

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

THE INFLUENCE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERS IN RECONNECTING THE
MILLENNIAL GENERATION TO THE COMMUNITY OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Brandi Lynn Ginty

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

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ABSTRACT

Population statistics point to an exodus of Millennials from local churches, reinforcing the increasingly widespread opinion that the church is no longer relevant or relatable (Barna Group, 2019a, 2019b; Conway, 2019; Del Rosario & Bock, 2017; Earls, 2022; Easton & Steyn, 2022; Fry, 2019; Gale et al., 2023; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Omilion-Hodges & Sugg, 2019; Packard & Ferguson, 2019; Sumpter, 2019; Wilson, 2019). Culturally contextual ministry leadership methods are needed if the trajectory of these statistics is to change. To reach the population of the Millennial generation, ministry leaders need to examine the cultural needs of those they are trying to reach. By embracing the complexities of this disconnected population, ministry leaders can develop culturally contextual ministry methods of leadership, such as transformational leadership, that connect with their audience while protecting the integrity and purity of the biblical scriptures. Transformational leadership is an exchange in which “leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation,” resulting in a transformative experience (Burns, 1978, p. 20). This qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study evaluated the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experience of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation (born between 1984-1998) who have remained connected to the local church community. The findings of this research helped to determine whether the Millennial generation responds to the leadership characteristics of transformational leaders and whether this connection affects their decision to remain connected to their faith communities.

Keywords: Millennials, transformational leadership, generations, cultural contextualization, methodology

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to the next generation, the church's future. I believe in you. If God is for you, who can be against you (Rom. 8:31)? This is your moment. The future is yours.

Moreover, finally, to my Lord and Savior, I am forever grateful that you gave me a curious mind, a voracious love for your holy scriptures, and a passion for seeing real change in the lives of your people. It is an honor to carry this baton for you for my leg of this journey.

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List of Abbreviations

Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Liberty University (LU)

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)

Research Leader (RL)

Research Questions (RQ)

Research Subject (RS)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

The culture of a generation known as the Millennials, has significantly impacted society and the local church. For this study, the term *Millennial*, also known as *Generation Y*, describes those born between 1984 and 1998 (ages 25-39), as recommended by Barna Group (2019a). Concerning this generation, statistics indicate many Millennials feel disconnected from their church, faith, and spiritual family (Barna Group, 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Earls, 2022; Wolor et al., 2021). There is an increasing lack of religious affiliation as Millennials who are lost, wandering, questioning, and seeking to become disengaged from a welcoming community of faith (Simmons, 2015; Sumpter, 2019; Wilson, 2019).

This lack of connectedness robs Millennials of the opportunity to know a transformative experience with God and the local church. Man's encounter with God sparks the catalyst for transformation. The same divine capacity that inspires transformation can also manifest between leaders and followers (Campbell-Enns, 2020). This God-ordained transformation, designed to take root together in the local church, is an intrinsic characteristic of the Christian believer.

This may be most true when people are supported in their social and cultural contexts by drawing on divine imagery. As a note of caution, spiritual-religious coping may be less effective, or even harmful, if it is not supported or legitimized by at least one important individual in the coping person's life. If not supported, persons who use spiritual-religious coping may find themselves feeling separate from their socio-cultural groups. (Campbell-Enns, 2020, p. 46)

Without a sense of belonging, interconnectedness, and shared narrative, Millennials seek to fill the void outside of their church within the context of society (Simmons, 2015; Sumpter, 2019). However, while Barna Group (Barna Group, 2019b) indicates that 64% of Millennials are "dropping out" of the local church, other research shows that there exists a population of Millennials that has remained connected to the local church and is actively seek leadership

opportunities (Barna Group, 2014, 2019a; Solaja & Oguntola, 2016; Valenti, 2019; Wolor et al., 2021). The statistics highlighting the exodus of Millennials and the studies that highlight the phenomenon of Millennials remaining connected indicate an immediate need for churches to better understand the lived experience of this generation regarding its connection with the body of Christ found in the local church.

This research proposes that transformational leaders are naturally gifted and pre-dispositioned to identify the unspoken but inherent needs of the Millennial population. They are, therefore, the most spiritually and naturally equipped to meet these needs. This chapter provides the background to the problem, a statement of the problem, a statement of purpose, the proposed research questions, the assumptions and delimitations, the definition of terms, the significance of the study, and a summary of its design.

Background to the Problem

According to the Barna Group (2013), one of the leaders in faith development research across generations, “Today there’s a new dimension that is reshaping personal spirituality, particularly among younger generations. The advent of the Internet and, more recently, social media have shaped personal habits significantly” (para. 1). Technology has reshaped their culture, transforming it into both inherent connection and inevitable disconnection. “This is a generation of contrast, of contradiction. For example, they are more connected than ever, yet their connectivity coexists with paradoxical levels of isolation and loneliness” (Barna Group, 2019a, p. 20). For the Millennial generation, technology and faith have converged; they cannot see one as disconnected from another. Instead, technology and faith only augment and complete one another. “The most common way Millennials blend their faith and technology is through digital scripture reading. It is an escalating trend, considering there are just as many YouVersion

(the free Bible phone app) downloads as there are Instagram downloads by Millennials” (Barna Group, 2013, para. 5). Kinnaman (Barna Group, 2013) said: “Millennials live in an era of radical transparency, powered by social and digital tools.... The digital world makes this kind of interaction and transparency a nonnegotiable among the youngest generations” (para. 17). Millennials are different from any generation that has come before them, including the generation currently leading the local church. These differences have fueled a great divide, a loss of Christian identity, and a breach of community connection (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016).

Packard and Ferguson (2019) propose a supposition that elucidates the reality of the faith experience for Millennials as it currently exists. They said that Millennials “are leaving the institutional church because it restricts their ability to be involved in their communities in meaningful ways” (p. 513). Even the traditional place of faith development, the local church, has lost its definition in the life of Millennials, choosing instead to explore their spiritual lives outside of the traditional religious organization. Okpaleke (2021) states, “For most millennials, spirituality generally represents a space for an encounter with God. It does not necessarily imply a “place” or “location” defined by religious institutions and structures” (p. 89).

These shifting definitions of traditional spirituality have led to many misconceptions between the generations, misconceptions that seem to have divided the older and younger generations of the church, creating a gap that reflects the dwindling numbers of Millennial churchgoers (Barna Group, 2019a, 2019b; Packard & Ferguson, 2019). Understanding Millennial values and the culture that shapes their needs could help local churches to innovate ministry methods that are culturally relevant for reaching this next generation with the gospel message and connecting them (or maintaining a connection that has weakened) to a faith community of the local church. Poor methodology selection to reach the next generation and a lack of cultural

contextualization have resulted in the mass exodus of Millennials (Sumpter, 2019). The challenge to ministry leadership is to discover how to contextualize the gospel message culturally to reach a generation that longs to connect but feels adrift in a culture alien to its own.

In her Doctor of Ministry project for Liberty University, Simmons (2015) examined how to combat the cultural decline in church attendance among the younger generation. Based on her research, Millennials are leaving the church due to pressure and demand from a career-driven society, easy access to unlimited choices for social activities, division over political issues, and perception of the local church rooted in the perceived attitude of their societal community. Studies show that Christians have come to be more associated with what they are against. Rather than being known for what the local church stands for, it has become better known for what it opposes (Conway, 2018, 2019; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Wong, 2021). Church leadership can learn to understand and value the Millennials if they are going to be able to create mediums that will inculcate in Millennials an understanding of the value of connection with the local church (Barna Group, 2014, 2019a; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Solaja & Oguntola, 2016; Valenti, 2019; Wolor et al., 2021).

