worship as a lifestyle and a prerequisite for leaders. The lack of leadership accountability as it relates to ethical behavior maybe one of the variables to explore to better understand the engagement levels of Millennials. This variable has led Millennials to question and seek leadership competencies which fit a lifestyle and not just a title.

Credibility in Leadership

The purpose of this research is to understand how a lifestyle of biblical worship can foster a greater competency to lead others. Specifically, in the modern-day Church, as previously stated, worship should be viewed as a prerequisite to leading others. Additionally, what leads to authentic worship for individuals such as the millennial generation seeking to understand their place in society and Church is the credibility of its leaders.

Credibility in Christian leadership has severely impacted the modern Church regardless of denomination over the last several years. An area of concern is addressing conflict in the Church which has led to millennial participation decline. The Church that does not deal with sin among the members will open the door to more problems. The Church however falls into more trouble when it does not understand that it is not called to be judgmental of unbelievers and members who have a different view of ministry (Millennials), but the Church is expected to confront and restore believers who are unrepentant of sins. When conflict arises, this generation looks for it to be resolved in a restorative manner rather than punitive in nature. Grace (2002) discusses some of the issues in which conflict occurs by stating, “The root cause of conflict in the Church is sin masked in lack of forgiveness, envy, and selfishness, just to name a few. Christians are not perfect, and when imperfect people get together, disagreements, hurt feelings, and misunderstandings are inevitable” (Grace, 2002, p.34).

Millennials seek authentic leadership which in essence practice what is being preached and taught in the local assembly. However, in order to effectively lead like Jesus, Christians must be aligned with the ministry of Jesus and coalesce with his attributes. In coalescing with his attributes Christians utilize worship as a lifestyle by developing habits of surrender in their daily walk. As surrendering occurs, leaders welcome and invite Millennials to the table to share ideas in a way that can be trusted, attractive and credible. "Your habits are how you renew your daily commitment as a leader to serve rather than be served" (Blanchard & Hodges, 2008, p. 33). Blanchard (2008) also argues in his book that a lifestyle or pattern of worship involves solitude, prayer, and the knowledge of and will of God as expressed in Holy Word.

In reviewing how leadership competencies help shape the engagement levels of Millennials within the New England area, many of them have leaders in the Bible who they identify with. A powerful example of worship and leadership who Millennials identify with in scripture is shown in the life of David and the Psalms. Over thousands of years the Psalms have been at the heart of the worship for Christians and Jews. David is a great example of a lifestyle of worship as he is mentioned as a man after God's own heart. Although David had moments of triumph and moments of regret, his head, heart, hand, and habits consistently aligned with the heart of God. "The result is that the Psalms are an education in desire for God. A classic expression of desire shaped through the depths and heights of the Psalms" (Ford, 2012, p. 67).

To give David's story context as it relates to worship and leadership from a millennial view, we must understand that his life was typical and prophetic of Christ. Most of David's Psalms are an emblem of worship as he was considered the sweetest psalmist of Israel. As examination continues of how a lifestyle of worship leads to a greater competency to lead others, the life of David is a classic example of this case. His songs were derived from his experiences

as a shepherd boy, refugee, warrior and as a King. In these experiences, scripture details his life devoted to God in both good and bad times, and therefore the guiding language for all who undertook lives of devotion. “He was the chosen of the Lord, the messiah. His relation to the Psalms rendered them messianic, Songs that not only expressed his and our praise and prayer but at their deepest level spoke of the one who for us was the Christ” (Blain, 2012, p.4).

So how is the leadership style of David like leaders of today who engage and attract people of all generations to follow them as they follow Christ? Millennials seek leaders who have a solid one-on-one relationship with God and display personal leadership/accountability as David demonstrated throughout scripture.

One-on-One Leadership Approach and Millennials

The important distinction with Christian discipleship is that we are not only called to learn the teachings of Jesus Christ, but we are also called to live them. A disciple who bases his or her life on the teachings of Christ. When a person makes their initial declaration of faith and ask Christ to be Lord and Savior, he or she will begin changing from the inside, giving them the ability to understand His word and the desire to live it. Discipleship enjoys its most concrete expression in Scripture when Jesus walked with his disciples during his earthly ministry. The one- on-one approach Jesus often used with his disciples helped them to grow and mature in the faith and learn from the great teacher. The disciples did not gain credibility based on their abilities or knowledge, but on the modeling the life Jesus Christ. Christian leaders of today indeed can learn from the one-on-one approach by focusing on Christ as the model. The Leadership Baton helps the reader to understand the discipleship process and how to reciprocate the teaching of Jesus Christ. The authors of the book describe how reciprocity is important in growing leaders. The art of growing leaders is based upon a small Church model and is designed

to equip churches to expand their reach in their communities and state by being intentional in developing leaders one at a time. Willard (2002) speaks of teaching in growing leaders, "The same paradoxical tone applies to his teaching about who can be his disciple or apprentice" (Willard, 2002, p. 66).

Personal Leadership and Millennials

Several authors discuss personal leadership as a critical component of establishing credibility in ministry. It is the ability to define a direction for your leadership and life, and to move in that direction with consistency and clarity. When you practice personal leadership, you lead from the heart, for out of the heart is the seat of our emotions. Successful Christian leaders understand that personal leadership involves how one governs themselves when no one is looking. Personal leadership helps to frame accountability for an individual based upon true convictions they have in representing the best version of themselves to the world. Badaracco (1998) discusses the importance of character in leadership. Badaracco (1998) article makes a note that an individual's personal and professional values must be properly aligned in order to lead effectively. In essence the author argues that one must practice what they preach and live out those values they expect in other leaders. It provides practical advice on how to align one's character when you engage others whose values are different from yours. Personal leadership is the first step in establishing credibility within ministry and is one of the essential character traits needed for Christian leaders. Millennials have access to information instantaneously. Like never before, leaders must be aware of how to engage this generational cohort in an honest, thought-provoking manner. The book, Leading with Cultural Intelligence discusses the need for leaders to be culturally sensitive as well to gain credibility in leading others. "As intuitive sense of

leadership and expertise in one's field continue to be valuable leadership assets, but they're no longer adequate to leverage the global potential that exists" (Livermore, 2015, p. 14).

A leader that is seeking credibility and to engage the millennial generation must examine his/her motives and barriers to becoming a credible leader. Livermore (2015) argues that cultural insensitivity is another barrier to personal leadership because of personal beliefs or lack of understanding of other cultures and generations. Credibility in Christian leadership involves moving beyond the status quo and engaging others from all walks of life regardless of color, creed, economic status, or affiliation. Understanding credibility, further research may have to move beyond artificial approaches in which leaders pretend to be respectful and move toward becoming leaders who genuinely respect and value people from different cultural backgrounds. To better understand one personal cultural sensitivity, a CQ assessment may uncover some gaps to help in the process of gaining credibility as a Christian leader. A question that arises is, how Christian Leaders regain credibility of leading others after so much has been suppressed regarding deviant behavior? And what is the impact of this type of leadership on the engagement levels of Millennials within the Greater Hartford area of Churches. Questions that may help to answer this issue are:

1. What leadership characteristics within the Churches in the GHA attract or disengage Millennials?
2. What are the leadership strategies are used to improve engagement and participation rates of Millennials within the GHA?

When seeking to answer these questions, the precedent literature suggests a nexus between authentic leadership and millennial engagement. Servant leadership engages all members and seeks to develop an inclusive environment so that all feel welcomed and empowered. This type of leadership will help leaders to better understand how to engage

Millennials and develop an inclusive environment where everyone has a seat at the table and more importantly have a voice. The first step is to understand who the Millennials are and their thoughts on what motivates them to engage in ministry authentically.

Understanding the Identity of the Millennials

To this point the researcher began with the end in mind, by identifying literature related to leadership competencies, theories and practices which impact the engagement levels of Millennials. The overall goal of this research was to understand how these components of ministry are the reasons for millennial participation or decline of engagement within the New England Area Churches. However, to best understand this, it is important to understand the identity of the Millennials. Who are they? How are they motivated? What do look for in ministry? What do they look for in leadership?

Who Are the Millennials?

The Millennials comprise the largest and most diverse generation, both ethnically and racially (DeMaria, 2013; 2011, Mendelson, 2013; Winograd & Hais). A study done by the Siebert and Kern Family Foundation in 2015 entitled Engaging Millennials A National Research Study of Effective Ministry Models, developed a study with the objective of understanding practices and worship traditions that are most effective at reaching and engaging Millennials. Additionally, the study sought to understand what leadership competencies are more effective at reaching them with the Gospel and developing Millennials as future Church leaders. Researchers approached the project with a two-fold methodology to gather both primary and secondary data on Millennials and worship traditions. This included: a) in-depth interviews with thought leaders in the fields of ministry, discipleship, and Church leadership to identify best practices from real-

life applications and experiences; and b) secondary research that gives a macro- level perspective on demographic, psychographic and behavioral trends of Millennials and their faith practices.

According to Brandau (2012), Millennials are difficult to define because they are less homogenous than other generations. The purpose of this research is to understand what attracts Millennials to Churches within the Greater Hartford Area to be active participants in ministry. A similar study on a larger scale analyzing the 2010 Faith Communities of more than 11,000 congregations provides insights into what makes congregations with significant numbers of young adults distinctive and provided insight to the New England Area Churches. The study was coordinated with Cooperative Congregational Studies Partnership and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research explores the characteristics of the mere 16 percent of those congregations where 21 percent or more of participants are Millennials. Conversely, this study may lend some insight into the current state of millennial engagement within the New England area since the study includes finding from the Hartford Connecticut area. Here are some of the report's key findings.

The Young Church

Studies show congregations organized in the past decade were three times as likely to have a significant number of young adults as congregations organized before 1976. Sahlin (2011) stated "One of the most effective ways to reach young adults is to launch a new church without that is inclusive of their ideas"

The KISS principle: Keep it spiritual, stupid

Congregations reporting high levels of spiritual vitality were three times as likely to have significant numbers of young adults as congregations with low spiritual vitality. Sahlin (2011)

discusses the needs of young adults and their desire in ministry. Sahlin said of young adults. "They're looking for something that connects to the divine connection" (Sahlin, 2011 p.59)

Eat, pray, read the Bible

Congregations that reported a lot of emphasis on spiritual practices such as prayer and scripture reading were five times more likely than congregations that put no emphasis on such practices to have large numbers of young adults in the pews. Sahlin and Roozen (2011) stated "It appears that congregations that teach spiritual practices are much more attractive to young adults," (Sahlin and Roozen, 2011, p.46)

Keeping up with new technology

Congregations that reported multiples uses of technology such as social media and websites were twice as likely to have a significant percentage of young adults as those that reported marginal use. Technology is a dominant part of a Millennials life. Due to globalization data and communication has become instantaneous in nature.

Bruce Tulgan said,

> Globalization and technology have been shaping change since the dawn of time. But during the life span of Generation Y, globalization and technology have undergone a qualitative change. After all, there is only one globe, and it is now totally interconnected (Tulgan, 2009, p.6).

Technology allows for immediate feedback from social platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Meister and Willyerd (2010) discuss in their article "Mentoring Millennials" published in the Harvard Business Review that Millennials want constant feedback. They even talked about "micro feedback." (Willyerd, 2010, pg32). Technology is an important part of a Millennials life, whether it be at home, work, or church. Millennials have a wealth of information at their fingertips like never before, and it is that access to technology that engenders a need for information rich feedback.

Promoting young adult ministry

Congregations that placed a lot of emphasis on young adult activities and programs were more likely to attract young women and men. The study reveals similar results of what Millennials are attracted to 5 years later from the study. It would be worth further examination as to what Churches have done to address the concerns of the past and how has it impacted millennial engagement today for the New England area Churches. In many ways, young adults are attracted to what matters most to believers of any age: Millennials want to be part of a congregation that recognizes their skills and talents while meeting their spiritual needs. In answering one of the research questions of this study, communities that were successful in attracting young men and women, it's pretty clear that these were congregations that were intentional about engaging young adults. However, with the aging of many congregations, incorporating changes from adding praise and worship teams, at worship to integrating young adults into leadership positions becomes even more imposing. Sahlin (2005) stated: "The church has to go through a process of change in order to engage the Millennials in a way that will keep them in their Churches" (Sahlin, 2005, p.320). The process Sahlin promotes provides faith communities important data to help develop strategies to fulfill the spiritual needs of the Millennial population.

Summary

The examination was to further understand the decline of millennial Church participation within the GHA. It also seeks to provide information and techniques to attract and spur involvement so that Millennials residing in their communities can be reached and reconnected to Christ. An examination of the literature has demonstrated a valuable connection between the characteristics governing the perceived and declared needs of Millennials toward the underlying

bedrock of Servant Leadership Theory. The majority of the research that has been conducted has focused on the reasons why Millennials have left the Church, however, the researcher looks to more granular research which identifies specific phenomena related to servant leadership technology, and theories which identify with millennial engagement with the New England area Churches.

Focusing on the impact of millennial behaviors within the area Churches will further lead to an understanding of how leaders can facilitate an improved and open delegation plan, more community integration, and shared responsibility for results, much as would be exemplified by the traditional and religious servant leader.

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

The rationale for the study in this literature was based upon the need to understand millennial participation across broad spectrums of religious activity. However, in order to understand the decline in engagement, smaller scale studies will help to identify common themes and issues that contribute to a larger problem. Millennials are consumers even in the realm of religious activity. Therefore, Church leaders must seek to understand how Millennials fit into their specific ministries in order to survive. A study done by Barna Group and Cornerstone Knowledge Network said,

> It's tempting to think of Church as one part of the "religious services industry "the sector of the economy that provides spiritual goods and experiences to consumers. When leaders conceive of their faith community this way, even unconsciously, they see their difficulty appealing to Millennials as a failure to create brand loyalty—a failure whose solution is a better product and/or better marketing. To be successful in the industry, Churches must compete in a marketplace undergoing massive disruption as a generation of young consumers becomes ever more knowledgeable and selective about what they do and do not want. (Barna Group, 2015. Para.4)

This study sought to understand how leaders can better understand the decline in millennial participation within a distinct group of Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. Engaging in this research helped leaders and Millennials better understand key drivers behind the decline.

> A significant number of young adults have deeper complaints about Church. More than one-third say their negative perceptions are a result of moral failures in Church leadership (35%). And substantial majorities of Millennials who do not go to Church say they see Christians as judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), anti-homosexual (91%) and insensitive to others (70%). (Barna-Group, 2015)

The Greater Hartford Area is no different than other larger communities who are experiencing the lack of engagement for various reasons. Surprisingly, the researcher could not identify any literature on the topic specific to the Greater Hartford area published. Therefore, the researcher seeks to discover tangible and concrete reasons as to why the decline of millennial participation is occurring.

Profile of the Current Study

The aim of this study was to investigate and understand the perspective of Millennials and Senior Pastors as to why Millennials choose to engage in some Churches and leave others within the inner-city Greater Hartford area. Additionally, it sought to discover whether motivating factors such as biblical worldviews, servant leadership or technology played a role in engagement levels.

Senior leaders must act now to better understand how Millennials both think and feel regarding their faith and church participation. Senior Pastors must be willing to answer the critical questions of how they have engaged this generation. The Church, specifically the ten protestant Churches within the GHA must seek and explore perceptions of the Millennials as to motivating factors which lead to engagement. Churches throughout this area have seen a negative decline in attendance, participation and giving amongst Millennials, therefore the Church must be missional in purpose to better understand these concerns.

The Bible is the manual that must be used in order effectively address the issue of declination in both and participation of Millennials. It is essentially the manual with answers to any question Millennials and senior pastors face in terms of engagement. Jesus told his followers to, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit” (Holy Bible, New International Version, 2016, Mathew 28:19). While Millennials are lacking engagement and at times leaving, senior pastors must develop new strategies to re-engage them and understand the drivers behind the exodus and lack of commitment. This research sought to assist Millennials and senior pastors with tools to identify drivers behind this phenomenon so that they may be able to reengage this generation in a way that promotes spiritual growth and maturity. The next chapter explored the specific methods chosen by the writer to research the problem.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research sought to explore and understand the decline of millennial participation in Churches within ten Protestant Churches within the inner-city of the Greater Hartford Area. Precedent literature suggests, no group has experienced a greater decline in Church attendance than Millennials between the ages of 24 and 39 (Chan et al., 2015; Desmond et al., 2010; van der Merwe et al., 2013). In comparison to the amount of research that has been conducted on the topic of why Millennials have left the Church, much less research has been conducted to determine what Churches can do to increase millennial attendance and involvement in the Church (van der Merwe et al.). Although this problem exists on a wider scope, this research focused on ten Protestant inner-city Churches within the Greater Hartford Area varying in size, where Millennials have cited issues such as lack of understanding and inclusiveness, a purposeful biblical worldview that is servant oriented, and the integration of technology.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

One of the problems facing Churches in the New England area is the decline of millennial participation at all levels. The future of the Church is at stake, for without young adult participation, the future of the Church is in jeopardy. Water and Bortree state that "The decline in Millennials' affiliation causes significant management concerns for religious leaders" (p. 201). According to Hadaway (2006), congregations in which more than 40% of their regular participants are over 60 are very unlikely to grow" (p. 3). Roozen (2011) reported that the aging of Protestant congregations is a factor that has contributed to the decline in Church attendance and will grow worse in coming years. Because of this downward trend, Churches need to find ways to reach and involve young adults in the life of the Church. Further research is needed to

identify strategies that will enable the Church to attract young adults and subsequently involve them in the life of the Church (van der Merwe et al., 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explore the perceptions of Millennials and senior pastors as to motivating factors which lead to engagement. This study within the Greater Hartford Area was comprised of ten Protestant Churches of varied denominations and sizes. Millennials were defined as anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 24 to 39 in 2020).