When examining the current statistics regarding church attendance, one sees a clear pattern of disconnection. According to Gallup, “Americans' membership in houses of worship continued to decline last year, dropping below 50% for the first time in Gallup's eight-decade trend. In 2020, only 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue, or mosque” (Jones, 2021, para. 1). According to Lifeway Research, “Fewer people regularly attend church now than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic... In 2019, 34% of Americans attended a religious service at least once or twice a month. That fell to 31% in 2020 and 28% in 2021” (Earls, 2022, para. 5). The research also shows that specific populations or demographics within the church,

such as the Millennials, have disconnected, never really connected in the first place in term of long-term attendance; others have quit attending church worship entirely. “The largest age demographic drop, however, happened among young adults. In 2019, 36% of 18- to 34-year-olds attended church at least once or twice a month. That has fallen to just 26% now” (Earls, 2022, para. 11).

The statistics show that the motivation for leaving the church is a lack of connectedness, usually associated with a lack of belonging. “The decline in church membership, then, appears largely tied to population change, with those in older generations who were likely to be church members being replaced in the U.S. adult population with people in younger generations who are less likely to belong” (Earls, 2022, para. 11). They desire to be a part of a life-giving community; yet, cultural differences, as well as antiquated ministry methods designed to connect people are failing to draw in these fringe cultural populations that are lost, wandering, questioning, and seeking to connect with a welcoming community of faith.

In their book, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, Lowe and Lowe (2018) discussed the ecological power of parables. They explained that Jesus utilized the environmental background of the world the people were familiar with because he knew that natural growth in nature reflected spiritual growth in the kingdom of God. As they examined the parable of the seed growing found in Mark 4:26-29, they asserted, “The parable teaches us that we cannot make anything grow on our own. We can only set the ecological conditions for growth” (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 43). John 1:12 and Romans 8:16 both communicate that when disciples have a growing connection with God and an accurate and increasing understanding of themselves, they can grow in connection with other disciples. One of the primary methods of developing disciples was expounding on truth in the context of relationships and community. In a community, there

were shared ideas, explanations, and a developed passion for understanding and connecting to the truth of God's Word. As it was true then, it is true now that people grow best through relationships, regardless of cultural differences.

This study supposes that the Millennial population needs a community to experience the personal nature of Christ. Therefore, creating, inspiring, and developing a community that draws this generation should be one of the main priorities for ministry leadership. Part of the solution to bridging the gap between the church and disconnected Millennials could include developing community-based opportunities that contextualize the gospel's message using relationships as its foundation. Current church attendance studies produce statistics supporting this truth (Barna Group, 2014, 2019a, 2019b; Gale et al., 2023; Johansen, 2018; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Simmons, 2015; Sumpter, 2019).

Barna Group founder, David Kinnaman talks about the three types of Millennials: nomads, prodigals, and exiles (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019). The prodigals are leaving Jesus. The other two, the nomads and the exiles stay with Jesus; they're just leaving the church. They are disconnecting from engagement with the church's people in pursuit of other opportunities for connection. The research surveyed in this study reveals a gap exists in the available literature regarding the cultural divide between the generations of the church and how this gap influences Millennial involvement. According to Del Rosario and Block (2017):

Millennials are looking for authentic, meaningful relationships with mature believers who love them well as they navigate the tensions of life and seek to grow in their faith. Rather than being most concerned about a pastor's Sunday sermon, many young people are desperate for discipleship. (p. 351)

Identifying the ministry leaders with transformational leadership capacity, who will honor the divine mandate of generational transference through cultural contextualization of the gospel message for the next generation, is needed to draw Millennials back into the church.

Statement of the Problem

The Barna Group study, *The Connected Generation*, has confirmed that the church dropout rate of Millennials rests at 57% globally; in the United States, 64% met the church dropout definition (Barna Group, 2019a, 2019b). The Barna Group statistics irrefutably indicate that Millennials are leaving the local church. However, even though some are leaving the church, others are choosing to remain connected, and not merely connected, but actively seeking leadership opportunities (Solaja & Oguntola, 2016; Valenti, 2019; Wolor et al., 2021). Leaders in local churches need to understand this phenomenon better if they desire success in creating mediums of connection that will inspire disconnected Millennials to restore their relationship with the local church (Simmons, 2015).

Reaching the next generation of Millennials and preparing them to take over leadership of the local church is one of the highest priorities for ministry leadership (Sumpter, 2019). It is the only way to safeguard the longevity and legacy of the local church. Understanding Millennials' values and culture will help the local church identify leaders with the wisdom and skills needed to reach the next generation with the gospel message. Without competent leadership that prioritizes generational transference and the cultural contextualization of the message of the Bible, the local church risks its future by losing the Millennials. By understanding why some Millennials remain connected to the local church at the same time as so many are leaving faith communities, church leaders can determine whether some leadership styles are more adept than others at reaching the Millennial generation for the benefit of the local church. These leaders could inspire the Millennial generation to rise into leadership positions and take their place in their local churches' future leadership.

Purpose Statement

This research is a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, the purpose of which was to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches.

Research Questions

Reconnecting with the Millennials begins with understanding their motivations and lived experiences (Bennett, 2020; Easton & Steyn, 2022; Elmore & Maxwell, 2022). Understanding the needs of the Millennial generation, which compels some but not all to remain connected to the local church, and determining the leadership style that positively affects Millennials was the basis of the research questions that guided this study.

RQ1. What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for deciding to remain connected to their local church community?

RQ2. What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for engaging in volunteer leadership in their local church?

RQ3. Has the influence of transformational leadership on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders in the Millennial population resulted in a continued connected engagement with the local church?

Assumptions and Delimitations

The following assumptions were foundational to this study:

1. The study assumed that the term *Millennial* pertains to the cohort born between 1984 and 1998.
2. It assumed that the psyche of most Millennials perceives and interacts with their surroundings from a digital perspective and, therefore, has formed its unique dialect and culture.

3. It assumed the Millennial generation is being groomed for the local church's future leadership and management positions.
4. It assumed that research subjects will inform the research voluntarily and without inducement based on their experience and will respond honestly and to the best of their abilities.

This study examined the relationship between the local church and the Millennial generation. This particular focus impacted the degree to which the findings pertain to other populations. The delimitations of the study included the following:

1. This research was delimited to 12 individuals born between 1984 and 1998 who can be assigned the generational classification of Millennial.
2. This research was delimited to a group of 12 individuals from the Millennial generation selected from one of the three pre-determined, non-denominational churches with an average worship attendance of 1,500 or more.
3. This research was delimited to individuals from the Millennial generation who have established volunteer church communities and ministerial leadership involvements for at least one year.
4. This research was delimited to three non-denominational churches with an average worship attendance of 1,500 or more with an organizational structure comprised of a senior pastor and lay leadership overseeing the church's daily operations in Syracuse, New York, Baltimore, Maryland, and Orlando, Florida.
5. This research was delimited to the perceptions derived from the lived experiences of the research subjects interviewed in this research.

6. This research was delimited to examining only the characteristics of transformational leadership and no other leadership theory.
7. This research was delimited to a phenomenological research design and, therefore, to the collected informed opinions resulting from the lived experiences of the interviewed Millennials (ages 25-39) from the surveyed churches.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions were offered for this study.

Church/Local church. In the context of this research, the term “church” or “local church” was defined as a gathering or coming together of a group of believers “reflecting the life imparted by the Spirit to the community of God” (Campbell & Garner, 2016, p. 83).

Community. In the context of this research, a “community” is a place of belonging that “allows people to contribute uniquely and authentically, to express creativity, and to operate within a safe environment of trust and hope” (Banks et al., 2016, p. 82).

Connection. The term “connection” means feeling inherently tied in relationship to God and other people (Simmons, 2015).

Culture. This term refers to “a historically transmitted pattern of meanings, embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Carson, 2008, p. 2).

Digital. In the context of this research, this adjective referred to media technologies that employ numerical representations, using a different language than previous forms of media, giving it a unique platform for engagement and exchange (Campbell & Garner, 2016).

Digital age. In the context of this research, this term describes a cultural advancement of the last 50 years in which sounds and pictures are translated via technological devices into binary codes of 1s and 0s (Campbell & Garner, 2016).

Digital engagement. In the context of this research, this term refers to digital social networking tools that “encourage individuals to come together in community or to contribute to external contexts” (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 91).

Digital linguistics. In the context of this research, digital linguistics (or digital language) is a form of communication shaped by the binary structure of digital technology. It connects people who process knowledge through digital media (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016).

Digital tools. These tools are the technological mediums, such as the internet, smart devices, and social media platforms, that connect people together (Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

Disconnected. This study used this term to identify those who were once connected to and involved in the local church but have detached and departed from their community of faith (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

Gospel/Gospel message. According to Bonhoeffer, the “gospel” articulates the story of the Christian faith and is defined in three parts: the holiness of God, the sinfulness of humanity, and the person and work of Christ (Bonhoeffer & Barnett, 2015).

Idealized influence. In transformational leadership theory, *idealized influence* is the charisma of the leader, combined with the relational dynamics of passion and personality, that increases the leader’s influence in the lives of their followers. Idealized influence can be defined as “leading by example, gaining followers’ loyalty and respect through moral and ethical behaviour” (Deng et al., 2023, p. 630).

Individualized consideration. In transformational leadership theory, *individualized consideration* is the capacity to personalize special attention to the needs of others, communicating feelings of caring and nurturing. Individualized consideration can be defined as “focusing on developing and supporting each follower through coaching, mentoring, and consulting” (Deng et al., 2023, p. 630).

Inspirational motivation. In transformational leadership theory, *inspirational motivation* is the ability to motivate people to action. Inspirational motivation can be defined as “communication of and enthusiasm towards goals and future states” (Deng et al., 2023, p. 630).

Intellectual stimulation. In transformational leadership theory, *intellectual stimulation* is the power to release the full potential of problem-solving by inspiring creative ideas and solutions that challenge people to think and see beyond present conditions. Intellectual stimulation can be defined as “bringing nonconforming, unique perspectives to problems that inspire follower thinking” (Deng et al., 2023, p. 630).

Leadership. There exists a multitude of definitions for the term *leadership*. In the context of this research, leadership is not a position, but a collection of practices and behaviors. This study used this term to describe the relationship between those who are responsible to lead and those who choose to follow (Kouzes & Posner, 2023).

Lived Experience. This study used this term from the hermeneutic phenomenological method to describe the personal experiences and perspectives unique to the research subjects selected for this study (van Manen, 1990).

Millennial. This term identifies those individuals born between 1984 and 1998 (Barna Group, 2019a).

Ministry. In its biblical context, this term refers to the work of the Christian, the privilege and responsibility of every believer (Anthony, 2018). For this study, ministry is a vocational service given to Christian leaders in a local church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The MLQ is a transformational leadership tool developed by theorists Avolio and Bass (1995) that evaluates three different leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant (Pittenger, 2001). The assessment tool was designed as a feedback form (including both self and rater evaluation forms) to identify leadership style.

Next generation. In the context of this research, this locution referred to the new or emerging generations of the church currently in development and the future congregants of the local church (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

Social network/media. Social networks act “as a space of information exchange, and as a platform for new social and cultural interactions...to socialize, maintain relationships, play games and receive emotional support...” (Campbell & Garner, 2016, p. 6).

Technology. In the context of this research, technology “is concerned with the human community creating and inventing assorted tools, machines, and mechanisms to manipulate and exploit the natural world... [and] influences not only creation but also human community, shaping the rhythms of everyday life” (Campbell & Garner, 2016, p. 20).

Transformational leadership. James McGregor Burns first introduced the theory of transformational leadership in his 1978 book, *Leadership*, which he defined as that exchange in which “leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation,” resulting in a transformative experience (Burns, 1978, p. 20).

Volunteer. In the context of this research, this term referred to the individual who voluntarily chose to use their gifts and talents in service of the local church as a component of their personal worship and discipleship (Ogden, 2016).

Worship. In the context of this research, this term referred to the process by which “God uses his Word, his church, other believers, circumstances, prayer, and a host of other vehicles to bring individuals and communities of believers into close, intimate relationship” (Pettit, 2008, p. 23).

Significance of the Study

In his book *Leading with Cultural Intelligence*, Livermore (2015) expounded on how leaders navigate from their personal histories, cultural biases, and traditional behaviors with cultural intelligence. When applied in cross-cultural contexts, where the needs and values may differ between cultures, these personal preconceived cultural norms can become obstacles to effectively ministering connection and communication to those who most likely do not share the same cultural norms as the minister (Livermore, 2015). In the context of ministry, ministry leaders navigating cultural differences can learn new ways of communicating, connecting, and contextualizing. They can learn to put aside their preconceived notions and assumptions regarding the Millennial population and instead navigate forward based on the truth that they still have much to learn.

Pew Research Center stated, “If recent trends in religious switching continue, Christians could make up less than half of the U.S. population within a few decades” (*Modeling the Future of Religion in America*, 2022). Unless current church leadership forgoes the assumption that it already knows what will entice Millennials into becoming active church members and begins to instead actively explore why Millennials are becoming dissatisfied and often disconnecting from

local churches, this statement by these authors could prove to be true (Ogden, 2016). Local churches can explore deploying new methods that reach the Millennial generation through their mediums of exchange, through the processes of connection that foster belonging. The message of faith found in the scriptures is what changes lives. Learning to live the context of that message within community is when and where contextualization begins.

While the message of the gospel does not change and the authority of God's Word is not ever to be questioned, the means and methods by which we present that message to the hearers must adjust and use available technology if we are to be obedient to the timeless command to disciple all nations. (Morris, 2013, para. 8)

To contextualize the gospel's message of faith without losing its purity, ministry leaders need to look into the gap and ask themselves what the key priorities are, the biblical mandates, for reaching those who do not feel reached. Perhaps by doing so, they can determine the leaders most adequately equipped to reach the Millennials, meet their needs, and reconnect them to the faith community. Only then will the significance of the lived experience of the Millennial generation foster the change needed to connect and disciple the successor leadership generation of the local church.

Summary of the Design

This research used the hermeneutic phenomenological method to study qualitatively (a) the phenomenon of volunteer leaders in the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of the local church and (b) how the role of transformational leadership has played a part in their decision to remain connected to the local church. This study employed the hermeneutic phenomenological research design founded by Max van Manen (1990). The hermeneutic phenomenological research population consisted of 12 individuals from the Millennial generation (ages 25-39) selected from three non-denominational churches with an average worship attendance of 1,500 or more.

Based upon a literature review in the following chapter that identified a gap in knowledge concerning the role of Millennials in church leadership, this hermeneutic phenomenological research study utilized instrumentation and protocols to question and interview these individuals to ascertain their perceptions regarding the role of transformational leaders in their lived experiences. During the data collection process, this researcher maintained a journal to gather information on this researcher's previous experience with the phenomenon and the anecdotes of the research subjects as they presented themselves as data. A trained observer was present during interviews to ensure research questions were presented consistently, and to note any behavioral anomalies during the interview process. Data collection instrumentation aided in carefully considering categorical codes, thematic analyses, and phenomenological reflection, leading to the data analysis phase.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Literature that highlights the growing concern regarding the widening cultural gap between current church leadership and the Millennial generation and the resulting exodus of Millennials from the church and environments of faith motivated this study (Allen & Santos, 2020; Badar & Lasthuizen, 2023; Bauman et al., 2014; Csorba, 2016; Del Rosario & Bock, 2017; Flanagan, 2021; Foulkes-Bert et al., 2019; Fry, 2019; Grotkamp et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Maiers, 2017; Mazor, 2018; Obmerga, 2021; Okpaleke, 2021; Putriastuti & Stasi, 2019; Sumpster, 2019; Valenti, 2019; Valdeneu et al., 2021; Vogels, 2019). Influenced by a survey of the literature, this researcher posited the following:

1. The Bible supports a lifestyle of worship encapsulated by an expressed love for the Lord, gathering together with other believers, and serving in the local church as key elements that center every Christian life and are necessary for spiritual formation.
2. There is a divine mandate for generational transference founded in scripture.
3. There is biblical support for cultural contextualization of the gospel message.
4. Due to the cultural needs of the Millennial generation, there is a demand for transformative leadership in ministry that can navigate the needed changes in ministry methods to form meaningful connections with the local church community.
5. The religious affiliations of Millennials are weakening.
6. The culture of Millennials has disrupted the contemporary culture of the local church and has presented a need for more innovative ministry methods.