The hypothesis guiding this study was that Millennials are seeking leadership from a biblical worldview that is heavily focused on spiritual formation, integration of technology and the servant leadership theory.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the motivating factors which lead to participation within the Church?

RQ2. What are the motivating factors which lead to leaving a Church?

RQ3. To what degree does technology play a role in millennial engagement?

RQ4. To what degree does servant leadership play a role in millennial engagement?

RQ5. What are senior pastors' perceptions of motivating factors contributing to engagement of Millennials within their Churches?

Research Design and Methodology

For the purpose of this study the researcher utilized a qualitative phenomenological research design that addresses the issue of declining millennial attendance and involvement in the Church. Qualitative research is defined as a market research method that focuses on obtaining data through open-ended and conversational communication. Creswell states the following about qualitative research, "The key behind qualitative research is to learn about the

problem from the participants" (Creswell, 2013, p. 47. This phenomenological qualitative research study sought to understand the lived experiences of Millennials and Senior Pastors by obtaining data through open-ended questions.

In looking at qualitative research method, the research is not only about "what" people think but also "why" they think so. Leadership researchers typically have used quantitative approaches; however, to better understand complex, embedded phenomena, qualitative approaches to studying leadership are also necessary (Alvesson, 1996; Bryman, Stephens, & Campo, 1996; Conger, 1998). This design was useful in answering the research questions to determine reasons for the decline in participation within the Greater Hartford Area. This study used a qualitative research design that collected and used and non-numerical data. This type of research helped to target the millennial population and place of study (New England Area) to better explain the meaning of the data collected.

For the purpose of this study and due to COVID-19 restrictions, the researcher did not conduct face to face observations. Thus, an understanding how environmental conditions may have impacted the decline in participation was limited. Although, Creswell encourages observational research when he states, "This up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research" (p.185). Virtual interview sessions did not allow the researcher to observe the research population in their normal environments to gather the data. Additionally, the researcher gathered data by conducting virtual interviews through Zoom® and Teams® applications. The use of these types of data collection tools are considered typical for descriptive research. Descriptive studies of this nature are aimed at finding out "what is," thus, observational and survey methods are frequently used to collect descriptive data (Borg & Gall, 1989). The

researcher hoped to observe the participants of the study in their normal church settings, however, due to the pandemic, social distancing restrictions, virtual meetings were held.

Setting

The setting for this research was conducted in the Greater Hartford Area in the state of Connecticut. The study focused on ten Protestant inner-city Churches of varied denominations and sizes to better understand the impact of certain criteria that impact the participation rates of Millennials. Hartford is the capital city of Connecticut, and according to Hartford Institute of Religion and existing research, Hartford has over fifty Churches which served as a sufficient population pool.

This setting or context was chosen for this study due to the high concentration of Millennials in the Greater Hartford area. This is primarily due to several colleges, such as Trinity College, University of Connecticut branch campuses, and University of Hartford, which are situated within the research area and have a high population of Millennials affiliated with their institutions.

New England Churches are comprised of diverse group, both denominationally and racially. The researcher sought to gain insight into demographics associated with age distribution, generational cohort amongst members, attendance of members amongst cohorts, and views about spiritual formation and servant leadership from the millennial population.

Participants

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative researchers sample participants deliberately, thus they need to define the criteria for participant selection (Moser & Korstjens,2018). By establishing participant eligibility criteria for settings and situations where researchers can gain access, researchers may afford themselves the greatest opportunities to gather rich data (Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

The criteria selection for participants of this study was based on three criteria: age, Church attendance, and senior leadership role (pastor). The researcher looked at two research populations for this study; 12-15 Millennials and 2-5 senior pastors from the inner-city Protestant Churches selected within the Greater Hartford area. Based on age, the population of interest in this research will be Millennials between the ages of 24 and 39 and currently attending the Churches. Powell et al. (2017) also studied Churches that effectively engaged young people of ages 24-39. Powell et al. defined an effective Church as "one that is involving and retaining young people in the congregational community, as well as helping them develop a vibrant faith in Jesus Christ" (Powell, 2017, p. 8). Additionally, it was necessary to also include those inactive Millennials of selected Churches who have already left in order to understand this phenomenon.

The second criteria for the research were those in the specified age group who attend Church within the ten Churches identified within Greater Hartford area on a regular basis. The relationship between Millennials and leadership was examined to understand types of curriculum and engagement activities that impact participation. Yin (2018) encouraged researchers to be adaptive to situations. When researchers maintain adaptive postures, they understand new information as opportunities instead of challenges (Yin, 2018). Grandy (2013) identified that the Church in one single case study used shared leadership between clergy and members to adapt to constituents' needs. As previously stated, the study involved two sets of populations, Millennials, and senior pastors, from the ten Protestant Churches within the inner-city GHA selected by the researcher allowing findings to be compared.

As previously mentioned, theoretical sampling procedure was utilized in the study to offset any issues that may hamper collection due to COVID – 19 pandemic issues. Theoretical

sampling occurs as the data collection progress, the researcher felt this was the most viable sampling method. Additionally, a purposive sampling method was employed because of the population target was the millennial cohort. The purposive sampling method allowed the researcher to hand select individual's whose views were particularly important or representative of the population under investigation. Patton (2015) provides the following description of purposeful sampling:

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding
> (Patton 2015, p. 265).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher using qualitative methods must argue that another human being (e.g. himself) is the only instrument that is sufficiently complex to comprehend and learn about human existence (Lave & Kvale 1995). Describing how any one participant experiences a specific event is the goal of the phenomenological method of research. This method utilizes interviews, observation, and surveys to gather information from subjects. Phenomenology is highly concerned with how participants feel about things during an event or activity. The researcher's role is to ensure these are represented without bias or inputting personal thoughts and feelings into the research. Additionally, the researcher in qualitative research must attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of study participants. However, the data that is being collected must be safeguarded.

It is the primary responsibility of the researcher to safeguard participants and their data. The implication is that social research will benefit from being performed as field research (Burgess, 1984) based on interaction between the researcher and the individuals studied. The

significance of qualitative research is unified by the researcher's fundamental research question—he asks *why?* In comparison, the researcher carrying out quantitative research will ask how many? How widespread? How old? etc. The research technique which the qualitative researcher uses is then to isolate and define phenomena/categories during the process of research in order to comprehend and learn, whereas the quantitative researcher's ambition is to determine the relationship between phenomena/categories already isolated and defined prior to the research.

Ethical Considerations

There are several guidelines that were adhered to by the participants in this study. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) application was completed and approved on February 16th, 2021, before the actual study was conducted. Each of the participants in the study was informed of any possible risks and the benefits of this study. Each of the participants received a consent form and was required to sign prior to their participation in this study. Participants were not put in any bodily danger. As stated in the IRB application, an executive summary of the results of this study will be provided to all participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2014). The data collected from the sample group was divided into two categories and was used to make general statements about millennial participation in the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Yin, 2009).

All participants were informed that participation was voluntary and, as such, they were able to stop the interview at any time during the process. The names and titles of all participants and all organizations involved in the study remained anonymous. Participants in the study was afforded the right to privacy and was kept informed of all aspects of the study. All information and data collected was locked in a secure location. All participants of the study were encouraged to answer all the questions honestly and thoroughly. The researcher adhered to all IRB requirements. The researcher conducted all data collection based on the schedules of the

participants. It was imperative to complete this study in an unbiased state to allow the results to speak and stand for themselves.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The data for this study was collected from senior pastors and Millennials ages 24 to 39 whose Churches met the criteria for the study. The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews to explore the views, experiences, beliefs, and motivations of individual participants in the study. Structured interviews were preferred for this study as they are essentially, verbally administered questionnaires, in which a list of predetermined questions was asked. Structured interviews deal with little or no variation and with no scope for follow-up questions to responses that warrant further elaboration. The researcher sought to conduct productive interviews despite the limitations of a virtual environment. Hammersley stated: "However, to ensure that the interview is as productive as possible, researchers must possess a repertoire of skills and techniques to ensure that comprehensive and representative data are collected during the interview" (Hammersley, 1995, p.10). Consequently, these interviews are relatively quick and easy to administer and may be of particular importance because clarification of certain questions is required.

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) was granted on February 16, 2021, to conduct interviews and other data collection methods required by IRB. Once approval was granted, the researcher communicated with participants of the study via social media and email to setup interviews.

Collection Methods

Several data collection methods can be employed in qualitative research. Data collection is the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest. This type of data collection is gathered in an established systematic fashion that enables one to

answer stated research questions, test hypothesis, and evaluate outcomes. The qualitative phenomenological methods most used in evaluation can be classified in three broad categories: in-depth interviews, focus groups, and observations.

The researcher utilized in-depth semi-structured interviews as the data collection methods for a total of ten Churches within the Hartford area based on the phenomenological study design. This methodology seeks to establish and understand the relationships between specific situations and then use the relationships to "guide inquiry into other situations" (Bradley, 1993, p. 438). The goal of the developed theory is to illustrate the basic social processes engaged in by the participants in a particular setting. A phenomenological design constructs the universal meaning of a specific event, situation, or experience. It also helps the researcher to arrive at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon being studied as Hutchison indicates. The design rely on the lived experiences of the research population to gain insight, "People sharing common circumstances experience shared meanings and behaviors that constitute the substance of grounded theory" (Hutchinson, 1993). Strauss and Corbin (1998, p. 12) comment, "grounded theories are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action." The researcher utilized this theory in congruence with a phenomenological design to understand the motivating factors that impact the engagement levels of Millennials within ten Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area as seen in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Protestant Churches

Church	Location	Denomination
Church 1	Hartford, CT	N/A
Church 2	Hartford, CT	Baptist
Church 3	Hartford, CT	Baptist
Church 4	Hartford, CT	Congregational
Church 5	Hartford, CT	United Christ
Church 6	Hartford, CT	CME
Church 7	Hartford, CT	N/A
Church 8	Hartford, CT	N/A
Church 9	Hartford, CT	Baptist
Church 10	Bloomfield, CT	N/A

Table 2

Alternate Protestant Churches

Church	Location	Denomination
Church 11	Hartford, CT	A.M.E.
Church 12	Bloomfield, CT	A.M.E.
Church 13	Hartford, CT	Baptist
Church 14	Bloomfield, CT	Church of God
Church 15	Hartford, CT	U.C.C

Due to COVID-19, observations were deemed difficult because many Churches were hosting virtual services to meet social distancing guidelines. The researcher identified five high attraction Churches (millennial participation rate of 50 - 75%) and five low attraction Churches (millennial participations rate 0-49%) to participate in in-depth interviews. Senior pastors and the Millennials of those Churches were asked to participate through virtual interviews. The senior pastors from each of these congregations were contacted via email, social media, and phone by the researcher and asked to participate in an interview for the study. Each pastor was given the research questions and given a link to Zoom® or Teams® provided by the researcher to participate in the interview. Pastors were asked to distribute the recruitment posters provided by the researcher to Millennials in their congregation and to ask them to participate in the interviews.

Instruments and Protocols

The instrumentation for this study included the researcher conducting in-depth semi structured interviews, via Zoom® and Teams® applications with all the participants. These applications provided ease of use and data collection features that aided the researcher in examining the data. A pilot study utilizing semi-structured, open-ended questions was conducted prior to collecting the study data to ensure the questions were understandable and rational based on the needs of the industry being studied (Maxwell, 2013). The data for this study was collected during scheduled, virtual interview sessions (Creswell, 2014). The interview questionnaire consisted of questions from an instrument that was similar in nature to precedent studies.

The interview process in qualitative phenomenological research is a valuable method of gaining insight into a focus populations perceptions, understandings and experiences of a given phenomenon.

For the purpose of this research, the following criteria was adhered to.

1. Structured interviews with open-ended questions.
2. Interviewer avoided leading questions.
3. Researcher created interview questions that were clear and easy to understand.
4. Researcher formalized questions that were focused but flexible.

In order to prevent bias during the interview sessions, the researcher adapted a phenomenological interview approach designed by Bevan (2014) which helped the researcher gain thick rich data. Bevan developed a guide that helps researchers identify methods of phenomenological research that help to answer questions from various approaches.

> I developed a phenomenological interview method with a structure for phenomenological interviewing consisting of three main domains: contextualization (natural attitude and life- world), apprehending the phenomenon (modes of appearing, natural attitude), and clarifying the phenomenon (imaginative variation and meaning). (Bevan, 2014, para.3).

Figure 4

Phenomenological Interview Guide

Phenomenological Attitude	Researcher Approach	Interview Structure	Method	Example Question
Phenomenological Reduction (Epoché)	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants Reflexive Critical Dialogue with Self Active Listening	Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions	"Tell me about becoming ill," or "Tell me how you came to be at the satellite unit."
		Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing	"Tell me about your typical day at the satellite unit, "or "Tell me what you do to get ready for dialysis."
		Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)	Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions	"Describe how the unit experience would change if a doctor was present at all times."

Note. Bevan structure of phenomenological interviewing.

Millennial Interview Protocol

The researcher conducted interviews of 14 Millennials from the targeted Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. The goal of the researcher was to have a minimum of 12 interviews and a maximum of 15. The interviews were 30 minutes in length and done through Zoom® or Microsoft Teams® applications. The interviews were recorded, transcripted, and the information was coded with NVivo® qualitative software. This software is used for coding qualitative data like interviews, surveys, transcripts, focus groups, text/videos/audio files, images, tweets, and more. The data collected was reviewed by the researcher to gain insight into the alignment or congruence with established research questions for Millennials (see Appendix B), and for senior pastors (see Appendix C). The researcher obtained a signed consent form from each participant prior to conducting interview sessions (see appendix D). Each participant agreed to the use of a digital recorder and a backup recorder as the main source for controlling bias and producing reliable data for qualitative analysis. A participant consent form was utilized and was signed prior to the study.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews were utilized because they gave the most direct and straightforward approach to gather detailed data regarding millennial participation within the ten Churches within the Greater Hartford area. These Churches were a group of Churches who have an average membership size of 150-500. The type of interview used to collect data was tailored to the research questions to gain an understanding of the participants thoughts on millennial participation. The goal of the interview questions was to capture non-numerical information that is usually descriptive or nominal in nature. This type of data is collected in the form of words and sentences which often captures feelings, emotions, or subjective perceptions

of something. The types of questions used to capture this information are typically open-ended in nature. Additionally, qualitative methods are best used to provide a richness of detail to quantitative findings and provide contextual background to quantitative data (Haricombe, 1993; Rossman & Wilson, 1985; Weiss, 1998). Powell (2006) argues that survey methods are "often quantitative in nature but lack the experiment's ability to rigorously test the relationship" (p. 110).

Semi-structured interviewing, according to Bernard (1988), is best used when the researcher cannot get more than one chance to interview someone. Additionally, the semi-structured interview process is useful when the researcher will be sending several interviewers out into the field to collect data. The semi-structured interview guide provides a clear set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. Additionally, all responses to interview questions will be kept confidential and placed in an appendix document of the final research document. A researcher-developed protocol was followed for the semi-structured interviews.

Procedures

The researcher ensured IRB approval was granted prior to conducting the study. The researcher provided a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix B and C) to each participant prior to their interview session. The researcher took notes during the interview sessions and received permission to record the sessions to ensure all information was accurate. All interview sessions for data collection were held via a virtual application Zoom® or Microsoft Teams®. The researcher scheduled interview sessions that were 30 minutes in length; however, more time was allotted when needed and recorded. Prior to the study, a pilot interview session was conducted of two senior pastors and two millennial participants to ensure the study was reliable

and valid. The pilot study also ensured that the phrasing and sequencing of the questions were understandable and germane to the study. To ensure appropriate responses and to address the study's research questions, a pilot study was utilized to detect any need to modify. The pilot study was conducted after the researcher received IRB approval.

It is important to note that all comments from participants were considered to ensure the study had the best opportunity for success. The researcher sought to fully understands the participants experience within the Church that leads to engagement and disengagement. "Phenomenological research is a way of determining the human experience through descriptive accounts, which allows the participant's essence to emerge and to be understood by the researcher" (Moustakas, 1994 p. 234). Qualitative research can only be valid if the participants involved in the study answer the researcher's questions truthfully and completely throughout the interview session.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved the capturing of essential experiences, perceptions, and concepts that participants used to create meaning (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Analysis was conducted through a review of the questionnaire given to participants via interview questions. This helped the researcher with identification of emergent themes and patterns, development of a framework for relationships between themes, organization and format of themes, development of personal narratives, "reflection on one's own perceptions, conceptions and processes" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 79). The data analysis process used was a non-linear, iterative path to a final internally consistent representation of experience Interviews were transcribed, coded, categorized, and analyzed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2014). Themes were examined and grouped together to determine a dominant pattern that is attributes to the decline or increase

in millennial participation within the identified Churches. The researcher facilitated the process of grouping common thoughts from the interview transcripts into emerging themes and eventually significant themes. According to Moustakas (1994), the purpose of analysis and organizing data is to form structural meaning.

Analysis Methods

Because of the nature of the questions in the survey, it was necessary to utilize a variety of statistical methods to interpret the data that was collected and answer the four research questions proposed in the current study. In qualitative research, a form of descriptive statistics typically utilized is frequency distribution. Lavrakas (2008) states that "Frequency distribution is a tabular representation of a survey data set used to organize and summarize the data. Specifically, it is a list of either qualitative or quantitative values that a variable takes in a data set and the associated number of times each value occurs (frequencies)" (p.2). According to Salkind (2012), descriptive statistics are used to describe and explore the general characteristics of data that has been collected. A descriptive case study is one that is focused and detailed, in which propositions and questions about a phenomenon are scrutinized and articulated at the outset. The main goal of the descriptive case study is to assess a sample in detail and in depth, based on an articulation of a descriptive theory. "Descriptive statistics are used to describe the basic features of the data in a study and provide simple summaries about the measure. This helps to form the basis of quantitative data" (Trochim, 2020, p.2).

The type of descriptive statistics was simple frequency distribution. Simple frequency distribution is used to organize data sets in an orderly fashion. It also shows the number of times each score occurs in a set of data, to find the frequency it occurs. The researcher took steps in coding to identify corresponding themes by capturing word repetition and key word in text.

Word repetition was utilized to captured in the informal mode via NVivo®. The software helped the researcher identify the text and note words or synonyms that people frequently used during the interview sessions.

Additionally, Key-words-in-context (KWIC) was utilized by simple observation. The researcher sought to understand a concept, and how it is used. In this technique, the researcher identified key words and then systematically searched the corpus of text to find all instances of the word or phrase. When a word or phrase is found it was saved then recorded in its immediate context. Themes were identified by physically sorting the examples into piles of similar meaning and into the nodes or categories established in NVivo®. These methods helped the researcher to identify emerging themes and give meaning to the data collected.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research requires checks and balances to ensure that the standards of scientific inquiry are met. Additionally, qualitative research often uses terms like trustworthiness, credibility, and authenticity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Trustworthiness results from the rigor used in systematically collecting and analyzing data for the purpose of describing or explaining phenomena as accurately and completely as possible (Patton, 2002). Credibility refers to the confidence one has in the truth of the findings (Merriam, 1998). Additional criteria, also referenced by Patton (2002), support the strength and believability of qualitative research, including transferability (the ability of other researchers to apply the findings to their own work), dependability (the stability of findings over time), and confirmability (the internal coherence of data in relation to findings and interpretations). The truth in findings is necessary in order to meet the foundational measures of trustworthiness, credibility, and authenticity.

Creswell (2003) provided eight primary strategies for qualitative scientific inquiry. The strategies included, member checking, use of rich data, clarification of bias of the researcher, presenting negative or discrepant information that counters themes, spend time in the field, use peer debriefing and use an auditor to review research. This study utilized four of these strategies. Utilizing the triangulation strategy, this single-unit case study collects and analyzes data from a variety of sources, including documents, observations, and interviews, and does so across multiple embedded units of analysis.

Member-checking of the recorded and documented data was provided by the researcher with an opportunity to correct or expand upon thoughts and comments. While triangulation provided a means of corroboration from the researcher's perspective, member-checking improves the truthiness of participants' accounts (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, rich, or thick descriptions were used in describing the setting, participants, and themes in the study, as opposed to thin, fact-only descriptions. This reporting style provided a context-based appreciation for the phenomena and sensitizes readers, reviewers, and other researchers to participants' experiences. It was critical for the role of the researcher to be fully disclosed providing a transparent and reflexive account of the assumptions, beliefs, and biases held by the researcher in documenting the Millennial and Pastoral experiences. Given that the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research, this step is crucial in documenting potential strengths and weaknesses of the stated interpretations and conclusions (Merriam, 1998).

Credibility

Credibility is the first aspect to be established to prove trustworthiness. This aspect is critical because it asks the researcher to clearly link the study findings to reality in order to

demonstrate the authenticity or truth of the research study findings. Seale (2000) sees credibility as followed:

> First, credibility should replace truth value. Through prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, and triangulation exercises, as well as exposure of the research report to criticism by a disinterested peer reviewer and a search for negative instances that challenge emerging hypotheses and demand their reformulation, credibility is built up. (Seale, 2000, p.44)

As previously stated in order to establish this, triangulation of sources was used. In this process different data sources were used within the same method since data was collected at different points in time due to interviewees availability. Additionally, member checking which involves sharing the data, interpretations, and conclusions with participants. This method establishes credibility by allowing the participants to clarify intentions, correct errors, or provide additional information if necessary.

Dependability

Dependability is associated with the consistency of findings. Since many qualitative methods are customized to the study situation, the specific ways of data gathering, analysis, and interpretation in qualitative research should be described. Dependability in qualitative research is defined as the stability of the data and is demonstrated by providing clear, detailed, and sequential descriptions of all procedures, and methods. This was done to establish that another researcher could repeat the study consistently. In other words, can the data be replicated? As stated by Lincoln and Guba (1985)), a dependable study needs to be accurate and consistent. Two ways of evaluating dependability of data include stepwise replication and inquiry audit. For the purpose of this study, the researcher utilized an external audit to establish dependability. This process involved having an outside researcher conduct an inquiry audit on the research study as outlined by Creswell (2003).

> Use an external auditor to review the entire project. As distinct from a peer debriefer, this auditor is new to the researcher and the project i.e., person that have not read or are not knowledgeable of the researcher's work; cannot be the committee members, researcher, or original subjects and can provide an assessment of the project e.g., how the variables in the theory interact with the researcher's variable] throughout the process of research or at the conclusion of the study. The role is like that of a fiscal auditor, and specific questions exist that auditors might ask. (Creswell, 2003, pp. 196-197)

This process led to important feedback, additional data gathering and the development of stronger and better articulated findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to whether one can track the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret the data. In other words, providing what is known as an "audit trail" is critical. Confirmability is the last criterion of trustworthiness that a qualitative researcher must establish. In order to establish confirmability, the researcher used audit trail and reflexivity as defined by Creswell. "Writing and composing the narrative report brings the entire study together" (Creswell, 2013, p.213). The researcher was considerate of the biases, values, and experiences each participant may have brought to this qualitative phenomenological research study. Additionally, the researcher considered his own experiences with the phenomenon and how it may have to shape the researcher's interpretation of it. "The goal is that the reader should come away with the feeling that, "I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that" (Creswell, 2013, p.227).

Utilizing coding techniques involved the researcher utilizing NVivo software to determine what topics were unique and interesting during the data collection, which created audit trails. The origins of audit trails in qualitative research appear to reside in the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985). In their influential publications, Lincoln, and Guba (1985, p. 318-319) regarded audit trails as one of the principal techniques for establishing the confirmability of

qualitative findings. The researcher documented the coding procedures and provided a rationale for merging and explanation of emerging themes. “Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach was to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p.77). The data was read and reread and culled for like phrases and themes that are then grouped to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). Through this process the researcher was able to construct a universal meaning of the event, situation or experience and arrive at a more profound understanding of the phenomenon.

This interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach allowed the researcher to develop a truer meaning of comments with the research participants. Credibility of the study relies heavily on the quality of the data collected. The phenomenon being studied must meet the criteria of lived experiences and a standard that makes it unique in nature to study.

Creswell states:

> The quality of any qualitative research finding is extremely important to the credibility of a study. More importantly, the analytical tool utilized by the research study to analyze the findings is also a very important tool in the analytical process. As a qualitative research approach, IPA approach analyzes the findings that the research study uncovered. Furthermore, IPA approach must create a standard that makes it unique and exceptional in analyzing research findings. As a standard of excellence in a phenomenological research study, Creswell stated that the “standard that I would use to assess the quality of a phenomenology would be: Does the author convey an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology? Does the author have a clear “phenomenon” to study that is articulated in a concise way? (Creswell, 2013, p.260)

Transferability

Transferability refers to the possibility that results found in one context apply to other contexts. It also illuminates how the current study might be applied in other contexts, or situations. According to Schwandt, Lincoln, and Guba (2007), qualitative researchers should abandon attempts to generalize their results, because qualitative research is time- and context-

bound. Researchers provide only the concluding context, not generalizations potentially applicable to other contexts. The researcher is responsible for providing detailed and thick descriptions of context. In transferability it is for future researchers to determine transferability to other contexts (Cypress, 2017; Fusch et al., 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007). This means, transferability concerns the aspect of applicability. The responsibility of the researcher is to provide a thick description of the participants and the research process, to enable the reader to assess whether your findings are transferable to their own setting; this is the so-called transferability judgement. Therefore, the researcher did not determine transferability but instead provided detailed and thick descriptions of the data which is intended to aid the readers in determining potential transferability in similar contextual settings.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the methods and procedures the researcher utilized in this study to answer the research questions (Chapter 4) that were posed. The researcher sought to understand the phenomena associated with the growing trend of religious disaffiliation in the United States and around the world, particularly with young adults between the ages of 24 to 39 years of age (Baart, 2018; Packard & Ferguson, 2018). This study used a phenomenological design to allow for the generation of rich data from which insights into Millennials' experiences with religious disaffiliation was gained, and general themes identified. The study sought to provide a basis for identifying variables that could be used to inform future qualitative studies. The researcher utilized thematic coding to identify common themes between Millennials who have become disengaged and those who maintain an affiliation, hopefully capturing the challenges they faced. The researcher will present study findings and methodological issues that arose during the study in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

Chapter four relates the findings of this study as it relates to motivating factors that impact Millennial engagement levels within ten Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. Chapter four also discusses the details of the data analysis techniques and the major themes which emerged from the interview transcripts.

The results of the study were designed to provide actionable recommendations for Senior Pastors and Churches in the GHA to consider in order to increase and sustain Millennial engagement long-term. Additionally, chapter four includes the researcher's findings and a summary of the data collection methods, the demographics of the sample group of study participants.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to understand and explore the perceptions of Millennials and senior pastors as to the motivating factors which lead to engagement within ten Protestant Churches in the Greater Hartford Area. This chapter provides the data, analysis, and results of this research.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the motivating factors which lead to participation within the Church?

RQ2. What are the motivating factors which lead to leaving a Church?

RQ3. To what degree does technology play a role in millennial engagement?

RQ4. To what degree does servant leadership play a role in millennial engagement?

RQ5. What are senior pastors' perceptions of motivating factors contributing to engagement of Millennials within their Churches.

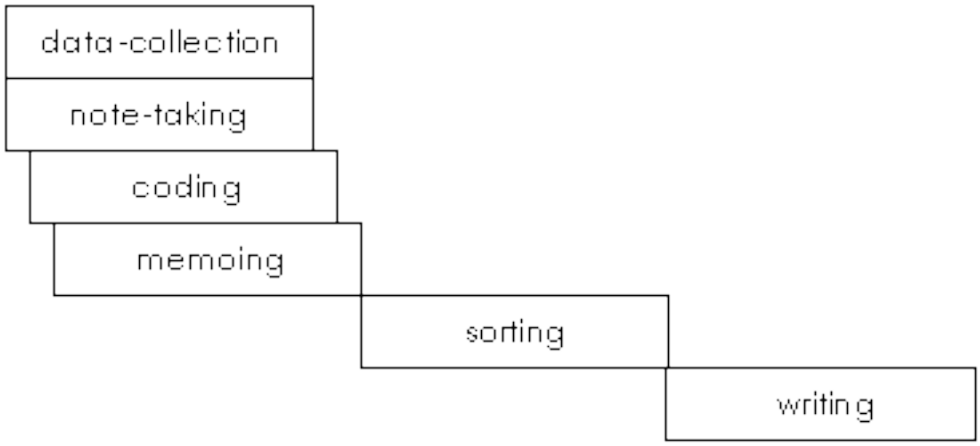
Compilation Protocol and Measures

The method of analysis chosen for this research was a phenomenological study. The analysis conducted was consistent with grounded theory methodology and how the analysis ties back to the research questions. Grounded theory is concerned with the generation of theory grounded in data and is systematically collected and analyzed, and what social scientists might experience or observe under similar circumstances. This analyzation was used to discover social relationships and behaviors of groups in this research. The overall process involved data collection involving the following steps. (See Figure 5)

1. Data collection through semi-structured interviews.
2. Note taking during the interview process.
3. Importing and Coding of data into NVivo qualitative software.
4. Memoing and sorting of data to discover emerging themes and commonalities in words.
5. Writing of discovery of themes and findings.

Figure 5

Grounded Theory Process



Note. Dick, Bob (2005) Grounded theory: a thumbnail sketch

Additionally, a qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized to gain insight into the lived experiences of the participants. Pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or

preconceptions (Husserl 1970). Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group.

Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study to determine if the protocols for each research population were easily understood. The pilot study was made up of individuals from the desired population groups and were not a part of the actual study. Additionally, the researcher wanted to ensure the interview questions were easy to understand and valid. In recruiting, the researcher posted recruitment flyers on social media and solicited participants from the targeted Churches within the research population. For the purpose of the pilot study, the researcher was able to secure two people to participate in the study. One from each research population of senior pastors and Millennials.

The participants were invited to participate in a Zoom® or Teams® virtual call due to COVID-19 restrictions. After recruiting the two participants, it was determined the results obtained from the research and interview questions were sufficient enough to be applied to the research study. The researcher followed the same interview guide designed for the main study by asking the interview questions word for word in the original order that was outlined. The 30-minute interview Zoom® calls were recorded via the application and transcribed using the *Simon Says*® application. During the virtual interview, participants were allowed to ask for clarification of interview questions to ensure they understood every detail and aspect of what was being asked. Once pilot interviews were completed, the participants were allowed to member check the transcripts for accuracy and provide any feedback.

In questioning the participants on the interview structure and the quality of questions being asked, the participants felt the questions were adequate and helped in understanding the motivating factors which impact engagement levels of Millennials within the Protestant Churches of the Greater Hartford Area. In reviewing the results of the pilot study, the researcher determined the questions were adequate and no revisions were needed for the research study.

Research Study

For this research, a recruitment flyer (see Appendix G) was posted to social media seeking participation from the targeted Churches and participants. Additionally, the same recruitment flyer was sent via email, postal mail, and Facebook messenger to the pastors of the targeted Churches. A combined total of one hundred invitations to Millennials and senior pastors were sent out soliciting participation. The researcher received 35 replies of all invitations at a 35% response rate. Of those 35 respondents, 6 were senior pastors and 29 were Millennials of the targeted Churches. The researcher initially sought to conduct 35-50 interviews of the millennial population, and 3-5 from the senior pastor population. However, due to COVID-19 the overall response rate was impacted significantly. The millennial response rate from those received was 51.72% for a total of 15 out of 29. Out of the senior pastors' respondents the response rate was higher at 83.33% with 5 out the 6 responding.

Once interviews from both targeted populations were solidified, emails were sent out containing agreed upon date and time for Zoom® or Teams® meeting, Docu-share® link for signing of consent forms, and a copy of the interview questions for the specific population. Consent forms were reviewed prior to the start of the virtual interview. Interview were recorded and transcribed through the software application Simon Says®. This software has 85% - 90% accuracy rating which made it easy to import into NVivo® for coding and analysis. Recall that

NVivo® is an intuitive software which made it easy to discover emerging themes and commonalities in the data, both of which are ideal for phenomenological research.

Coding was done inductively. Inductive coding highlighted the emerging themes from the transcripts imported into NVivo® for analysis. The themes were indicative of both senior pastor and millennial thoughts towards those high value items that impact engagement levels. An inductive approach utilizes codes generated while examining the collected data. This data was helpful in determining motivating factors which impact engagement levels of Millennials. These results will be discussed in further detail in the data analysis and findings section of this dissertation.

Demographic and Sample Data

In order to participate in the semi-structured interviews for this research, the participant had to be a member of the targeted populations. The research populations included Millennials aged 24-39 and senior pastors. Additionally, those Millennials and senior pastors were required to be members of Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. A deeper dive into the Millennials population also included former members of the Churches selected for participation. Because the researcher was seeking to study a specific group of members and leaders in the targeted Protestant Churches, the sampling procedure used was a non-probability criterion sampling method. Non-probability sampling is defined as a sampling technique in which the researcher selects samples based on the subjective judgment of the researcher rather than random selection. It is a less stringent method. Non-probability is a sampling method in which not all members of the population have an equal chance of participating in the study, unlike probability sampling. Each member of the population has a known chance of being selected.