7. The Millennials' unique need for networked theology and digital engagement to form a connection to community has created a cultural division between generations in the local church.

This chapter aimed to provide data to support these observations and justify the need for this research study, providing theological and theoretical data. The theological framework addresses observations one through three. The theoretical framework addresses observations four and five. The related literature section further explores observations six and seven. The chapter concludes with the study's rationale based on an identified gap in the research literature.

Theological Framework for the Study

This research sought to understand the generational gap referred to above, its resulting influence on the involvement of Millennials in the local church, and the need to reach the next generation for Christ. The theological frameworks for this study included the theology of worship (Barkley, 2017; Boa et al., 2020; Bonhoeffer & Barnett, 2015; Dockery & Morgan, 2018; Gale et al., 2023; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Nichols, 2013; Ogden, 2016; B. C. Whitney Sr., 2022; D. S. Whitney, 2014; Willard, 2014), the theology of generational transference (Cox & Peck, 2018; Elowsky, 2016; Erdvig, 2016; French, 2013; Horan, 2017; Johansen, 2018; Moulin-Stožek, 2020; Roehlkepartain & Benson, 2013; Scales et al., 2014; van Niekerk & Breed, 2018), and the theology of cultural contextualization (Conway, 2018, 2019; Deitsch, 2012; Elmore, 2017; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Livermore, 2015, 2016; Park et al., 2023).

The Theology of Worship

This research study assumed that if a Christian believer is to grow and develop in their relationship with the Lord, a lifestyle of worship should exist. The theology of worship is woven

throughout the biblical scriptures, mainly because the scriptures aim to inspire a lifestyle of worship that activates spiritual formation (Gale et al., 2023; Moulin-Stožek, 2020). Constructing a lifestyle of spiritual formation begins with exploring biblical definitions of worship and establishing why worship matters in the life of a Christian believer.

Definitions of Worship

At its core, the Christian church gathers God’s people together to celebrate and worship the one true God. The Bible supports that only God is worthy of worship, so worship should be at the center of the Christian life. It is a natural response to God’s holiness, majesty, goodness, and glory (Dockery & Morgan, 2018). If Millennials are leaving the church, it is crucial to understand why that decision is detrimental and why it is essential that they belong in the local church, the place of worship. For the sake of clarity, this section examines three ways in which the term “worship” is defined or understood within the context of this research (Boa et al., 2020; Bonhoeffer & Barnett, 2015; Dockery & Morgan, 2018; Horan, 2017; Lowe & Lowe, 2018; Nichols, 2013; Pettit, 2008; Scales et al., 2014; D. S. Whitney, 2014; Willard, 2014).

Reverence the Lord. The first and foremost definition of worship is the praise, glory, and honor given to the Lord on behalf of his people (Dockery & Morgan, 2018). The relationship between the Lord and the believer is integral to their spiritual and cultural formation. To be Christian is to be a disciple of the Lord, and that discipleship demands worship and a reverent attitude of devotion, commitment, and love (Willard, 2014). The scriptures capture the jealous nature of God and his relational expectations. Exodus 20:3-5 states, “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above, on the earth beneath, or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God....” (NIV). The theology of worship as a

dedicated, individualized relationship between God and the believer is expressed throughout scripture in both the Old and New Testaments, as Jesus himself supports in Luke 4:8, where he said: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only' (NIV).

Worshipping the Lord is described as a demonstrative, identifiable reverence in the lives of those who call themselves children of God. 1 Chronicles 16:29 describes the biblical expectations of a lifestyle of worship, "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come before him. Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness" (NIV). And again, these expectations are also supported by Psalm 96:9: "Worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth" (NIV). As Pettit (2008) stated:

God continually calls the individual believer into a deeper, more mature walk of faith. God used his Word, his church, other believers, circumstances, prayer, and a host of other vehicles to bring individuals and communities of believers into close, intimate relationships. (p. 23)

The greatest commandment of the Bible is described as an outpouring of worship and love evident in the lived experience of the believer, as seen in Mark 12:33: "To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices" (NIV). As is evident from this verse, the natural overflow of worship will pour out of the relationship between God and his children and into believers' relationship with one another.

Gathering Together. Because the local church is recognized as the organized and established house of worship, being an active member of the local church is understood to be a necessary component of worship (Whitney, 2014) and, therefore, one of the primary definitions of worship. "Liturgy—considered now in terms of corporate worship—is not just an expression of "authentic" devotion; liturgy is formative. It is not just expressive, and this is why repetition is necessary, for repetition is necessary for formation. This connects a church's corporate worship

inexorably with spiritual formation” (Aniol, 2017, p. 101). The author of Hebrews reinforced this when he said, “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV). Coming together corporately as believers to worship God, fellowship, and serve one another is what comprises the local church community. The church is not merely the building; it is the people of God gathered together. And together, the church represents the temple of God, according to 1 Corinthians 3:17: “If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple” (NIV). As God’s people come together to worship God, they exist as the dwelling place of God, as it says in Ephesians 2:21-22: “In him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (NIV). Together with one another as the body of Christ, the members of the local church embody worship to the Lord, especially as they come together to serve one another.

Serving the Body. An outward demonstration of worship is serving the body, or serving the members of the local church. The scriptures encouraged followers of Jesus to serve one another, and that service would become an act of worship. If the church is the body of Christ, then serving the body is worshiping Christ. Galatians 5:13 confirms, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love” (NIV). As the church members serve one another, they demonstrate a liturgical expression of the character of God. “As children of God through faith in Christ, we are called to a lifestyle of growing others-centeredness and diminishing self-centeredness as Christ increases and we decrease” (Boa et al., 2020, p. 40).

Each believer can express their worship to the Lord by serving the local church knowing that by doing their part, they are adding to the full expression of worship to the Lord. Ephesians 4:16 supports this: “From him, the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (NIV). As the church serves Christ and serves one another, a lifestyle of worship that honors and glorifies God can be seen in the life of the church. “Our connections to one another as fellow Christians derive from our mutual connection to Christ as head of the body, creating spiritual conduits of mutual exchange and mutual spiritual benefit” (Lowe & Lowe, 2018, p. 156). Worship finds its highest expression in adoration to the Lord, connection to the body, and service to one another.

Why Understanding Worship Matters

All argumentation for this research stemmed from a theology of worship, a foundational understanding that connection to the body of Christ within the context of the local church is a necessary component of Christian discipleship. The necessity for a lifestyle of discipleship commanded in scripture must be taught where Christ himself is present, in the local church (Bonhoeffer & Barnett, 2015). Therefore, a theology of worship matters in this research because it clearly articulates the value and necessity of the Millennial culture remaining connected to the life of the local church. Millennials need to learn firsthand that worship is foundational to a lifestyle of discipleship. “The liturgy is a ‘hearts and minds’ strategy, a pedagogy that trains us as disciples precisely by putting our bodies through a regimen of repeated practices that get ahold of our heart and ‘aim’ our love toward the kingdom of God” (Whitney, 2014, p. 33).

Millennials need the church to experience God’s transformative presence, an experience that results in an outpouring of worship. Scripture captures that whether it was the cloud by day and the fire by night (Ex. 13:21-22), the transitory tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex. 25-40), the

finite temple rebuilt again and again (1 Kings 5), or finally, the house of the Lord where the power of God came to reside amongst his people (Acts 1:8), the gathering together of God's people has historically been the place where God's presence could be experienced. When individuals experience God's presence, they share in the transformation that stems from that connection. Essentially, they become the people of God, as Deuteronomy 7:6 confirms, "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (NIV). These transformed people become part of an ethnic group demonstrating God's nature to the world (Aniol, 2017; Boa et al., 2020; Hayes, 2022). Connection to the local church is an essential component of this transformational experience. The church is where transformed people of God come together to worship, fellowship, and serve one another. This research study substantiated that while an extensive population of Millennials is progressively withdrawing from the church (from the act of worship), there is a phenomenon that exists in that there are also Millennials who have remained connected to the local church through attendance and service, and, through the act of worship. The research conducted in this study confirmed that worship is a vital aspect of the Christian experience and a foundational doctrine to be transmitted to future generations.