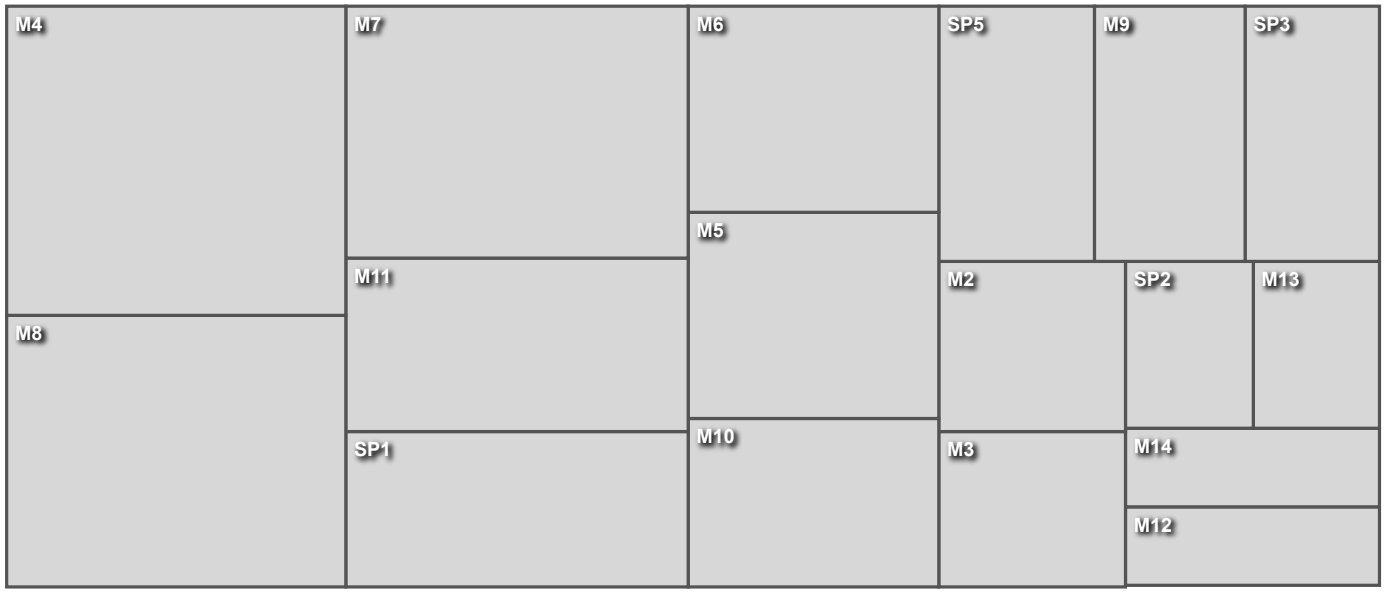
This method was also utilized because the researcher sought to examine a specific group of church leaders who met the criteria outlined and not all Church leaders and members from any or even every theological tradition or demographic (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014, pp. 82-84)

Data Analysis and Findings

Prior to the analysis of the data collected, the researcher assigned predetermined identifiers to the research population. This process was done to ensure anonymity of the participants as outlined in the interview protocols. Senior pastors who were interviewed were simply given a SP designation with a number. Millennials were given the designation of M with a number (See Figure 6). This aided in the sorting process and aligning millennial responses with senior pastor responses. This also added another layer of anonymity to those who participated. Once this was accomplished the analysis of the data was conducted.

Figure 6

Tree Map of Research Population Coding



Note. NVivo Tree Map Coding Research Population

In addition to the coding of Millennials and senior pastors, as stated previously, the researcher imported all transcripts from interviews of both research populations into the qualitative analysis

software NVivo®. The researcher carefully went through each interview transcript and conducted coding of the data based on the research questions of this dissertation. The interview transcripts were reviewed line by line, and all relevant statements associated with the research questions from the interviewees were highlighted and placed in a node for further examination. This allowed the software and the researcher to code and recode the information as more information was discovered. Multiple viewings of the transcripts were done by the researcher to ensure proper coding was conducted. In doing so, the following tree-map highlights the emerging themes from those interviews conducted (See Figure 7) .

Figure 7

Tree Map of Interview Emerging themes

Note. NVivo Tree Map of Top Emerging Themes from Interviews which impact millennial engagement

In order for the researcher to gain an understanding of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews, NVivo software helped to identify emergent themes as the data was coded.

> "Emergent themes are a basic building block of inductive approaches to qualitative social science research and are derived from the lifeworld's of research participants through the process of coding. Inductive approaches exist within positivist, postpositivist, and social constructionist paradigms" (Williams, 2008, p.249).

To discover the emergent themes, interview questions were developed for each research population. The senior pastor interview consisted of nine questions centered around the established research questions for this research. Additionally, the millennial interview consisted of 17 questions centered around the established research questions for this research but was also comprised of additional questions in regard to their current or former involvement in ministry. These questions were open-ended and utilized to gain insight into the motivating factors that lead to engagement levels of the millennial population. The interview questions were the main components of the semi-structured interviews, in which an interview guide was used with pre-determined questions and potential follow-up questions. "The latter allows the interviewer to pursue topics that arise during the interview that seem relevant" (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006, para. 3). Tables 3 & 4 show the dominant emergent themes by research population based on answers given during the interview process.

Table 3

Senior Pastor Results by Theme

Population	Acceptance	Authenticity	Communication	External Factors	Gen. Gap	Millennial Specific Ministry	Outreach Servant Leadership	Relevant Teaching and Preaching	Technology	Utilizing Skills and Talents
SP1	9	12	1	2	6	2	3	3	11	2
SP2	6	11	4	0	5	4	2	3	10	1
SP3	7	12	7	7	7	7	7	6	9	5
SP4	8	13	4	1	4	2	1	4	10	5
SP5	10	10	3	3	3	3	3	6	12	7
Totals	**40**	**58**	**19**	**13**	**25**	**18**	**16**	**22.**	**52**	**20**

Note. Senior Pastor results of total number of coding instances by theme to show motivating factors impacting millennial engagement levels.

The interview process conducted for senior pastors revealed several important factors that impact engagement levels of Millennials within their respective congregations. The goal of the interviews for the senior pastor research population was to understand their perspectives on their lived experiences with millennial participation within their congregations in the Greater Hartford Area. The senior pastors who participated in the interviews were passionate and very eager to discuss engagement levels of Millennials within their congregations. The five senior pastors all detailed the importance of reaching this generation in a way that is inclusive and authentic.

Senior Pastor 3 stated:

> One of the things senior pastors are beginning to teeter around with is the realm of American evangelicalism, which is a subset of a form of evangelicalism. But the reality is we have to really identify with true biblical evangelicalism. Once we do that, we will have a framework as far as to say what is the authentic spiritual Christ journey about. This will not only help but remedy the disconnection with Millennials. It will help bring a resolve to so many people, especially Millennials. (Senior Pastor 3 personal communication, March 26, 2021)

Senior Pastors believe that understanding the true tenants of evangelicalism from a biblical perspective is paramount to engaging Millennials. At its most basic level, evangelicalism is Christianity characterized by a belief in the literal truth of the Bible, a "personal relationship with Jesus Christ," the importance of encouraging others to be "born again" in Jesus and a lively worship culture. At least 3 senior pastors in this study identify that Millennials are looking for authenticity, not only in their spiritual relationship with Christ, but in their everyday relationships with other members of the Church. However, one of the issues that has dampened the relationships with Millennials and other generations within the Protestant Churches is the perception there is a lack of authenticity not only in leadership but also in the older populations of the Church. The results show that senior pastors cited authenticity 58 out of 283 times or 20.49% of all coded themes during the interview questions as the most important driver of engagement within the millennial population.

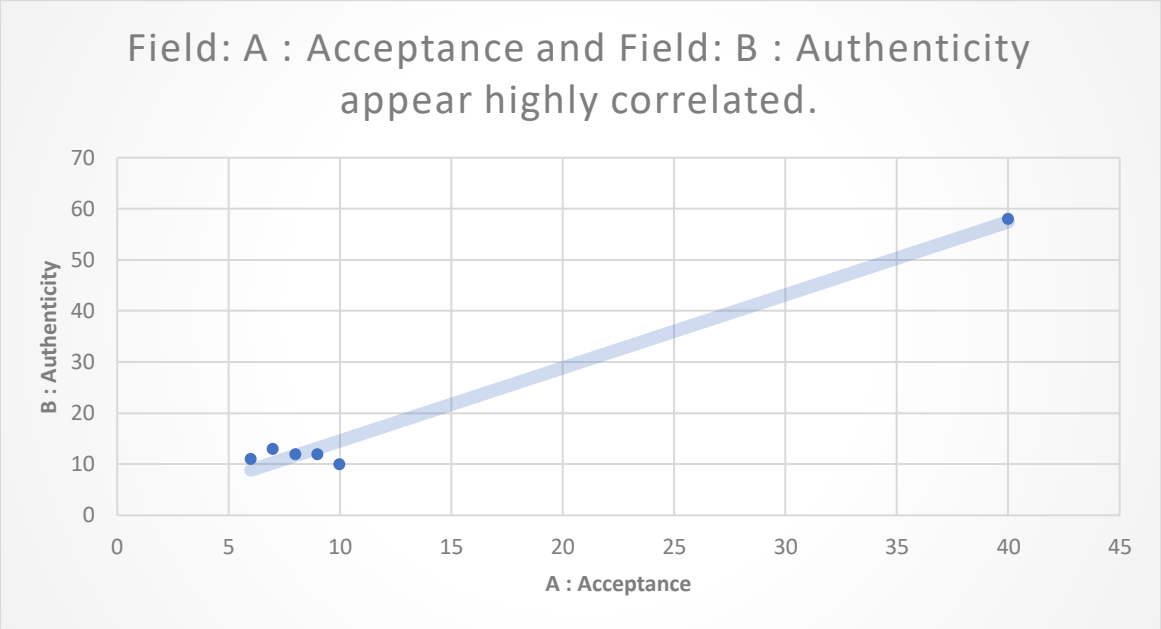
Senior Pastor 1 stated:

> Lack of authentic behavior from leader's impact Millennials the most. The Millennials want to be involved and are watching what you do versus what you say. Many have expressed that they do not see the current leaders that you have in place abiding by the things you expect from us. Many leaders and older members are not abiding by the mantra that you have set for your Church in terms of these activities. How does that not impact millennial engagement? It effectively discourages them from participating or wanting to be involved in any activities in the Church. (Y. Beauford, personal communication, March 24, 2021)

In addition to authenticity, a theme which has a direct congruence is acceptance. Although the acceptance theme emerged as the third highest impact to millennial engagement amongst senior pastors, many of them feel acceptance is directly tied to authenticity. Acceptance accounted for 14.13% (40 out of a total 283) of all coded responses from senior pastors which deal with motivating factors which impact engagement levels of Millennials. The congruence between authenticity and acceptance amongst senior pastor responses is highlighted in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Authenticity and Acceptance Correlation



Note: Acceptance and Authenticity High Correlation amongst Senior Pastors

Senior pastors state that Millennials have generational issues they are dealing with when looking to get involved in ministry. Many of the old guard in the Churches in the Greater Hartford Area are less accepting of the thought processes of Millennials when it comes to ministry.

Senior Pastor 3 said,

> The vernacular definitely has changed in reaching the Millennials. I mean, you've got to understand their lingo and their thought processes and stuff and in order to reach them. So, I think you're absolutely right, you know, in terms of the disconnection between the Millennials and congregations today" (Senior Pastor 3 personal statement March 29th, 2021).

The older generation in these Churches are less accepting of worship styles, fashion choices, as well as giving up leadership roles to Millennials. "A lot of things that have been taught come from a group of people who are more religious than spiritual. And I think the disconnect is because I think the generations of old make Jesus so hard to get to. They do not accept anything about millennial thought process" (Senior Pastor 4 personal communication, March 28th, 2021).

In making Jesus hard to get to other pastors state the Church has to change in order to meet the physical and spiritual needs of all generations. What was interesting in the interviews is the fact all senior pastors recognize the lack of authenticity and acceptance perceived by Millennials within their respective congregations, however they struggle with tackling the issues before Millennials make the decision to disaffiliate with their Churches. Before disaffiliating, many of the Millennials describe how they experienced a contradiction between the word of God, the Church's teachings, and their involvement with the congregation. The senior pastors recognize the need to become more involved in the culture and lifestyles of Millennials to better understand how they can contribute to the advancement of the Church. It is clear the lack of authenticity and acceptance from Church leaders as well as older members will damage the overall health of the Church if not addressed properly.

Senior Pastor 4 said,

> People perish. Why? Because of lack of knowledge. So how can you relate to somebody if you do not take the time to find out what their generation is even all about? And so, you know, a lot of times they are force-fed religion. A religion that's not really relative to who they are. (Pastor 4, personal statement, March 27th, 2021).

In looking at the emerging themes from the interviews conducted with senior pastors of the Churches within the Greater Hartford Area, technology emerged as the second highest coded item. Technology accounted for 18.37% (52 out of 238) of all coded responses from senior pastors as to motivating factors which impact the engagement levels of Millennials within their congregations. Technology was highly correlated with the generational gap theme due to many of the older population in the Churches lack the knowledge and understanding of technology. However, Millennials are tech savvy and utilize technology while participating in church. Senior pastors note use of social media platforms, bible applications, virtual meetings before the COVID-19 pandemic were widely utilized by Millennials and less by the older generation.

Senior pastor 1 said,

> Our Millennials love what to show us what they can do with the computer, they love showing us what they can do with the cameras at the Church? How they can put the scriptures on the screen and have a split screen with the service on the screen. They love being able to say, look how the tithes and offerings have gone up by utilizing the Givelify® application. Because now we can see people patronizing us from across the world, whereas every Sunday you had to pass five baskets. And so, using the technology they (Millennials) are looking for an opportunity to show us what they have learned. And the pandemic has been a catalyst to do that. They are showing our seniors who thought they didn't need a computer or would never need a computer, how to use Zoom® so that we can have Bible study and Sunday school and Church service, and they can tune in. (Senior Pastor 1, personal statement, April 12th, 2021)

According to Barna research, the most common way Millennials are blending their faith and technology is through digital reading of Scripture. It is an escalating trend, considering there are just as many You Version® (the free Bible phone app) downloads as there are Instagram downloads. And BibleGateway.com® has become one of the top Christian websites today.

> For Church leaders, the data point to lots of opportunities to engage Millennials spiritually online. This stems from the convergence of two trends: Millennials leaving the Church, and Millennials taking their faith discussions and explorations online. One of the most positive trends among Millennials is that they want faith that is holistically integrated into all areas of life—including their technology. How the Church acknowledges and engages the digital domain—and teaches faithfulness in real-life to young adults as well—will determine much about its long-term effectiveness among Millennials (Barna Group, 2013).

Senior Pastors recognize the need to adjust to the changing landscape in order to connect with the millennial generation. In order to accomplish they must discover creative to blend the old with the new, so that the congregations within the Greater Hartford Area grow together as an inclusive group of ministries. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the hand to this change, due to social distancing and Churches having to conduct virtual services. In many instances senior pastors look at this pandemic as an opportunity to bridge the generational gap within their Churches because it gave Millennials an opportunity to teach the older generation in regard to technology. Virtual Zoom® meetings, social media services, utilizing the computer and giving applications were ways the millennial generation were able to assist the older generation in discovering the importance of technology and ministry. Christian worship not only in the Greater Hartford area, but across the United States have long adhered to the traditional worship experience, however, this experience has been significantly altered by the coronavirus pandemic.

In summary, senior pastors within the Greater Hartford Area Protestant Churches, have identified several themes that impact engagement levels of Millennials within their Churches. Authenticity, acceptance, and technology all play major roles in Churches being able to connect with this generation in a way which promotes long-term spiritual growth. One thing is for sure is that Millennials are seeking accountability for actions not only amongst leadership but from those they worship side by side with. In order to bridge this gap, congregations within the

Greater Hartford Area will have to continue to be creative in ways of meeting the needs of all of its congregants.

Senior Pastor 1 said,

> And, you know technology and authentic worship is part of that connection that has been bringing us together. Technology and acceptance of all generations came to the forefront during the pandemic because we need each other for the first time. The older generation say we need them, and they see, and they love the fact that, hey, they really do need us. We are important to the Church and to create opportunities for them to use what they learned while we still show them the importance of who God is and who He is to us and who we are to them is the most attractive thing to them that I've seen about meeting the needs of the entire congregation. (Senior Pastor 1, personal statement, March 26th, 2021)

Technology no doubt plays an important role in connecting generations and engaging Millennials. In order for senior pastors to continue the progress, which was forced due to the coronavirus pandemic, they must continue to develop opportunities for Millennials and the older generations to come together and understand the values and skillsets each generation brings to the table. The goal is to grow the kingdom of God in a way which brings about unity and harmony, which ultimately fulfills the mandate of the Great Commission of making disciples.

The next section will show emerging themes from the millennial population. A total of 15 Millennials were interviewed on their thoughts of motivating factors which impact engagement levels within their generation. All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom® meetings and were 30 minutes in length. During the coding process of the millennial responses the researcher was able to identify similar patterns of thoughts between the two research populations of senior pastors and Millennials. The following Table 5 identifies the top emerging themes Millennials identified as some of the most important items which impact their involvement in Church.

Table 4

Millennial Results by Theme

Population	Acceptance	Authenticity	Communication	External Factors	Generational Gap	Millennial Specific Ministry	Outreach Servant Leaders	Relevant Teaching	Technology	Utilizing Skills and Talents
M1	4	10	1	8	5	6	3	4	5	2
M2	8	4	6	0	2	0	2	2	7	2
M3	18	14	3	0	7	13	4	13	10	7
M4	18	9	7	0	10	7	1	8	2	3
M5	14	8	3	0	12	10	5	12	5	7
M6	8	11	6	1	6	4	0	5	2	6
M7	6	10	2	0	2	1	0	5	8	0
M8	2	7	3	1	3	4	3	6	11	3
M9	8	13	8	2	7	6	1	12	7	5
M10	5	12	6	1	6	8	3	4	12	8
M11	5	3	2	3	2	2	2	1	9	7
M12	8	8	1	0	5	4	1	3	6	6
M13	3	9	4	4	6	7	1	7	7	6
M14	7	12	6	1	2	4	0	9	11	8
Total	**114**	**130**	**58**	**21**	**75**	**76**	**26**	**91**	**102**	**70**

Note: Millennial results of total number of coding instances by theme

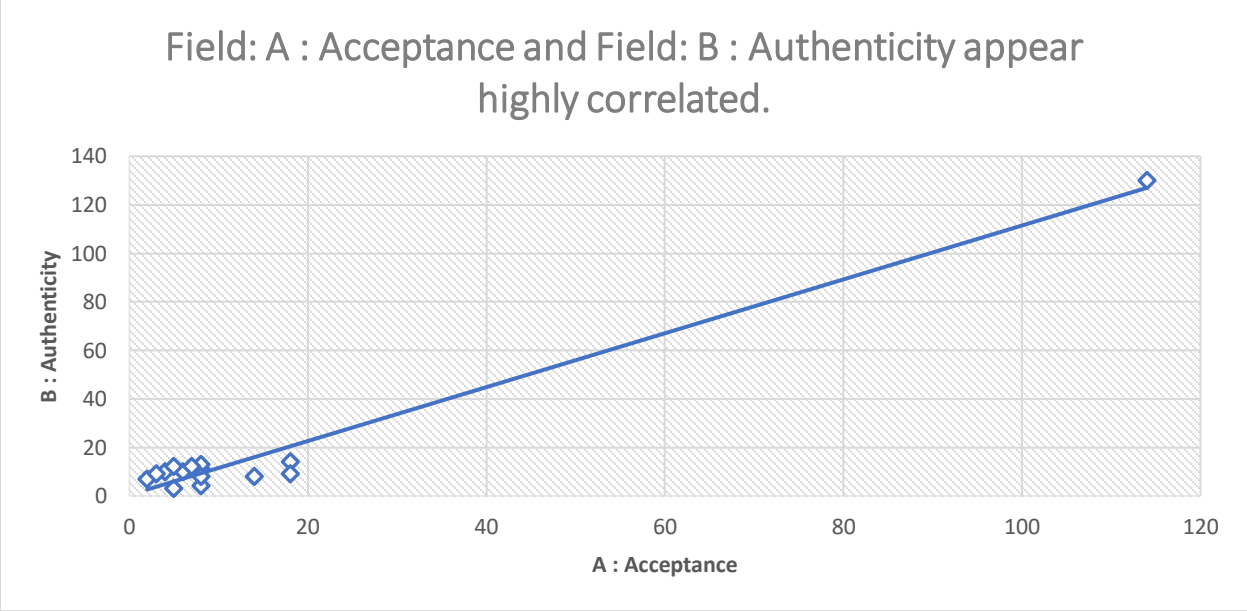
Millennials within the Protestant Churches targeted in the GHA identified several emerging themes that impact their engagement in ministry. In reviewing the data collected, surprisingly, similar patterns and themes emerged as the senior pastors in the same targeted Churches within the GHA. The number of coded responses for 14 Millennials totaled 763. The answers given by the 14 Millennials were coded in NVivo software which generated emerging themes. The top emerging themes, similar to those of the senior pastors were authenticity, acceptance, and technology. The only difference is the acceptance theme ranked second overall in coding for Millennials compared to the technology theme ranking second for senior pastors. However, surprisingly, both research populations highlighted the same top three themes as to motivating factors which impact engagement. The results show that technology and authenticity are important to Millennials as they seek to utilize their skills and talents in ministry.

Authenticity in ministry and relationships within the Protestant Churches in the Greater Hartford Area is a major concern for Millennials who attend or have attended in the past. During the interviews of several Millennials, the researcher discovered that Millennials are seeking more than attending service on Sunday morning but an authentic experience. Millennials are looking and seeking not only an "authentic" faith that will allow them to utilize their skills and talents while at the same time strengthen their personal relationship with God, but also an authentic Church that lives by the tenants of community, compassion, acceptance, and service to all.

Of the total 763 coded items in areas of ministry, authenticity accounted for 130 of those coded items or 17.04% of all responses. This theme was the highest coded theme of all responses and was closely related to the acceptance them which accounted for 114 of total coded themes or 14.94% of all responses. Authenticity and acceptance seem to show a high correlation in themes amongst Millennials as indicated by Figure 9 much like results from the senior pastors.

Figure 9

Authenticity and Acceptance Correlation amongst Millennials coding themes



Note: High Correlation between acceptance and authenticity in the Millennials population

In reviewing the results from the interviews with Millennials, the researcher discovered that Millennials renounce "easy" forms of religious practice. Many indicate that they are looking for Churches and leaders who offer a challenging learning community of believers who embrace compassion and acceptance of each other. In turn, participants note that they need to feel empowered to construct religious identities that fit their personal needs while utilizing their skills and talents alongside their fellow older Church members. They seek an authentic form of worship where all members and leaders not only recite what the Bible speaks about fellowship and love amongst all believers, but they also put it into practice in their daily interactions.

> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales, and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. (*Holy Bible*, *New International Version* Acts 4:32-35)

The results are clear, Millennials are looking for a balance in ministry that challenges them to live according to the word of God, while at the same time strengthens the bonds and relationships of all generations in the Churches, they serve in. They believe traditional congregations and services should be devoid of ritualistic worship and more focused on communicating to all generations through sermons and preaching that challenge them intellectually. Many of the interviewed Millennials view a focus on self-improvement as needed, but not entirely separate, from the pursuit of authenticity. Senior pastors must figure out how strengthen their congregation through preaching that intertwines personal fulfillment with living a life of profound worship. Millennial 4 said,

> When I look at my involvement in Church, not all of my spiritual needs were being met, so I found myself venturing out, looking into other avenues to get more of what I felt that I needed spiritually. The things that I do not get from Church, whether that's daily devotional or something to keep up with prayer groups that I can stay in contact with that's authentic and real. I needed somethings that is daily and consistent. Since I didn't

> feel accepted, I found myself going in that direction. (M4, personal communication, March 22, 2021)

The interviews indicated that when seeking a place to worship, Millennials are not looking for Churches who pretend to be perfect but are authentic in accepting those who are imperfect. They are looking for leaders who do not shy away from imperfection but seeks to encourage and develop those areas of opportunity in all members of the congregation. Many of the Millennials interviewed started out with traditional Churches but have begun their pursuit in identifying with those Churches that embody their values towards helping those in need, being creative in their approach towards worship, and possessing the characteristic of authentic compassion of others. Millennials seek innovative ways of religious practice that will allow them to utilize their God given skills and talent in a way that develops their spiritual maturity. Millennial 5 said,

> I do not want to come across as judgmental, but I also do not want people leading me that I do not see as an example. So, I have a hard time with that, too, because, like, you're up there talking to me, but you're doing the same things that I would probably be doing that I'm not supposed to be doing. So, that I have a hard time with…- hypocrisy. If you're not going to be authentic, with your relationships with Millennials then the Church will continue to see us shy away from it. When I stop coming, I honestly do not feel like anyone cared. I still got all of the Church stuff, but no one followed up to see if I was ok. I needed more than just lip service at that point in my life. I needed to grow spiritually. (M5, personal statement, March 24, 2021)

Millennials are not just seeking accepting communities and Churches, but they are demanding that communities be accepting in order to be authentic and successful. Many of the Millennials have a vastly different viewpoint than there more mature counterparts. When asked about things that are deal breakers for them and their involvement in Churches in the GHA, a plethora of items were discussed during the interviews. Millennials have a more accepting view of sexual orientation, worship styles and music, Church attire, and use of technology in the worship experience. Traditional worshippers have long preached and frowned upon

homosexuality and lesbianism along with wearing your Sunday best to Church. However, Millennials stated that this form of ritualistic and traditional way of thinking is what is driving them away. Millennials are looking for transparency in preaching and a less homophobic Church that teaches the authentic principles of not loving the sin but loving the sinner in spite of the sin. They talk a lot about tolerance and not being disrespectful in preaching when it comes to calling out those who live differently than you.

Millennial 7 said,

> A lot of Millennials I know need more transparency and dialogue around Church in the history of the Church and like the misogyny and homophobia that have plagued the Church community for years. And I think that a lot of Millennials I know are looking for more direct ways to talk about the word without it being interpreted as disrespectful or being antireligious. So, I think that's what Millennials need. I think that a lot of I want to call them Internet preachers, but a lot of popular preachers nowadays are meeting those needs by breaking down the word in a more modern, relatable way. (M7, personal statement, March 23, 2021)

Transparency and open dialogue about differences within generational cohorts seem to be one of the common themes amongst Millennials who are seeking Churches to associate with. The researcher notes that in every interview of Millennials for this research, authenticity, acceptance, and transparency was mentioned as to motivating factors that attract Millennials to Churches. Those Churches which seek to create an open dialogue and seek ways to minister and develop all generational cohorts, according to the interviewees are high attraction Churches for Millennials.

Millennial 6 said,

> I think, by and large, we are being ignored at times. But the need to have Churches not to toot my own horn, but you have pastors like Pastor Trevor, who is working with a very traditional Church in a Church with such a strong, rich history. But he is picking up Millennials, saying, OK, what do you need? But at the same time, he's still asking the older Church members, well, what do you need? So, I think he's found a really beautiful way of intentionally seeking out all voices. (M6, personal statement, March 21, 2021)

In looking at the authenticity and acceptance themes which emerged during the coding process of millennial interview statements, leaders of the Churches within the Greater Hartford area, specifically the Protestant Churches have work to do in bridging the divide. The researcher was profoundly grateful for the transparency and open dialogue from each of the Millennials. The following statements point to the importance of leaders addressing the authenticity and acceptance themes in a way that brings Millennials to the table where they feel valued and appreciated.

Millennial 4 said,

> I literally do not think that we are accepted, I think we are tolerated. We are not accepted but tolerated because it's the house of God. So, everyone is welcome in the house of God. But you can tell by the looks of disapproval, side conversations, whispers, just simple things or the not so warm in greeting at the door. You know, and that could be something that's so simple. You know, ushers are disrespecting people at the door. They think that they're not doing any harm, but they're doing more harm than good. And so that could be something that can turn someone away just from that. And that individual at the door could have just had a bad day that day. But I do not know that it is not authentic, and Millennials do not feel welcome at times. (M4, personal statement, March 22, 2021)

Millennial 11 said,

> I do not feel that we meet the needs of the Millennials. And the big thing is that they want to be engaged and involved. Our mind needs to constantly be stimulated. And again, technology is the key, as we see even with us around the boomers. And but again, I just feel that we really kind of dropped the ball on showing the Millennials how to get involved and how they can help in any aspect of the Church. Sometimes the generational gap causes issues because the older generation doesn't see the value in the skills and abilities of the Millennials. And in order for the Church to grow it has to inclusive and accepting of all generations. (M11, personals statement, March18, 2021)

Millennial 13 said,

> For me, probably, I will say there is a disconnection between each generation within the Church. The way each generation was brought up is different. A lot of our members go back to traditional times, so it is hard for us to find out where we fit in to the Church. And a lot of behavioral aspects in the Church impact the Millennials. Being treated less than and not being accepted as a viable voice for change is often a problem. We'd like to find some way that we fit into the congregation, but we do not really get that because a lot of our senior members or older members look at us differently. (M13, personal statement March 18, 2021)

Authenticity and acceptance were resounding themes in each of the interviews of Millennials. It is critical for the Church and its leaders in the GHA to develop and implement strategies that create an open dialogue of the motivating factors that cause engagement levels to fluctuate. Many of the comments from Millennials seemed to come from a good place of wanting to please God. Albeit the content of their answers may seem they are disenfranchised and ready to bolt for the door, nothing could be further from the truth. The Millennials love their Churches and members they corporately worship with. They want to see the change and acceptance they talk about and are willing to meet halfway in order to foster a more harmonious union within the Protestant Churches in the GHA. However, they do not want to feel marginalized and have the disconnectedness from the older generation. In order to make progress, the Church needs to become the place where all those things described above – marginalization, disconnectedness, constant separation, and constant motion – no longer find a home.

One of the other issues which impact millennial engagement from the research study is the theme around technology. As stated previously, technology plays a critical role in attracting and keeping Millennials, which senior pastors recognize. The COVID-19 pandemic played an important role in bridging the gap between generations through technology. Churches and leaders had to become more creative in conducting socially distanced services, older members had to be brought up to speed on the technology being used to communicate and other platforms needed to be developed for bible study, giving, funerals and weddings. Some Millennials cited that for the first time they felt appreciated and needed, and that the older generation was accepting of their skills and talents. Technology had to be taught to the older generation in a way that had never been done before. Many Millennials state they spent time on the phones due to the socially distancing with older members walking them through how to setup Zoom® calls, how to

utilize social media, and some things as simple as how to dial in to a conference call for a meeting. Many areas that were frowned upon by the older generation in the past had now become a necessity for worship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Members were taught how to utilize FaceTime and other applications to visit their loved ones while they were in the hospital by the Millennials in the Church.

Millennial 10 said,

> I believe the Millennials finally felt they had a place in the Church. I believe if you get a strong music and media ministry, because the Millennials are very technical. During this time in the pandemic, I feel like they flourished because they were the ones who were already on social media heavily and they did a lot of conferences already before the pandemic. So, when the pandemic hit across the board, people were looking to them for help. So, the Millennials needed to assist them with Zoom® conferencing and Microsoft teams, they were looking to the Millennials to assist us because they were lost. And at that moment they felt needed. They felt like their ideas were being heard, that we were utilizing them. And at that moment, they were excited. When it comes to music, the Millennials, the culture, they love music, and they love to hear a beat, or they love to hear a music with a message. (M10, personal statement, March 24, 2021)

In looking at technology and the responses from Millennials, 102 of the total 763 coded themes were technology related. This accounts for 13.37% of the total responses that were coded from the interviews of Millennials. Much like the senior pastor responses, Millennials recognize the need to integrate technology into the worship experience. Millennials see themselves as game-changers. They desire to make impactful decisions and bring about change and technology has been one of the avenues that has allowed them to bring about lasting change. They feel technology has helped them bridge the gap between generations. “So, for me, the creativity, the technological efficiency is important. There should be excitement to try new things and I think that the older generation actually sees that as a benefit, as a net benefit” (J. Elliott, personal statement, March 23rd, 2021).

In summary, the researcher notes that the top 3 themes that emerged during the interview process of Millennials was almost identical to the top 3 themes for senior pastors. Authenticity,

acceptance, and technology appear to be the pillars which connect generations and impact engagement levels for Millennials. The researcher believes the results are telling in that senior pastors and Millennials appear to be on the same page as to how to fix the divide, the question arises as to how will they tackle the problem together?

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asks, what are the motivating factors which lead to participation within the Church? In reviewing data that relates to motivating factors that has led to participation for Millennials within the Greater Hartford Area Protestant Churches, the researcher used inductive coding within the two research populations in order to gain clear insight into the mitigating and motivating factors which lead to Millennials participating in Church. As stated previously the analysis conducted was consistent with grounded theory methodology as the analysis ties back to the research questions. To gain a better understanding of this issue, the following questions were asked of Millennials and senior pastors and imported into NVivo for emerging themes.

1. What are the motivating factors which lead you as a millennial to participate in ministry?
2. Some Churches and leaders do not see the value of changing to reach this generation, how has your Church changed to reach this population?

Additionally, to understand the responses by population the researcher separated data by population. The coding data results show that there are several factors which lead to millennial participation within the Church. Authenticity, acceptance, and the use of technology were emerging themes which participants of the study cited. There were other factors and themes of lesser value that were contributors, who included relevant teaching and preaching, millennial specific ministries, outreach servant leader activities, external factors, generational gap, and utilization of skills and talent. In reviewing the response as stated previously the top three motivating factors which lead to Church participation include an authentic place of worship on

all levels, a feeling of acceptance from the other generations, and the integration of technology into the worship experience.