Theology of Generational Transference

Whether in society or religion, hope for the future lies with the next generation of children. The intentional grooming and education of the next generation are essential for the survival of traditions and culture (Anthony, 2018; Cox & Peck, 2018; Erdvig, 2016; Hayes, 2022; Moulin-Stožek, 2020; Roehlkepartain & Benson, 2013; Scales et al., 2014; van Niekerk & Breed, 2018). The church must pass on the essential biblical education to ensure that they endure beyond the current generation. In the church at large, rather than performing as the first

educators of faith development in their children's lives, parents and faith communities are neglecting the responsibility of ensuring that biblical truths and traditions are being passed down (Sumpter, 2019; van Niekerk & Breed, 2018). Throughout scripture, several passages highlight the theology of generational transference. For example, in Genesis 18:19, God's confidence in Abraham's faithfulness to teach the next generation; therefore, he chose him to be the father of the nation of Israel. The entirety of Psalm 78 highlights the consequences of failing to teach the next generation. Judges 2:10-13 articulates how Joshua's failure to train the next generation causes the children of God to fall into idolatry. Generational transference is a divine mandate that God prioritizes throughout scripture for every age. If neglected, as seen in the biblical text and the world today, non-adherence could result in a crisis of faith.

To reverse the possibility of a faith crisis and reestablish the biblical mandate for Christian education in the home, parents and the faith community should take the sacred responsibility seriously to educate the next generation of the local church (van Niekerk & Breed, 2018; Whitney Sr., 2022). This section contended that biblical evidence proves that generational transference through Christian education has always been a primary function of parental jurisdiction and communal mission. Biblical and historical evidence shows that God designed generational transference to begin first in the home with the parents as educators and second in the faith community, contributing role models essential for faith development.

The Jurisdiction of Generational Transference

Suppose the biblical expectation is that Christian education is mandated to begin with parents and children in the home (Gen. 6:1-2). In that case, it is necessary to examine the biblical mandate from the primary parent, God the Father, to human parents to define the biblical definition of generational transference (or Christian education, in this case) in its original intent.

The first step is determining the biblical expectation regarding transferring the Bible's message from generation to generation through education. Anthony (2018) defined Christian education as "the deliberate, systematic, and sustained divine and human effort to share or appropriate the knowledge, values, attitudes, skills, sensitivities, and behaviors that comprise or are consistent with the Christian faith" (p. 26). Christian education teaches the next generation of God's children his way of life. This process integrates God's commands, stipulations, and life patterns into the human experience. There is a biblical expectation (Deut. 4:5-9) to form the lives of children according to the Word of God. Parents and church leaders are responsible for ensuring that the next generation is familiar with and has adopted this divine expectation.

Consequently, the process of faith development falls on parents in partnership with the faith community. "Faith development is an intentional process by which the faithful are guided to grow in their relationship with God and the accompanying change in lifestyle" (van Niekerk & Breed, 2018, p. 1). Parents and leaders can use this definition as a model for faith development to guide the children to grow in their relationship with the Lord and assist in molding their children's lives to please him. People need to address the sin issue inherent in all of God's children, including their own, and teach the next generation to abstain from sin and please God by dedicating their lives to spiritual formation. "Our human spirit is now dominated by these dynamics of corruption. A big part of spiritual formation is about transforming our human spirit from corruption to godliness" (Pettit, 2008, p. 56).

Suppose parents do not address the fundamental issue of sin. In that case, children yield to the impulse of sin and begin to show signs of that strain on their lives, experiencing the side effects of the crisis that is evident in the current generation of children. Walton (2011) confirmed this by saying: "Sin does not just impact our relationship with God; it affects our relationship to

our families and the people around us. Sinful people inevitably result in dysfunctional families and societies” (p. 269–70). The primary responsibility of parents and leaders is to assist with the shaping and molding of their children to God’s standard, exposing them to his glory and his love by teaching them his ways as commanded in the biblical mandate (Deuteronomy 4).

The Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-7

In Deut. 6:4-7, a passage of scripture known as *The Great Shema*, God clearly articulates his expectations regarding generational transference:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up. (NIV)

It is important to place this scripture in light of the biblical, historical context. The people of God have finally exited the wilderness period of their lives and entered the promised land. God reminds them that just as they depended upon him to supply and care for them in the wilderness, they must be equally dependent upon him in their settlement (Erdvig, 2016; Gaebelein, 1990). God declared that the decrees and laws he had imparted to them in their wandering would safeguard their survival in this new season and that passing such laws and precepts to their children would also ensure the survival of their faith. Birch (1983) said:

No longer would these people see the fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. Instead, the people were now to have God’s written Word as their guide. But how could the reality of those past experiences be passed on to the succeeding generations? God’s answer was to make it the responsibility of each individual home and each parent of that home, to teach the truths of His Word to their children. Of course, parents are in the best position to train their children, both in terms of time and potential for impact. Children copy their parents. (p. 130)

Children were taught to recall God’s commands from rote memory and how to understand how to write them on their hearts. They were to *love* their God, who had delivered

and cared for them. “Deuteronomy 6:4-9, the *Shema*, presented both the goal and process of education. The people were called to acknowledge and love the one true God and to teach his Word to their children in the daily activities of life” (Anthony, 2018, p. 17). Their homes and places of worship were to be the training ground for the *Shema*, where the children interacted with and were imprinted with God’s goodness and his truths. Anthony and Benson (2011) said, “Rabbis believed that the Hebrew home should be viewed, much like the temple, as a private sanctuary for religious observances, including the worship of God (house of prayer), the instruction in the Torah (house of study), and meeting needs found in the community (house of assembly)” (p. 26). God’s original intent for Christian education was to integrate faith and practice into every element of life. It served as the central focal point from which all other activities in life were to be viewed. This process of transference is how the definition of generational transference came to be. From this example in the Old Testament, one can construct a picture of what the educational environment of the local church should look like today (Anthony, 2018; Dockery & Morgan, 2018; Erdvig, 2016; French, 2013; Lowe & Lowe, 2018).

The story found in Judges 2:7-10 clearly captures what can happen when the former generation does not prioritize passing on the Christian faith from one generation to the next. After the death of Joshua and the death of the generation of the elders who had served and battled with Joshua during the exploits of conquering the promised land, the generation that followed these men did not know God.

The people served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had seen all the great things the LORD had done for Israel... After that whole generation had been gathered to their ancestors, another generation grew up who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel. (Judges 2: 7, 10, NIV)

The generation of Joshua, regardless of what they had experienced from God themselves, did not transfer their faith with the generation that came after them. The result was a new generation of

God's people who did not know him or what he had done for his people. The message of faith had never been passed on to the next generation. The book of Judges follows how God had to miraculously intervene to reeducate his people about who he was and what he had done for them. There is a biblical expectation that the story of God's people will be passed from generation to generation eternally (Hayes, 2022). The method of passing that story from generation to generation would require contextualization to meet the needs and speak the language of the current generation. In this way, the story was safeguarded by generational transference.

Theology of Cultural Contextualization

Not only is there a divine mandate to transfer the faith from generation to generation, but biblical evidence suggests that the message of faith was contextualized to meet the needs of cultures as they evolved. When hearing terms like "culture" and "context," it is common to associate these words only with the cultural differences between international ethnicities that often manifest on the mission field. Yet, when looking within the four walls of the church, one finds a cultural division along the fault line of the age of congregants (Conway, 2019). This gap between older and younger generations is causing great concern for churches as they struggle to find methods of ministry that can cross the cultural divide and reach the next generation with the message of the Bible, resulting in an exodus of Millennials from their churches and their faith.