According to dictionary.com, authenticity or being authentic is defined as "genuine or real." Authenticity, the state of being authentic, is being "true to oneself or to the person identified." Furthermore, when something is authentic, it is "entitled to acceptance or belief because of agreement with known facts or experience; reliable; trustworthy." The opposite of authentic is false. Millennials in this research are attracted to authenticity and the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the Church. One of the leading drivers behind whether or not they choose to become engaged in one of the targeted Churches of this study, is how they members and leaders carry out their roles according to God's Word. Authentic behavior in how they treat fellow members who are different than them, and how they welcome the common person to the service are all important behaviors in which Millennials are using as litmus test for their decision on participation. Responses from senior pastors and Millennials both indicate that this authenticity transcends into how leaders actually lead. Millennials are looking to see if those who are in positions of authority are practicing what they preach. "A lot of Millennials have a wait and see attitude. They know what they expect out of ministry and what they are looking for, and one of the common themes is authenticity and acceptance. So, seeing authentic ministry in action, is important" (J. Elliott, personal statement, March 27, 2021).

The second motivating factor which leads to participation within the Church in the GHA that emerged as a dominant theme in the interview process of both research populations is acceptance. In coding the data as previously stated, acceptance to Millennials and senior pastors were in the top 3 responses.

The responses to these questions varied by population. Of the millennial's response 12 out of 14 Millennials interviewed cited feeling accepted by the older generation as a reason to become active in ministry. In other words, acceptance by Millennials is viewed as more than just accepting them into Church service, but also placing value on their thoughts and opinions. Millennials think differently than the older generation as it relates to several issues that have been controversial to the Church. Issues such as homosexuality, worship styles, types of clothing worn, and also preaching styles to name a few.

M13 Stated:

> One of the things I find challenging in the Church is the mindset that I find that the older generation has trouble connecting with us on. There is a sense of entitlement that gets thrown out pretty frequently and the sense of not having a work ethic about Millennials. So, I still think that there's a lot of tension there. I think the most amount of tension from a spiritual standpoint is the is the social issues, sex before marriage and the heterosexual homosexuality lack of acceptance in the traditional Church. So, I think that there's still a large gap between generations. Tension between Millennials and the older generation when it comes to those things. (M13, personal statement, March 26th, 2021)

Churches in the GHA are challenged to figure out ways to have thoughtful conversations with Millennials in regard to these issues. Leaders are starting to realize that attitudes and behaviors of Millennials are radically different from previous generations. The Church does not have to be accepting of sin; however, it has to address the issues in a way that seeks reconciliation and life changed through the teaching of the Word of God. In both research populations, interviewees expressed concern about how individuals who were dealing with understanding their identity in Christ and struggling with living alternative lifestyles were being treated harshly by the Church. This issue of acceptance is challenging to Millennials because they struggle with how traditional Church members treat those who are seeking a spiritual answer to their issues.

Millennial 13 said,

> I think definitely speaking to others in a I want to say violent, but harmful way. Sermons may be homophobic or misogynistic or just sermons that outwardly degrade and shame people identities or their actions, I think that's definitely a deal breaker" (M13, personal statement, March 27, 2021).

In summary, authentic relationships and acceptance of different thoughts and views across generations are major factors that contribute to the engagement levels of Millennials within the Churches in the GHA. Millennials want to be contributors and utilize their skills and talents in a way that works in collaboration with the older generations. Senior Pastors and Millennials alike recognize the need to develop ministries and strategies that address the ongoing needs of the entire Church. A study conducted by the Seventh Day Adventist (Jenkin & Martin, 2014), indicated Millennials have a desire to be engaged in both mentoring and intergenerational relationships within the Church. Jenkin and Martin reported that the presence of intergenerational relationships was a key factor in Millennials remaining in the Churches they serve in. Although integration of technology was another motivating factor for Millennials and senior pastors, this motivating factor will be addressed in research question 3.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asks, what are the motivating factors which lead to leaving a Church? In order for the researcher to understand in explicit terms the motivating factors which have led to Millennials to disaffiliate with a Church in the targeted area, the question was asked to all Millennials interviewed. The interview results show that having an authentic view of the entire Church and also feeling accepted as the main drivers for disaffiliation. However, Millennials offer other issues that cause them to leave. Some cite how they were treated by ushers when they walked through the doors of the Church caused them to leave. Additionally, comments about how they dress, or utilize technology during the service from the older

population of the Church often times led to them falling away . Millennials view this type of communication as disrespectful and have stated they see this as a deal breaker when deciding whether or not to continue to fellowship with a Church. A millennial interviewed highlighted in one of the interviews conducted how misunderstanding between generations has led to this type of behavior.

Millennial said,

> I think the biggest thing is the disrespect. Because I've noticed a lot of the older generation downing our spirituality, telling us that we're not praying enough, telling us that we're not reading our Bibles instead of having a conversation and actually giving us the opportunity to show that we do know the Bible, we do have a real relationship with God. And I think I know for me sometimes I'm apt to leave. Millennials do not want to be disrespected. (M2, personal statement, March 25, 2021)

It appears that many of the Churches in the research study targeted area have struggled with this issue in its congregation. A senior pastor stated, "Some Churches often have an identity complex. It's sad but the older generation often clashes with Millennials on matters of vision and strategy, causing them to leave. (Senior Pastor 2, personal statement, March 28th, 2021).

Other reasons that Millennials and senior pastors indicate as motivating factors that has caused the disaffiliation include lack of communication and the feeling having no voice in any matters of the Church. One of the emerging themes in both research populations deals with generational gap issues. The generational gap issues, although not as significant as the top 3 themes, is an underlying motivating factor as to why Millennials are leaving. Generational gap issues were coded 125 times out of the total 1,046 coded items from both research populations. This emerging theme accounted for 11.95% of total responses which gives validity to it being an underlying issue which impacts Millennial's engagement levels.

Millennial 4 said,

> I'm hoping and I'm praying that we're turning a corner but there has to be clear communication. Millennials are leaving because of the drama and different things where there seems to be cliques in the Church. Also, if you do speak up or if you do have a question, you do approach it in a respectable way, but you do not get that respect back. So, it's kind of like now your kind of being edged out, and you have no choice but to leave. The generational gap between the older saints and Millennials causes a rift that sometimes can't be repaired. (M4, personal statement, March 23, 2021)

The generational divide is multifaceted. The gap involves Millennials who are trying to fit in and share their innovative ideas to an organized Church with traditions and at times ritualistic components and are being challenged for doing so. The other part of the gap involves seasoned members who are trying to protect and preserve their way of doing things including decision making, worship, teaching, and are not ready to pass the baton to the next generation and are causing a disenfranchisement of the millennial population. These issues have caused Millennials to seek other ways of getting spiritual development and disaffiliate with the organized Church of today.

Millennial 7 said,

> The generational divide in Church is definitely there. I came to Church and was stopped at the door. I'm trying to get in the building just to hear the Word and to find Christ during a difficult time. An older member stopped me from entering because of the makeup I had on. And so, when I get to the prayer altar, someone tells me that I'm praising God too loud, and it do not take all that. I was surprised that what was said to me. It made me want to leave and never come back. (M7, personal statement, March 29, 2021)

In summary, there are several motivating factors that are impacting engagement levels of Millennials within the Churches in the GHA. From personal statements of both research populations during the interview process, the issues of authentic relationships, acceptance of all different viewpoints, and the generational divide that serves as an undercurrent to many of the issues must be addressed. Millennials want to be a part of Churches where they feel like they

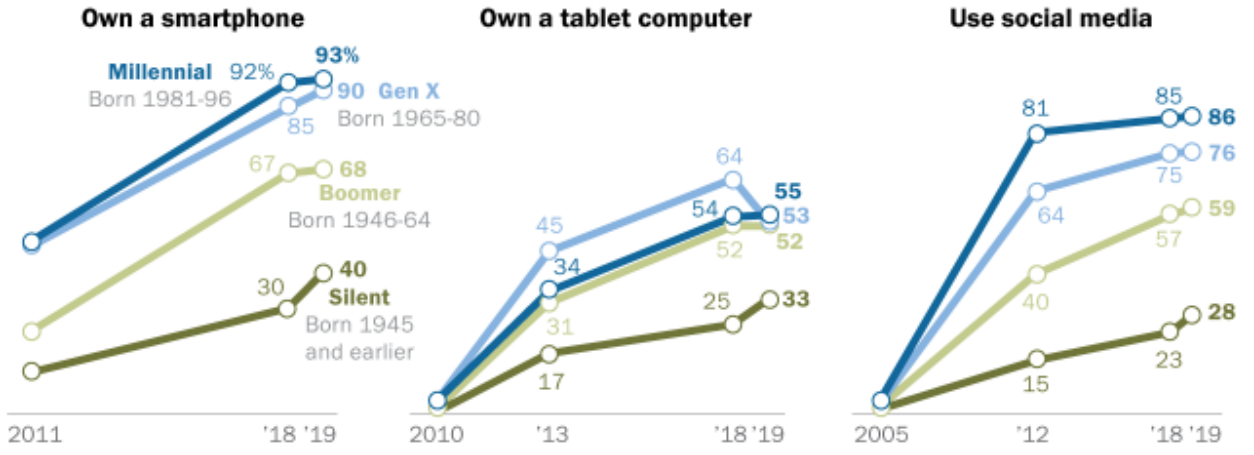
matter but they also want to be treated like they matter. Senior Pastors and Millennials alike, acknowledge the fact that they value purpose in serving. They want to be trusted enough to be a part of the mission and vision of the Church in a way that is inclusive and respectful, or as one of the Millennials stated, “They will take their skills and talents where it is appreciated and utilized” (M1, personal statement, March 26, 2021).

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asks, to what degree does technology play a role in millennial engagement? In reviewing the data from the interviews conducted from both research populations, technology was considered to play an important role in millennial engagement levels. Technology accounted for 13.37% (102 out of the total 763) of all coded response from Millennials and 18.37% (52 out of 238) of all coded responses from senior pastors as to motivating factors which impact the engagement levels. The numbers show that technology has in important place in engaging Millennials during the worship experience. Figure 10 from Pew research indicate Millennials lead the emergence of technology in many areas.

Figure 10

Millennials and technology usage vs. other generations



Note: Millennial Technology use compared to other generations

Millennials have been early adopters to the technology age in all areas of life. From owning a computer, using social media, to owning a smart phone, it is easy to understand why they have brought this knowledge into the worship experience. Interview results indicate that senior pastors of the protestant Churches within the GHA have seen the exponential value of technology since the start of the pandemic. Churches across the country have adjusted services in order to better reach congregations due to social distancing guidelines imposed by the government. The pandemic has caused the older population to see the value in some of the technology they were opposed to in the past or just didn't understand the need for it.

Pastor 3 Said,

> Digital Media Matters, technology, gadget matters. It actually aids in the evangelism of our older people since COVID. The older generation see it as toys, not as evangelism, but to reach our Millennials we need it, and now because of COVID our seniors. Even though they just do not value a quality product. They do not see the ten thousand dollars as an investment in quality. I'm hoping that changes since we have had to adjust due to COVID. (Pastor 3, personal statement, March 24, 2021)

As stated previously, technology plays a critical role in attracting and keeping Millennials, which senior pastors recognize. The COVID-19 pandemic played an important role in bridging the gap between generations through technology because of the need to reach all generations. The interview sessions with senior pastors and Millennials were enlightening and informative in understanding how generations begin to work together through technology. In reviewing the motivating factors which impact engagement levels of Millennials, technology during the pandemic seem to offer a glimmer of hope that perhaps generations can work together in the Church.

According to Barna research, the most common way Millennials are blending their faith and technology is through digital reading of Scripture. It's an escalating trend, considering there are just as many You Version (the free Bible phone app) downloads as there are Instagram downloads. Seven out of 10 of practicing Christian Millennials (70%) read Scripture on a screen. One-third of all Millennials says they read sacred Scripture on a phone or online, demonstrating how broadly the digital trends are shaping this generation. The senior pastors and Millennials within the GHA protestant Churches understand the importance of technology integration within their worship services. They are working to bridge the gap between generations to ensure they see the value in investing in the hardware to make it happen.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 asks, to what degree does servant leadership play a role in millennial engagement? Reviewing the data from both research populations, servant leadership and outreach activities were among the emerging themes after data was coded in NVivo. Servant leadership was coded 5.65% (16 out of 283) of all responses for senior pastors and 3.41% (26 out 763) of all responses for Millennials. Even though this theme did not appear as a dominant theme, some of the interviewees cited the importance of living out to the mission of the Church through outreach activities. In answering the research question regarding the degree that servant leadership play a role in millennial engagement, the answer suggests that it serves a significant role. However, the issues of acceptance and authenticity need to be improved in order to allow these activities to be built upon across generations. Millennials desire a team environment where all generations can work together to live out ministry through serving others. However, in feeling unaccepted and disrespected at times, causes these important activities to lay dormant while other issues are sorted out.

Millennial 15 Stated:

> Our Church seems to be more centered on outreach and servant leadership more than anything else and then the youth at times. But there is no involvement for the Millennials and there really isn't any real place specifically for us to engage to be elevated or to grow outside of the available basics that we already have. Millennials are either too old for the youth activities or too young for the new activism and outreach that's mainly done by the older generation. And I believe that those of us who stay have a sense of loyalty and commitment and we try to just get in wherever we can fit in. (M15, personal statement, March 2. 2021)

The answers to this research question are misleading, due to the fact many of the interviewees appeared to be laser focused on improving relational issues within the Churches in the GHA. The desire to be involved in the business of the Church was evident, however, the dominant themes of feeling accepted and having an authentic relationship with other generations

and leaders within the body of Christ, prevents these activities from happening on the scale Millennials would like to be involved in. While some activities are happening, the answers from Some of the Millennials in this research study suggest they are not included in some of those endeavors including servant leadership activities, transformational leadership. This leads to Millennials feeling unaccepted and leadership being viewed as unauthentic**.**

Research Question 5

Research question 5 asks, what are senior pastors' perceptions of motivating factors contributing to engagement of Millennials within their Churches. The research question sought to understand from a senior pastor's perspective, their thoughts on the motivating factors they have on what leads to engagement for Millennials within their congregations. The senior pastors interviewed from the 5 Protestant Churches were all transparent and provided insight into their personal experiences with engagement of Millennials within their Churches. The researcher sought to interview 2-5 senior pastors from the 10 Protestant Churches selected within the Greater Hartford Area.

Out of the senior pastors' respondents the response rate was 83.33% with 5 out the 6 responding. This response rate was encouraging to the researcher since the initial response rate for millennial participation was low. The senior pastors within the targeted area had a common theme in their responses as to the motivating factors that contribute to millennial engagement. These responses have been discussed previously as the top emerging themes of authenticity, acceptance, and technology. The researcher wanted to understand if there was a difference of opinion between senior pastors and Millennials as to what motivates them (Millennials) be engage in ministry. The results were almost identical. Senior pastors feel they have to be more authentic and accepting in their approach with all generations. The senior pastors all indicate that

work needs to be done on bridging the generational divide within their respective congregations. “We got to meet people where they are. We have to work at getting rid of the judgment of Millennials, like their opinion doesn't matter. We have to develop strategies that brings everyone together with the goal of exemplifying Christ” (Senior Pastor 4, personal statement, March 26, 2021).

Senior pastors understand they must bridge the gap by leading authentically and teaching acceptance of all generations in their Churches. This phenomenon is not isolated to the Greater Hartford Area. Barna (2017) states, “Millennials across the country who are opting out of Church cite three factors with equal weight in their decision: 35 percent cite the Church’s irrelevance, hypocrisy, and the moral failures of its leaders as reasons to check out of Church altogether. In addition, two out of 10 unchurched Millennials say they feel God is missing in Church.”

In summary, the researcher would agree that the Church needs to maintain a healthy balance across generations in the Greater Hartford Area. Senior pastors in the GHA indicate that leaders and parishioners must understand the Church is a gathering place for those who are seeking a deeper and more committed relationship with Christ and that we all are sinners saved by grace. In order for senior pastors to accomplish the goal of Calvary, they must continue to relate the importance of salvation to the collective community of believers. They must promote the power of God through being authentic in prayer, proclamation, and praxis.

Pastor 2 Stated:

> We have to do a better job of being authentic and accepting if we are going to engage the Millennials. As a senior pastor I try to distribute leadership and intergenerational engagement and the idea of we serve others as part of the deal. We promote you can't be a leader unless you are actively involved in service. The challenge is when you have a model for servant leadership and your leadership doesn't abide by it. We have got to do better and set the right example not just for Millennials and the older generation, but because God is watching. (Pastor 2, personal statement, March 24, 2021)

The answers to the research questions for this study indicate the motivating factors that impact engagement levels of Millennials within the protestant Churches in the GHA were consistent across research populations. The next section with evaluate the research design of this study.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological design. Phenomenology focuses on describing the lived experience of individuals about a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). For this study, the lived experience being examined was the engagement activities of Millennials and senior pastors of 10 Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. The phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because it provided the researcher with deep, rich data from detailed semi- structured interviews with participants from the targeted Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. The interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom® and Teams® applications due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A phenomenological design "culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). It is important to note that since the researcher had the opportunity to interview multiple individuals from both research populations, sufficient data as it relates to a phenomenological design was discovered. The findings that emerged from this study provided various beneficial insights related to motivating factors which impact engagement levels of Millennials within the targeted Churches from perspective of the Millennials and the senior pastors who lead them. The major themes that emerged from this study were without intentionality and were the result of a natural progression of data through inductive coding of interviews from both research populations. As a result of using a phenomenological design, this researcher was able to gain insightful data to understand the lived experiences of both senior

pastors and Millennials as described by the participants in this study. The next section will outline the conclusions of this study in more detail.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand the motivating factors that contribute to millennial engagement within 10 Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford, CT area. The research population consisted of 5 senior pastors and 14 Millennials who attended the targeted Churches for a total of nineteen participants. This chapter presents a summary of the findings relevant to the participant's lived experiences within those Churches selected. This is followed by an empirical and theoretical discussion of the findings in light of relevant literature. This chapter further examines the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study, including delimitations and limitations. This chapter will highlight further research recommendations and how it will contribute to the larger academic audience. The summary concludes with the most significant implications of this phenomenological study.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to understand and explore the perceptions of Millennials and senior pastors as to motivating factors which lead to engagement. This study within the Greater Hartford Area which was comprised of ten Protestant Churches of varied denominations and sizes. At this stage in the research, Millennials were generally defined as anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 24 to 39 in 2020).

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the motivating factors which lead to participation within the Church?

RQ2. What are the motivating factors which lead to leaving a Church?

RQ3. To what degree does technology play a role in millennial engagement?

RQ4. To what degree does servant leadership play a role in millennial engagement?

RQ5. What are senior pastors' perceptions of motivating factors contributing to engagement of Millennials within their Churches.

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Research Conclusions

The researcher found that the findings from this research study were conclusive to the respect of understanding the motivating factors which impact engagement levels of Millennials withing the protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford area. There have been a number of studies conducted on the topic of millennial engagement within Churches and the motivating factors which affect it. The findings of this research were substantial enough to provide an understanding of the phenomenon as viewed through the lived experiences of the participating senior pastors and Millennials. The researcher took into consideration the purpose of the research design, and concluded the study offered an in-depth understanding of the overall motivating factors which impact engagement levels of Millennials. The following section seeks to provide a more specific understanding of the conclusions with respect to each research question.

Research Question 1 Conclusion

The first research question sought to understand the motivating factors which lead to participation within the Church. In reviewing the data from semi-structured interviews from both research populations the researcher found the results to be conclusive. The top three coded items from interviews of both research populations were authenticity, technology and acceptance as

being the leading motivating factors which impact engagement. These emergent themes accounted for 150 out of a total 283 total codes items for senior pastors or 53% of total coded items which senior pastors cited as motivating factors which lead to engagement. Similarly, the same coded items of authenticity, acceptance and technology were the top 3 coded themes for the millennial population. These coded themes accounted for 346 out of a total 763 coded items for Millennials or 45.35% of total coded items which Millennials cited as motivating factors which lead to engagement.

Although there was a total of 10 emerging themes the NVivo software calculated from the coded items from the interviews, the researcher could conclude from the high percentage of the top three coded items of authenticity, acceptance and technology from both research populations as true motivating factors that impact engagement levels. Other themes which contributed to engagement levels were generational gap issues for senior pastors which accounted for 25 out of the total 283 coded items or 8.83%. Millennials cited the theme of relevant teaching and preaching which accounted for 91 out of the total 763 coded items or 11.93%. In reviewing statements from Millennials, the researcher discovered these themes to be impactful to engagement levels, as stated by one of the Millennials interviewed below.

Millennial 2 Stated:

> In order for the Church to move forward in my opinion, it must address the issues of being authentic and accepting of the Millennials. I've always felt before this pandemic even happened, and it could probably happen virtually, that we need to have a full sit down with the entire congregation where everything is on the table. Let it be known what exactly we are going through as a millennial. If they want us to stay in Church, let us tell you what we are thinking and feeling and use our skills and talents in technology and other areas. Other generations have to want to know what's going on so they can actually understand what's bothering us or stop what's going on so we can stay in the Church. (M.2, personal statement, March 24, 2021)

This profound statement from a millennial is perhaps one of the most significant answers to the motivating factors which impact engagement levels within the Churches in the GHA. The research data showed that all 14 participants mentioned the top 3 themes of authenticity, acceptance, and technology in the answers during the interview process.

Research Question 2 Conclusion

The second research question sought to understand the motivating factors which lead to leaving a Church. Millennials were transparent during the interview process as to the items they termed as deal breakers when deciding to leave a Church. During the interview process of Millennials and senior pastors, the themes of authenticity, acceptance and use of technology were emerging themes in the conversation regarding leaving a Church. One of the Millennials stated bluntly "I will leave a Church that does not respect all people" (G. Smith, personal statement, March 26th, 2021). While another millennial stated, "Pastors and leaders who are not authentic and refuse to allow us to be involved through using our skills and talents whether it's with technology or in leadership is a deal breaker for me" (M5, personal statement, March 26th, 2021).

The results are conclusive in that senior pastors were asked the same questions as to the motivating factors that lead to Millennials leaving their Churches. Senior pastors were asked the following question.

1. What are the top 3 reasons Millennials have left the Church?

The following responses from senior pastors show that Millennials are consistent in their responses as the motivating factors which lead to disaffiliation from the Churches in which they attend within the GHA. "One of the top three reasons Millennials are leaving the Church I would say one is judgment. They are judged because they're different, they operate different, and

worship different. We got to meet people where they are" (Senior Pastor 4, personal statement, March 26, 2021). Another senior pastor stated "It's unfortunate but many in the Church are not authentic in their response to Millennials and their abilities. They are being looked at as they are inferior, like their opinion doesn't matter which creates a sense of negativity that Millennials won't tolerate (Senior Pastor 4, personal statement, March 28, 2021). As stated previously senior pastors and Millennials point to a generational divide which impacts engagement levels. Generational differences as it relates to worship styles, how Millennial's dress, and the use of technology (cell phones in service, social media, digital media) are all issues which feed the generational gap that exists in the Churches in the GHA. As previously mentioned, the generational gap issues, although not as significant as the top 3 themes, is an underlying motivating factor as to why Millennials are leaving. Generational gap issues were coded 125 times out of the total 1,046 coded items from both research populations. This emerging theme accounted for 11.95% of total responses which gives validity to it being an underlying issue which impacts Millennial's engagement levels and a reason they are leaving the Church.

Research Question 3 Conclusion

The third research question sought to understand to what degree does technology play a role in millennial engagement? The data from the research shows that technology does is in fact play a motivating factor of engagement levels of Millennials. In fact, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, technology emerged as impactful not only for Millennials but for the Church as a whole. The results from this study are conclusive due to the fact all Churches in the study were impacted during the field research portion of this study. All Churches were required by law to abide by social distancing guidelines, and limitations set for the number of people who could gather within the Church at any time. The American Psychological Association reported:

> During these times when a moratorium is placed on churches, community building, social connections and attitudinal changes are being hampered. No doubt, American Psychological Association (APA) has observed that the lockdown has triggered depression, anxiety disorders and adverse behavioral changes to the American people (American Psychological Association, 2020).

All of the Churches within the targeted research study had to move to a virtual platform to conduct all religious activities which included social media, Zoom®, Microsoft teams®, conference calls, and even giving applications such as Givelify®.

As previously mentioned, technology accounted for 13.37% (102 out of the total 763) of all coded response from Millennials and 18.37% (52 out of 238) of all coded responses from senior pastors as to motivating factors which impact the engagement levels.

Senior Pastor 2 Stated:

> Due to the pandemic, we have had to engage all forms of technology to reach our congregation. We use Facebook®, Instagram®, Zoom®, Facetime, and conference calls. It's funny because the older saints used to frown upon social media and the use of technology, and now they are forced to learn all of them. The Millennials have done a great job in helping with that process and hopefully we can keep that momentum going. Technology has definitely played a critical part in our engagement of the entire Church due to the pandemic. (Senior Pastor 2, personal statement, March 24, 2021)

The research question of to what degree does technology play a role in millennial engagement is conclusive in nature. The research conclusion for question 2 demonstrated the degree to which technology plays a role in millennial engagement. This was identified in each of the participants lived experiences with technology within their respective ministries.

Research Question 4 Conclusion

The fourth research question sought to understand to what degree does servant leadership play a role in millennial engagement? The results from this question were inconclusive as to the impact of this theme on millennial engagement levels within the targeted Churches. The response rate of coded items was well below the response rate of the top 3 coded items from both research

populations. As stated in the previous section servant leadership was coded 5.65% (16 out of 283) of all responses for senior pastors and 3.41% (26 out 763) of all responses for Millennials. While the number of coded items were low compared to the other 9 themes which emerged, servant leadership was mentioned enough to be identified as one of the emerging themes in the NVivo qualitative software. Additionally, to develop themes from research data, researchers often start by engaging with the data through interactive reading, which facilitates the analysts' connection with the data. By doing so underlying themes such as servant leadership emerge as an underlying meaning which maybe stated directly or indirectly. Given discussed emergent themes and how they emerge during the coding process.

> Emergent themes are a basic building block of inductive approaches to qualitative social science research and are derived from the lifeworld's of research participants through the process of coding. Inductive approaches exist within positivist, postpositivist, and social constructionist paradigms. Some qualitative researchers believe that emergent themes are part of the process that leads to generalizable theories of human society, whereas others use emergent themes to provide rich and detailed insight into the micro and meso levels of intersubjective experience. Themes emerge from the close analysis of any data source, including fieldnotes, ethnographic and reflective memos, interview transcripts, and various print, visual, and digital media. (Given, 2008, p. 65)

While servant leadership emerged as a theme in the coded data from both research populations. The amount of data coded for servant leadership is inconclusive and misleading. The number of times the software identified servant leadership compared to other themes suggest the research populations identify servant leadership as a concern. However, both research populations appeared to be laser focused on other themes which dealt with improving relational issues within the Churches in the GHA. Improving relational issues may point to a desire for individual consideration, a hallmark of transformational leadership and indicative of a deeper desire for more obvious discipleship. The research data shows that relational issues across generations are a prerequisite to participating in servant leadership activities. "We can't begin to work outside

the Church until we fix inside the Church. The relationships between generations have to be the way God expects for it to be, before we can go and share in the community" (M6, personal statement, March 24, 2021).

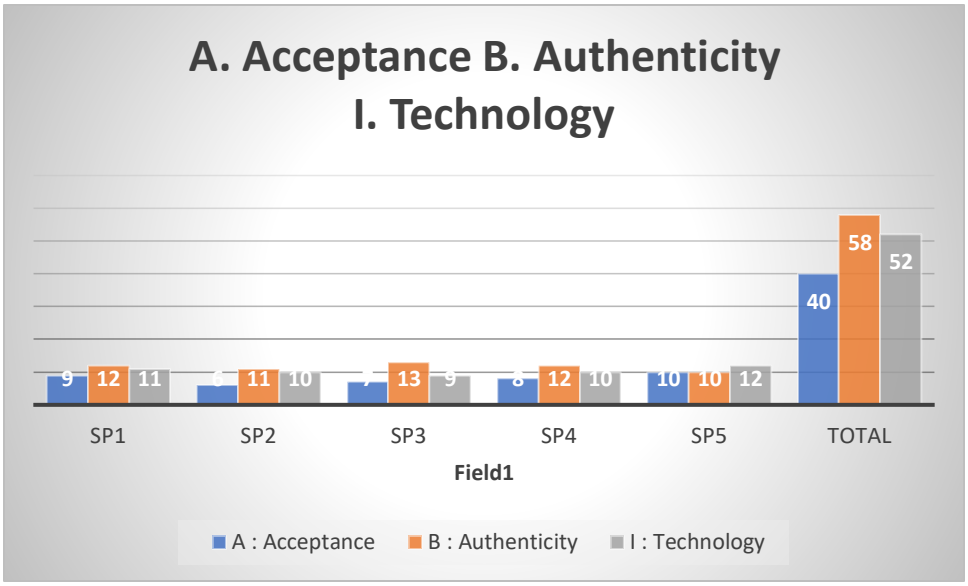
Research Question 5 Conclusion

The fifth and final research question sought to understand what are senior pastors' perceptions of motivating factors contributing to engagement of Millennials within their Churches? As stated previously, the researcher sought to interview 2-5 senior pastors from the 10 Protestant Churches selected within the Greater Hartford Area. Out of the senior pastors' respondents the response rate was 83.33% with 5 out the 6 responding to the interview request. The response rate suggest senior pastors were eager to share their perceptions as to motivating factors which contribute to engagement levels of Millennials within their Churches.

The results are conclusive as they show the top 3 motivating factors which contribute or impact engagement levels in a positive and negative manner were authenticity, acceptance, and integration of technology. Throughout chapter 4, the analysis and finding section of this research, several personal statements from senior pastors indicate Millennials are seeking authenticity, acceptance and to be able to utilize their skills with technology within their respective Churches. Therefore, the results are conclusive for this demographic of senior pastors as to their thoughts on what motivates and also what causes disaffiliation of Millennials within their Churches. Figure 11 shows the top three coded items that indicate their perceptions of the motivating factors which contribute to engagement levels of Millennials.

Figure 11

Top 3 Engagement coded themes by Senior Pastor



Note: Top 3 emerging themes for senior pastors

The senior pastors' responses indicate technology, authenticity, and acceptance as being the top three drivers impacting Millennial engagement. Additionally, the data shows from senior pastors' responses, that authenticity, acceptance, and technology are consistent with millennial responses of motivating factors which impact engagement levels. The following statements from senior pastors support the findings.

> I engage Millennials in our Church through our Facebook, Instagram pages. It's interesting that if they see some of the things I post or throw on social media they respond. It's good for them, to see their deacon or assistant pastor throwing stuff on social media Some of them have been like, ok I can relate to that and then you see them in the pews on Sunday. After engaging them at their level and accepting technology as a means of communicating, as a pastor I am actually seeing them in the pew, it's a vehicle to minister to them throughout the week to make them think about something, beyond ministry. (Pastor 3, personal statement, March 26, 2021)

> Millennials are dealing with Christianity versus prosperity. And they are searching for, that authenticity versus good old-time religion where, you know, you just get up there and, you know, you tell them about prosperity. Or if you do this, God is going to bless you. But they're looking for a theological framework that deals with the pain that they're dealing with today. They are dealing with issues the Church is still wrestling with and they want to feel accepted. And the question they have is what happens when God doesn't fix my issues, is God still God? They need authentic teaching not just on Sunday morning but for life experiences. (Pastor 1, personal statement, March 26, 2021)

> Millennial's I have found, and it really started with Gen Xers, where they are dealing with some of the cruxes of Christianity that revolve around particularly modern Christianity, revolve around institutional based things. And so that means that this idea that we do it because someone else said do it doesn't connect very well, and we do not provide the free space to question the institution. Millennials need to feel as though they can question the institution without fear of retribution from older generation. There needs to be a feeling of inclusiveness and acceptance that's dealt with in order to further improve relations in the Church. COVID has forced to acknowledge that there is improvement needed in all areas to improve relations with Millennials (Pastor 2, personal statement, March 2, 2021).

The results of question 5 show the perceptions of senior pastors as to the motivating factors that impact engagement levels of Millennials within their congregations. The researcher concludes the findings of authenticity, acceptance, and technology integration as the primary motivating factors senior pastors feel impact engagement the most. Additionally, the research conclusion for question 5 demonstrated that the impact of these themes by senior pastors was seen in each of the participants lived experiences.

Research Limitations

Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the approach is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This is the nature of the study design. The purpose or outcome of this study was to understand and explore the perceptions of Millennials and senior pastors as to motivating factors which lead to engagement. Specifically, the research focused on 10 Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area.

However, the desired outcome of this study was impacted significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher initially sought to interview a larger research population but due to pandemic restrictions, the research population was scaled back significantly. The research was also limited to ten Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. Additionally, the study was limited in nature due to not being able to observe participants in their natural environment where the researcher could observe non-verbal communications that would add to the researchers understanding of the answers.

The researcher concludes the issues of COVID-19 reduced research population ultimately impacting the overall amount of data collected to complete the research with the desired number of interviews for each research population. However, the researcher feels the answers in the interviews conducted virtually were thoughtful, transparent, and sufficient to complete the study. Likewise, the researcher also concludes the findings are generalizable to other denominations. The study focused on the lived experiences of senior pastors and Millennials which provided an opportunity for participants to give transparent feedback in a controlled virtual environment.

The research garners a need for further research on the subject as outlined in the further research section below. The study was hyper-focused on the aspect of generational-centric departure from the modern-day church and because of this other areas/variable of inquiry were not pursued. This limited the researcher from inquiring or coding data in such a way as to explore additional experience modifiers such as gender, ethnicity, or specific denominational experiences as it relates to departure of Millennials.

Further Research

This study raised questions in need of further research to explore the impacts that lead to millennial engagement within the Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. The following list provides suggestions for further research related to this field of study.

1. The current study explored specific Protestant Churches within a defined Greater Hartford Area. Additionally, the research population was further limited to senior pastors and Millennials. Further research could be explored outside the boundaries of Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area.