Lost in the Gap

The Millennial generation is crying out for cultural awareness, for the church to understand its intrinsic need for connection, and to communicate the gospel message in a way that Millennials can embrace. Millennials have become lost in the gap, exiting the church out of frustration, doubt, and disconnection. This reality demands that ministers be well-informed and educated regarding this representative culture's needs and petitions. Livermore (2016) concluded,

"One of the most effective ways to promote self-awareness is through the world-renowned work on unconscious bias—exposing ways we unwittingly favor certain types of people based upon our upbringing, experiences, and values" (p. 16). Translating this principle to the context of ministry methods, ministry leaders need to learn to be aware of when they unconsciously favor their own biases or preferences toward their own cultural norms in contrast to grooming heightened cultural awareness of the needs of the representative group to which they are trying to minister.

Preferential bias toward ineffective ministry methods indicates a general lack of understanding regarding the cultural gap between the church and the Millennials. Older generation ministry leaders are, in many cases, culturally disconnected from the people who represent the younger generation (Barna Group, 2019a; Csorba, 2016; Easton & Steyn, 2022; Pyöriä et al., 2017; Wilson, 2019). The younger generation differs from the senior in interests, values, relational rules, and spiritual and faith development. Confusion has become a standard component of the Millennials' faith life and a deterrent to their ability to connect with the body of Christ. They cannot clearly articulate who they are in light of their beliefs. They have unanswered questions (Barna Group, 2019a). Moreover, much like a person visiting from another country with its own culture and language, the attempts of ministry leaders to communicate with them without understanding their culture and language add to the confusion.

Cultural Contextualization of the Message

In 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, Paul makes a statement about cultural contextualization: "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means, I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (NIV). This scriptural passage provides contemporary ministers with a critical

principle of ministry, the message needs to be contextualized. The audience to which the message is delivered needs consideration. Paul said to the Jew that he had become a Jew. Born and raised a Jew under the law, relating to the Jewish culture would not have been hard for him. The stipulations and ethics of the Jewish law would be his cultural bias and norm. However, he also said that to those who did not have the law, he became one not having the law, meaning that he would have to step outside of his bias and norm to contextualize his message to minister to those representative of a different culture than his own.

This consideration of his audience did not compromise Paul's message but indicated that he contextualized it to better relate to his audience (Guyette, 2019). There is so much for ministers to learn from this example. Paul was able to globalize the ministry of the early church without modern advances or technological inclusion. "He accomplished it by understanding human nature, understanding and respecting the culture, and aligning himself with the values of his leader, Christ, and the church's mission, vision, and declaration" (Randolph, 2021, p. 43). Suppose ministry leaders desire to learn the language of the next generation and contextualize their message to ensure generational transference. In that case, they could address the cultural needs of Millennials and contextualize the message to communicate in a way that connects with their intended audience. This transformation could result from ministry methods guided by cultural contextualization, intentional care, and consideration of the generation's needs. Rather than standing back from the gap, the gap could inform effective methodology, wrapped in the gospel message's purity and guided by Christ's example in culture and community.

In Ephesians 4:15-16, Paul again instructs his contemporary audience regarding ministry methodology that results in authentic growth by stating, "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.

From him, the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (NIV). Connection to the body, being knit together, sharing, and building each other up in love, each discovering and doing their part, from the head, who is Christ. These are all core values and shared needs of the Millennial generation: to be able to talk to others and ask questions, to be knit together with others in relationships and the community, to be inspired to live the story of the gospel authentically, and to engage in their community and the world without fear (Wilson, 2019). For this next generation, ministry methodology should begin with a connection to the community—the community of Christ, the source of generational transference of the message.

Theoretical Framework for the Study

This section provides a theoretical framework for this study. Through a discussion of theory, this researcher offered a framework for the hermeneutic phenomenological method that this researcher employed in this study. This study evaluated the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experience of those in the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of the local church to determine whether there are characteristics specific to transformational leadership to which the Millennial generation responds, influencing their decisions to remain connected to the faith community. This section highlights the significant contributors and influences of the theory related to the main aspects of the study, in particular: (a) transformational leadership theory (Abitew, 2023; Adella & Andriani, 2023; Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Burns, 1978; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2020; Lancefield & Rangen, 2021; Lin et al., 2020; Løvaas et al., 2020; Matsunaga, 2024; Momeny & Gourgues, 2019; Nour, 2023; Roe, 2023; Sasan et al., 2023; Steinmann et al., 2018; Valenti, 2019; Valldeneu et al., 2021; Wolor et al., 2021; Yulman & Trinanda, 2023) and (b) its

impact on Christian practices and leadership (Al Saed & Saed, 2023; Deng et al., 2023; Earley & Dempsey, 2013; Forrest & Roden, 2017; Foulkes-Bert et al., 2019; Lambert, 2013; Nxumalo, 2020; Obmerga, 2021; Olaniyan, 2015; Rammel, 2013; Sliwka et al., 2023). This section also included brief historical backgrounds on the theorist and theory. This section concludes with a summary of how this research design connects to this theory.

Transformational Leadership Theory

James McGregor Burns conceived transformational leadership theory in his 1978 book, *Leadership*, in which he defines the theory as that exchange in which “leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation” (p. 20). Indeed, the concepts of morality and motivation as transformational stimuli for leaders and followers indicate the reciprocal nature of this leadership theory. In further research, "Bass (1990) and Northouse (2013) define transformational leadership as the ability to influence interpersonal relationships and help followers to function well in their respective situations and areas of responsibility" (Foulkes-Bert et al., 2019, p. 21). However, to truly understand transformational leadership theory and why it potentially explains why some Millennials remain connected to the local church despite evidence that some do not (Conway, 2018; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016; Packard & Ferguson, 2019; Roe, 2023; Sumpter, 2019; B. C. Whitney Sr., 2022; Wolor et al., 2021), one needs first to understand the worldview from which one navigates the realm of transformational leadership, secular or Christian.

Secular vs. Christian Transformational Leadership Theory

The theory of transformational leadership began in secular spheres of education and research. As noted, leading experts such as Burns, Bass, and Northouse offered the first definitions and theories underlying transformational leadership practices. They observed

the power of confident leaders to inspire fundamental transformation in those with whom they interacted and began to identify those characteristics these leaders had that stimulated transformation in their followers. From these observations, they identified four inherent components of transformational leadership. These components would be foundational for the secular and Christian worlds, the individual's worldview guides these components in practice.

In direct contrast to the secular theory, despite employing the same vital components as the secular theory, the Christian transformation leadership theory draws upon a biblical foundation as an underpinning. Yoms and Du Toit (2017) clarify the difference between the worldviews of secular and Christian transformational leadership in practice:

Christian development agencies may be involved in social transformation for various reasons; however, their respective ministries are virtually always a natural expression of their faith. Their ministries are in response to the great commandment: total love for God and neighbour. It can also be argued that, while secular donors may provide economic incentives as well as strategies to achieve the donor's or development agency's purpose, the Christian side of social transformation is born out of personal obedience to Jesus Christ and the desire to have others know and follow Christ. (p. 47)

For Christian leaders, transformation cannot be separated from a Christian worldview. Change without Christ at the center of the change is not transformational change; the only change that can definitively impact vision, character, and influence is change centered on Christ.

The Components of the Transformational Leadership Theory

Christian transformational leadership theory is grounded in four leadership components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. "Transformational leaders do more with colleagues and followers than set up simple exchanges or agreements. They behave in ways to achieve superior results by employing one or more of the four core components of transformational leadership" (Hickman, 2016, p. 78). However, in the Christian version of transformational leadership theory, these components are

tested and examined against a Christian worldview supported by scripture, particularly in the lives of influential and transformational biblical leaders. The presence of these components in a leader's methodology helps to identify a transformation leader in practice (Almas et al., 2020; Avolio & Bass, 1995; Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1993; Foulkes-Bert et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Obmerga, 2021; Olaniyan, 2015; Valldeneu et al., 2021; Wolor et al., 2021).