2. Additionally, further research could seek to delve more deeply into other populations besides Millennials to gain a broader perspective related to generational gaps

3. Further research could seek to understand the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the engagement levels of Millennials within Churches across a wider spectrum of denominations.

4. Further research utilizing a quantitative study that would enhance the qualitative data with more robust statistics cold be considered.

5. Due to the sample size being small because of the pandemic, further research could enhance beginning step of understanding this population. In doing so the following what if questions were developed to be considered for further research. These questions before the summary of this chapter.

The results of this study highlighted various recommendations for future research. Future researchers should focus on a population different from the Protestant one studied within this current research. What is evident as a limitation in this current study is the sample may not have given enough data making it difficult to generalize the findings. Subsequent studies should focus on other denominations on a larger scale utilizing a different population of Millennials. This will assist in exploring engagement levels of this population across other denominations to understand any consistent findings or inconsistent findings. Additional research could also focus on other cohorts such as Baby boomers or Generation Z population. However, future studies of Millennials are warranted across a different research population. Additionally, due to the sample size being small and only the beginning step in understanding this population, a larger sample

group utilizing a quantitative research method. The following what if questions would be beneficial in a quantitative research design.

RQ1 What is the relationship between leadership style and organizational commitment in faith-based organizations?

RQ2: What is the relationship between age and organizational commitment in faith-based organizations?

RQ3 How do churches attract and track Millennials in their ministries?

RQ4 How do churches measure and track Millennial attendance and participation?

RQ5 How do church leaders measure their organizations' success in reaching and retaining Millennials?

RQ6 What relationship exists among Millennial's sense of belonging in a church and level of engagement in church ministries?

RQ7 How do church leaders measure Millennial engagement?

RQ8 How do church leaders decide, and measure ministry focus?

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to understand and explore the perceptions of Millennials and senior pastors as to motivating factors which lead to engagement. This study within the Greater Hartford Area which was comprised of ten Protestant Churches of varied denominations and sizes. At this stage in the research, Millennials were defined as anyone born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 24 to 39 in 2020). The findings in this study determined ten different themes from both research populations. The top 3 themes for both research populations were authenticity, acceptance, and technology. Other themes were utilizing skills and talents, generational gap, communication, relevant teaching and preaching, and outreach servant leadership and external factors.

The researcher sought to answer the question of what are the motivating factors which lead to engagement in the Millennial population. The results show Millennials and Senior Pastors both agree that authentic leadership is a necessity and the most significant driver of engagement amongst Millennials. Both populations highlighted authenticity as important enough to cause disaffiliation in role as a senior leader of the church as well in daily living outside of the church. If "the future of American religion is in the hands of adults now in their twenties and thirties" (Wuthnow, 2010, p.2), then it is the responsibility of church leaders to do everything within their power to overcome the barriers to understanding and reaching the Millennial generation.

Additionally, the research highlighted the importance of technology in the church. The coronavirus pandemic has created a dilemma for many churches in the research area. With doors closed for months, church leaders had to upgrade their technology in order to reach members. With services being stopped due to government restrictions placed on in person worship, church leaders begin to turn to social media platforms, conference calls, and even virtual giving platforms to keep into contact with members. Church members had to work together between generational gaps to ensure every member was educated on the technology changes that were made. This created an opportunity for some of the issues between generations to be resolved and for Millennials to now take the lead in areas they were denied in the past. Online worship has had a lasting impact on the relationship congregates have with their churches, and now has created a viable alternative solution for church leaders to consider. Technology was and remains the difference maker in connecting congregant with their churches in a way that is helping mend fractured relationships caused by generational gaps.

Lastly, the research for this study identified acceptance as one of the motivating factors in which Millennials consider when deciding on membership in one of the churches in the targeted area of the GHA. The study showed when Millennials are accepted, which means their thoughts, skills and abilities are utilized they are more than willing to work to build relationships across generations. The research shows that senior members are less reluctant to accept the offer due to fundamental differences in worship styles, attire, and views on issues such as sex before marriage, homosexuality, and same sex marriage. Millennials are more accepting and seek to practice authentic love and respect to all.

Research for this study allowed for a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and challenges Millennial's face when serving in ministry. However, it also highlights what motivate Millennials on their journey to finding a place to worship where their skills and talents can be utilized.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A Consent Form Pew Research

Consent Form Pew Research

From: **Pew Research Center**
[redacted]RE: Approval to Use Diagrams
Date: November 30, 2020 at 10:23 AM
To: Victor Thomas
[redacted]

Hi Victor,

Thank you for reaching out. You do not need express permission for these graphics, so feel free to use with proper attribution to Pew Research Center. You can review our use policy here: [redacted]

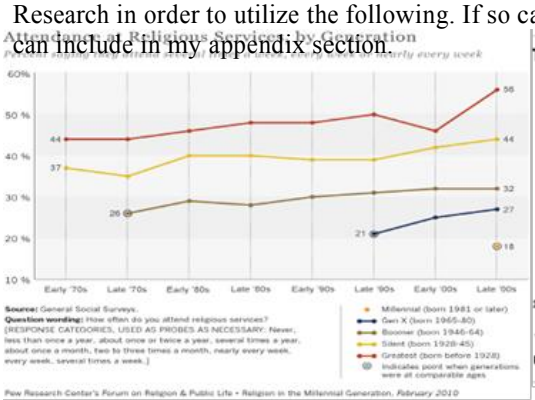
Best,
Mimi Cottingham
Pew Research Center

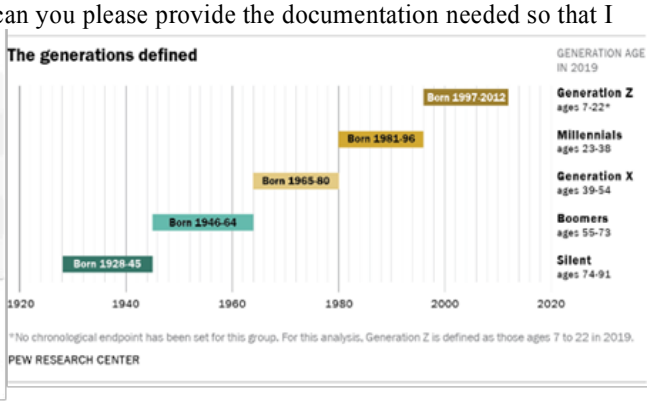
From: Victor Thomas [redacted]
Sent: Monday, November 30, 2020 10:07 AM
To: Pew Research Center <[redacted]> **Cc:** [redacted]
Subject: Approval to Use Diagrams

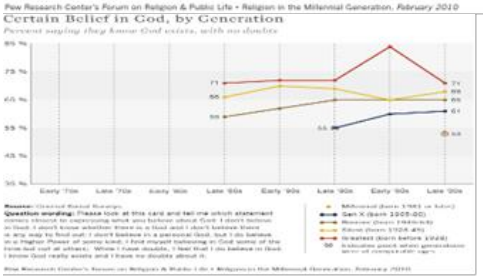
[EXTERNAL EMAIL]: This message is from an external sender. Verify the sender and exercise caution when clicking links or opening attachments.

Good afternoon,

I am a doctoral student at Liberty University and am writing to seek approval to utilize the following diagrams in my dissertation. Please let me know if there is any special permission needed from Pew Research in order to utilize the following. If so can you please provide the documentation needed so that I can include in my appendix section.







Appendix B Millennial Protocol

Millennial Interview Protocol

The researcher will conduct interviews of 2- 5 Millennials from each of the targeted Churches within the Greater Hartford Area for a total of 12-15 interviews. The goal of the researcher is to have a minimum of 12 interviews and a maximum of 15. The interviews will be a maximum of 30 minutes in length and be done through Zoom® or Microsoft Teams® applications. The interviews will be recorded, and information will be coded with NVivo® qualitative software. This software is used for coding for coding qualitative data like interviews, surveys, transcripts, focus groups, text/videos/audio files, images, tweets, and more. The data collected will be reviewed by the researcher to gain insight into correlation with established research questions.

Interview Questions for Millennials

1. Describe for me your thoughts about the state of our Church. Do you feel that the needs of those in attendance are being met? Why or why not?
2. Tell me, do you feel the millennial generation has a place in this Church? If they do not, can you explain to me why not?
3. Do you feel that the millennial generation has a voice in this Church? If not, can you explain why you feel this way?
4. Tell me about the motivating factors which lead to Millennials leaving a Church.
5. Tell me about your views on the role of Senior Pastor's connection to the Millennial generation.
6. Do you feel the millennial generation is accepted by the older generation? If not, can you explain why not? Can you give me examples?

7. In your opinion, what would need to happen in order to bridge the gap between the millennial generation, the Senior Pastor, and the older generation?
8. As a millennial member of this Church, what type of changes do you feel are needed to help our Church operate at its greatest potential?
9. What are the motivating factors which lead you as a millennial to participate in ministry?
10. How many times per month do you attend Sunday morning worship and why? _____
11. How many times per month do you attend Wednesday Bible Study and why? _____
12. How many times per month do you attend Sunday school and why? _____
13. Can you say that you are an active participant in this Church? _____
14. How impactful were sermons from Worship Wednesday? (1= not at all 10= very impactful) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
15. Did the sermons influence you to become more active in our Church? (1= not at all 10= very influential) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
16. Did the ministry fair have any impact on you becoming more involved in the Church? (1= not at all 10= very impactful) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
17. Of the following, which were the most influential to you in becoming more involved in ministry? Please rank the following activities form 1 to 5. (5= Most impactful 1= Least Impactful)

_____Bible Study
_____ Sermon series
_____ Pastoral focus on Servant Leadership Activities
_____ Use of Technology in Ministry
_____ None of the above

Appendix C Senior Pastor Protocol

Senior Pastor Interview Protocol

The researcher will conduct interviews of 5 Senior Pastors from the targeted Churches within the Greater Hartford Area for a total of 2-5 interviews. The interviews will be a maximum of 30 minutes in length and be done through Zoom® or Microsoft Teams® applications. The interviews will be recorded, and information coded with NVivo® qualitative software. This software is used for coding for coding qualitative data like interviews, surveys, transcripts, focus groups, text/videos/audio files, images, tweets, and more. The data collected will be reviewed by the researcher to gain insight into correlation with established research questions.

Interview Questions for Senior Pastors

2. Describe for me how Christianity, as lived and taught in ministry, seem most disconnected or remote from Millennials in your congregation.
3. What objections do Millennials most often raise about ministry involvement?
4. Tell me how your Church lives out servant leader principles.
5. How do Servant Leader principles impact Millennial engagement?
6. What are the top 3 reasons Millennials have left the Church?
7. How has Technology changed how the Church attracts or engages Millennials?
8. What forms of technology are you currently using to engage Millennials?
9. What insight, passion, or conviction do Millennials have that you wish older Christians would take more seriously?
10. Some Churches and leaders do not see the value of changing to reach this generation, how has your Church changed to reach this population?

Appendix D Consent Form Research Study

Consent

Title of the Project: Engagement of Millennials: Understanding the Decline Within Greater Hartford Area Churches
Principal Investigator: Victor Thomas, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must either be a current senior pastor, or 24-39 years of age and a member or former member of a selected Protestant church within the Greater Hartford Area. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand motivating factors which lead to engagement of millennials within Protestant churches in the Greater Hartford Area. The goals of this study are to discover millennial engagement levels within inner- city Greater Hartford area, engage local (GHA) church leaders in discovering effective tools in discipling and retaining millennials, help church leaders understand what characteristics attract Millennials and create and contribute to previously available knowledge of millennial engagement within the church.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a 30-minute interview via Zoom or Microsoft Teams virtual application. Interviews will be audio- and video-recorded.
2. Member-check your transcripts for accuracy and return them to me via email (10 minutes).

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include helping church leaders and millennials understand drivers that lead to engagement and develop effective tools in discipling and retention [description of expected benefits to society.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researchers will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in

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Approved on 2-16-2021

future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants may be compensated for this study. Participants will be entered in a raffle to receive $50 Visa Gift Card.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you during the interview will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Victor Thomas. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [redacted] or [redacted] You may also contact the faculty sponsor, [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu

[redacted]

Liberty University
IRB-FY20-21-495
Approved on 2-16-2021

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will not be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record and video-record/photograph me as part of my participation in this study.

_____ _____

Printed Subject Name Signature & Date

_____

Printed Subject Name

Liberty University
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Appendix E Bevan Interview Guide

Phenomenological Interview Guide

Phenomenological Attitude	Researcher Approach	Interview Structure	Method	Example Question
Phenomenological Reduction (Epoché)	Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants Reflexive Critical Dialogue with Self Active Listening	Contextualization (Eliciting the Lifeworld in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive/Narrative Context Questions	"Tell me about becoming ill," or "Tell me how you came to be at the satellite unit."
		Apprehending the Phenomenon (Modes of Appearing in Natural Attitude)	Descriptive and Structural Questions of Modes of Appearing	"Tell me about your typical day at the satellite unit,"or "Tell me what you do to get ready for dialysis."
		Clarifying the Phenomenon (Meaning Through Imaginative Variation)	Imaginative Variation: Varying of Structure Questions	"Describe how the unit experience would change if a doctor was present at all times."

Appendix F Recruitment Flyer One

Dear Senior Pastor and Millennials:

As a student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education. The purpose of my research is to understand motivating factors which lead to engagement of Millennials within selected Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants for this study must be current senior pastors at [Churches selected within the Greater Hartford, CT area] or Millennials between the ages of 24-39 that are current or former members of [Churches selected within the Greater Hartford, CT area]. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a 30-minute audio and video-recorded interview through Zoom® or Microsoft Applications. Participants will have the opportunity to member-check their transcripts for accuracy. It should take approximately 10 minutes to review transcripts and return them to me via email.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, contact me at [redacted] for more information and to schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this letter or will be emailed to you [if this is a phone call]. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you are willing to participate, p
lease sign the consent document electronically by typing your name and the date and return it to me via email prior to the start or at the time of the interview.

Participants will be entered in a raffle to receive $50 Visa Gift Card.

Sincerely,

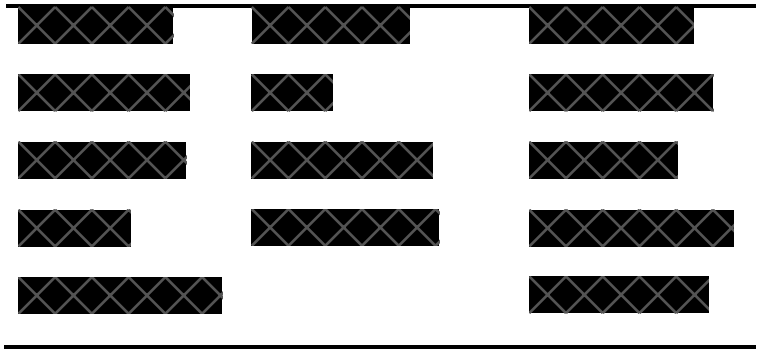
Victor Thomas
Doctoral Candidate
[redacted]

Appendix G Social Media Flyer

Research Participants Needed

Engagement of Millennials: Understanding the Decline Within Greater Hartford Area Churches

- Are you 24-39 years of age, or a Senior Pastor?
- Are you a current member or former member of these Protestant Churches in the Greater [redacted]



If you answered **yes** to either of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to gather information about Millennial Engagement in Protestant Churches within the Greater Hartford Area. Participants will be asked to participate in a 30-minute audio and video-recorded virtual interview.

Consent information will be provided.

Participants will be entered in a raffle for a $50 Visa gift card.

The study is being conducted virtually.
Via Zoom® or Microsoft Teams®
Victor Thomas, a Doctoral Candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.
Please contact Victor at [redacted] for more information.

Appendix H Recruitment Follow-up

Recruitment Follow-up Template

Dear Senior Pastors and Millennials:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education. Two weeks ago, an email/letter was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email/letter is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is 03/30/21.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to attend an audio and video-recorded virtual interview via Zoom® or Microsoft Teams® applications. It should take approximately 30 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. All participants will be allowed to review transcript of interview for accuracy. Your name and other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, contact me to schedule an interview a [redacted]

A consent document will be attached to this recruitment. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document electronically by typing your name and the date and return it to me via email prior to or at the time of the interview.

If you choose to participate, you will be entered in a raffle to receive a $50 Visa gift card.

Sincerely,

Victor Thomas
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

Appendix I CITI-Certification

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 11-Oct-2019
Expiration Date 10-Oct-2022
Record ID 33735136

This is to certify that:

Victor Thomas

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher
(Curriculum Group)
Social & Behavioral Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Liberty University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w16b52b14-7625-42c3-ac36-de1d99f76b67-33735136

Appendix J Phenomenological Design Consent

Copyright © Bob Dick, 2000-2005. You may copy this if you do not include it in material sold at a profit, and this notice is included.

This document may be cited as: Dick, Bob (2005) Grounded theory: a thumbnail sketch. [Online] Available at http://www.aral.com.au/resources/grounded.html

Appendix K IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 16, 2021

Victor Thomas
Gary Bredfeldt

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-495 Engagement of Millennials: Understanding the Decline Within Greater Hartford Area Churches

Dear Victor Thomas, Gary Bredfeldt:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office