Idealized Influence. In a transformational leader, influence is the catalyst of transformation. The charisma of the leader combined with the relational dynamics of passion and personality can increase the influence of the leader in the life of their followers. In Christian transformational leadership theory, the leader utilizes their influence in the life of the follower to persuade and to strategize for beneficial outcomes (Yoms & Du Toit, 2017). When properly managed, the influence of leaders in their relational capacity with their followers—in action, word, or character—has the power to motivate people to transform their character and behavior. A transformational leader employs a transformational style that fosters commitment and loyalty while simultaneously conveying organizational objectives that move the team toward a future vision (Valldeneu et al., 2021). Christian leaders use their influence to guide through accountability to God. Influence involves changing people's thinking and behavior through persuasion, encouragement, or Godly example (Kouzes & Posner, 2023). Their gift of influence is one of responsibility, and they know that their power of influence can move people to act.

Inspirational Motivation. A transformational leader's power to motivate people to action is a critical component. Mueller (2012) examined the impact of motivation in the process of transformational leadership theory:

Transformational leaders appeal to values and aspirations shared by both followers and leaders, resulting in greater impact on followers and higher motivation overall. Transformational leadership elevates the follower's level of maturity and ideals as well as concerns for achievement, self-actualization, and the well-being of others, the

organization, and society. The essence of transformational leadership is the inspiration and moral uplifting of followers ... [involving] deep change in followers' values, attitudes and behaviors. Transformational leadership is a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents. (p. 20)

Transformational leaders inspire those that surround them. They provide meaning for tasks and challenge their followers' work ethic. Through a shared vision, they also inspire connection in disconnected people. They lead by example in their interaction with their followers, and their model motivates them to transform their own potential for initiative and accomplishment. The influence of their presence and the impact of their words inspire their followers to imitate them in achievement, action, and commitment.

Intellectual Stimulation. In transformational leaders, the power of problem-solving is released. They inspire creative ideas and solutions that challenge people to think and see beyond present conditions. Yoms and Du Toit (2017) noted, "Intellectual stimulation describes a leader who has the skills to advocate intelligence and encourage problem solving mentality" (p. 422). Exposure to a transformational leader creates an environment that stimulates people to think beyond the norm or the status quo. Rather than being comfortable or content with present conditions, leaders cause their followers to experience discomfort with what they see as stagnant conditions. They have the capacity to paint a vivid picture of potential yet realized.

Keeping their minds set on the envisioned end result, they create language, emotions, strategies, plans, policies, and structures that facilitate the desired outcome. They gain energy neither from the plaudits of people nor from the tangible evidence of worldly progress but from the knowledge that they are effectively carrying out the vision that God has entrusted to them. (Barna, 2018, p. 30)

This aptitude for vision-casting and intellectual stimulation is prominent within transformational leadership. Transformational leaders have the capacity to inspire others to see beyond the limitations in front of them to the potential solutions that exist beyond those limitations.

Individualized Consideration. Last, the transformational leader devotes special attention to the needs of others, thus communicating caring and nurturing. People follow leaders who care for their interests and their self-development. Transformational leaders have the capacity to personalize special attention to the needs of followers, by “focusing on developing and supporting each follower through coaching, mentoring, and consulting” (Deng et al., 2023, p. 630). Transformational leaders can intuitively consider and discern the personalized needs of each follower, and tailor their leadership to meet those individualized needs. The ultimate goal of nurturing and caring Christian transformational leadership is a healthy, involved, and empowered follower. In particular, this is an effective principle when a leader seeks to reach the next generation through that generation’s perceived needs for personal development.

Biblical Evidence of Transformational Leadership Theory

When surveying scripture for evidence of transformational leadership, it quickly becomes evident that this approach to leadership was present in many of the dominant and influential leaders throughout biblical history. The New Testament offers two of the strongest examples of biblical transformational leaders: Jesus Christ with his disciples and the Apostle Paul with his ministers in training. During the time of Jesus’ personal ministry to and development of his twelve disciples, the four components of transformational leadership are identifiable (Forrest & Roden, 2017). Jesus called imperfect men to walk alongside him in ministry, men who were seemingly unqualified for such work; through relational exposure to his presence and his influence, these men were stimulated and motivated for the work of the ministry.

Their association with Jesus over a three-year period served to transform this ragtag group into world-beaters. After the descent of the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost, a group of frightened, cowardly disciples was transformed into fearless megaphones for the resurrected Christ. (Ogden, 2016, p. 78)

The disciples were transformed not merely by Jesus's presence but also by his transparent consideration of their well-being and maturation. He would regularly take time to be with them and teach them personally. Jesus modeled before them the character and the sacrifice of the work to which he was calling them. Interaction with Christ transformed them from disciples into the ministers they would one day become. As Bonhoeffer (2015) stated, "Jesus calls to discipleship, not as a teacher and a role model, but as the Christ, the Son of God... What is said about the content of discipleship? Follow me, walk behind me! That is all" (p. 57-8). Through exposure to the transformational leadership of Jesus, these men became who they were called to be, a calling that they could have only realized by walking behind Jesus.

Like the Christ who so radically disrupted and transformed his life, the life of the Apostle Paul suggests that his transformation led him to help transform others (Guyette, 2019). Paul's leadership taught people about the transformation found in Christ, and those who followed him experienced this transformation by his example (Conybeare & Howson, 2023). Paul lived the change he had experienced, and, as an apostle, he was committed to empowering others to share the gospel message with those who did not know Christ, just as he was compelled to do.

[Paul's] leadership style was unquestionably transformational, as evidenced by the change and increasing maturity in the lives of the people he served. Consider, for example, Timothy. He developed from a young, timid individual to a church leader who, tradition states, died for his faith. (Cooper, 2005, p. 52)

The relationship between Paul and Timothy also demonstrates this transformational exchange of empowerment. "We see Paul's commitment to Timothy. His commitment to Timothy was demonstrated by his relationship with Christ and dependence on pure doctrine. Furthermore, Paul demonstrated his commitment to Timothy through prayer" (Cooper, 2005, p. 56). Second Timothy 2:2 illustrates Paul's philosophy of mentoring multipliers. In this passage, one can identify five generations of multiplication: "What you have heard from me in the

presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (CSB). "Even as Paul was busy fulfilling his calling as an apostle to the Gentiles, he also fulfilled the great commission by making disciples. He took what the Lord had deposited into him and committed it to faithful men who in turn taught others also" (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. 122).

Paul shared his leadership with others, helping to establish churches and leadership in the places he visited, preparing and empowering disciples to lead before he moved on to the following location. "One key to Paul’s leadership was empowerment. While Paul challenged people to change and required something in return for his leadership, he also empowered them to make the required change" (Cooper, 2005, p. 53). Empowerment was the key to developing mature disciples and leaders who could, in turn, disciple and lead others through the same process of maturation demonstrated by Paul.

For Paul, the fully devoted, reproducing disciple is one who has grown to reflect the character of Jesus in his or her life. The process of transformation removes all that reflects the old, simple self, while the scent of Christ permeates the whole being from the inside out. Maturity for Paul is our readiness to have Jesus reflect his nature to every aspect of our being. (Ogden, 2016, p. 105)

In transformational leadership, there is an element in which the disciples or followers reproduce after their leader, not reproducing their leader but reproducing *after* their leader in becoming both like them and, at the same time, the best version of themselves.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Transformational Leadership Theory in Practice

Because transformational leaders rely upon charismatic, personal character traits such as influence, motivation, stimulation, and consideration, one of the significant weaknesses of this leadership theory is the potential for abuse in pursuit of personal gain. Charismatic leaders who harness their capacity to inspire transformation in others can easily seduce their followers for their gain, treating them as stepping stones to the leaders’ deeper ambitions. Leaders with an

ulterior motive for self-gain can do more harm than good, as people become pawns in a larger game played by leaders for their own ends. Correct utilization of the leader's influence is essential to prevent misuse (Almas et al., 2020; Bennett, 2020; Kouzes & Posner, 2023; Løvaas et al., 2020). Transformational leaders are always responsible for subjecting their divine gift of influence to the inspection of the Holy Spirit, assessing their motives, and judging their intentions. This accountability process reminds Christian-based transformational leaders daily that people are not pawns under their control but children of God under their stewardship (Nour, 2023; Olaniyan, 2015; Roe, 2023). Transformational leaders bears a weight of responsibility and are ultimately accountable to God for the welfare of the people they shepherd.

Conversely, the greatest strengths of transformational leadership also spring from these same characteristics of charisma and influence. Strength or weakness is determined by intent and how it is used to achieve an end. The same charismatic traits, such as the ability to influence others, can be used for good. Mentors, coaches, ministers, educators, and teachers are excellent examples of how these characteristics can be used for good. Dr. Gary Bredfeldt, aligning with Noel Tichy, noted that teachers are the most outstanding leaders. He said, "The greatest leaders among us are those who are the great teachers among us. Why? Because they influence us, they motivate us, and they develop us as they interact with us in relationship" (Bredfeldt, 2020b).

Mentors, coaches, ministers, educators, and teachers have the power of position, having earned the right to teach through education and experience (Bredfeldt, 2020c). They can reward through grades and feedback. They have coercive power through their right to decrease grade scores should the student show a lack of quality and effort in their coursework. They have referent power because good teachers inspire others to follow their lead. They have expert power because they are experts in their field of study and possess the knowledge necessary to inspire

others to follow in their steps through words, calculations, and thought. Finally, they have informational power because they have information their students do not yet have (Bredfeldt, 2020a). But all good teachers relinquish their power by giving it away to their students as they model before them the transformation they preach.

With the application of transformational principles, Christian education teachers/leaders are expected to exhibit simplicity in their lifestyles, relationships with people, and the lessons they teach; they are to be motivational individuals who avoid bitter criticisms and non-complimentary attitudes; hard-working individuals who facilitate the learning of students. (Olaniyan, 2015, p. 270)

Even in the care of their students, they model the transformational leadership component of individualized consideration. Regardless of nationality or race, of social or economic status, Christian educators and leaders should look at each student or follower through the lens of God's Word. Every person is made in the image of God. The *imago dei* secured every person dignity and worth, secured as a creation of God (Campbell-Enns, 2020; Cox & Peck, 2018; Gale et al., 2023). As leaders, mentors, or teachers, how the individual treats a person created in God's image creates the potential for a relationship of Christian nurture that can expedite the process of transformation and renewal. It takes time to restore the image of God in an individual. It requires time to discover the process of spiritual maturity ripeness into Christ's fullness and explore the depths of development and perfection. Most often, the pathway to Christian maturity is through the investment of Christian nurture, when one person intentionally pours into another (Anthony, 2018; Dockery & Morgan, 2018). As the transformational leader develops relationships with the people they lead, their investment in the growth of the individual will instigate transformation.

Transformational Leadership Theory in Christian Leadership

Transformational leaders, whether educators or ministers, employ three primary approaches to encourage followers: a leader's presence, a leader's words, and through personal

concern for the welfare of their followers (Deng, et al., 2023). Through these three methods, transformational leaders can create connections with Millennials, as their culture inherently demands relationships, empowerment, and commitment. The relationship established with the follower allows for influence and imitation. The capacity for empowerment in the life of the follower allows for motivation and stimulation. And finally, commitment to the follower allows for consideration and maturation.

Relationship (Influence and Imitation). Transformational leaders' relational presence creates the power of influence and imitation in the follower's life. Paul excellently captured the relational impact of the transformational leader in 1 Corinthians 11:1 when he said, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (NIV). His capacity to develop meaningful relationships with those he worked marked Paul's ministry. These relationships impacted the life and ministry of those who looked to him for leadership. "Paul's relationship with his coworkers does not seem to have been marked by structure and hierarchy. Instead, Paul shared deep relational bonds with these folks" (Forrest & Roden, 2017, p. 426). Paul's transformational leadership was founded upon his ability to form influential relationships, just as transformations in Christ were based upon relationships with Christ. "Paul's convictions about ministry and church leadership find the apostle teaching the Word in close relationship with—and directly accessible to—those he taught" (Forrest & Roden, 2017, p. 429). Millennials express a deep need for relationships and church leadership to provide opportunities to connect intimately with others (Barna Group, 2019a; Lambert, 2013; Ogden, 2016; Rammel, 2013; Simmons, 2015).

Empowerment (Motivation and Stimulation). The empowering words of transformational leaders create both the power of motivation and stimulation in the follower's life. "Leaders take the initiative in mobilizing people for participation in the processes of change,

encouraging a sense of collective identity and collective efficacy, which in turn brings stronger feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy" (Burns, 2003, pp. 25–26). The ability of leaders to motivate their followers can also increase transformational potential in other areas of followers' lives. The transformational leader's leadership qualities inspire motivation, self-possession, and the desire to achieve common goals (Ibrahim et al., 2022). Exposure to transformational leaders motivates and intellectually stimulates people to what living a life in service to the Kingdom of God, manifested in the service to the local church, achieves. "Leaders, therefore, are living, breathing imitations of the Kingdom, foreshadowing in this world the vision and values of that world. They are 'Kingdom guides,' and as such express 'leadership' appropriate to the new reality in which they live" (Forrest & Roden, 2017, p. 321).

Leaders are strengthened by their willingness to empower those they lead and share leadership with them, hoping they, too, would become leaders in the cause and one day reproduce after their teacher or mentor (Bredfeldt, 2020b). By exposing followers to extended time in the presence of transformational leaders, they develop and mature and become empowered to lead others. Leaders develop an environment that shares power and invites followers into work that is important. They strengthen others by sharing the power to create change, and thereby turn followers into leaders themselves, capable of also strengthening others (Kouzes & Posner, 2023). Millennials need access to empowerment and the opportunity to stimulate change within the context of any organization they belong to, and in this case, the local church (Solaja & Oguntola, 2016).

Commitment (Consideration and Maturation). The committed care of transformational leaders creates both the power of consideration and maturity in the follower's life. "Transformational leadership behavior application in church arena helps the church

progressively conform to Christ's image. Church leaders' behavior motivates church members to consistently grow in church community" (Harwanto, 2022, p. 30–31). Although the relationship between leader and follower is reciprocal, where both leader and follower experience transformation as they challenge one another to rise to higher levels of morality, transformational leaders are committed to the well-being and growth of those who follow them (Harwanto, 2022). They dedicate their lives to seeing the finished work of Christ manifest in the lives of those who look to them for leadership.

The goals of transformational leaders reflect James 1:4: "Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything" (NIV). Nothing less than the follower's preparation, maturation, and commitment to their unique calling in Christ constitutes the finished work of transformational leaders. Millennials express a deep need to be a part of something meaningful and have a lasting impact resulting from their commitment (Simmons, 2015). Given the dynamic nature of Millennials, overflowing with energy, they can quickly adapt to any situation in which they are positioned, given their capacity to stand firm (Obmerga, 2021). Transformational leaders understand this partiality for commitment intrinsic to the Millennial culture and know how to harness it.

Millennial culture is disrupting ministry norms and challenging leadership to explore more discipleship methods. Christian leadership should prioritize that the next generation has a clear and adequate understanding of the Christian faith without demonstrating disgust or defensiveness over a lack of knowledge (Barna Group, 2019a; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Simmons, 2015). They are children of God, designed uniquely by the creator in the uniqueness of their design. "Millennials, just like everyone else, are created in the 'image and likeness' of God. As such, their sustenance and sanctification come from God as well" (Okpaleke, 2021, p.

91). Their *imago Dei* demands that ministry leaders respect the intricacies of their divine creative design, which, as scripture articulates in Genesis 1:26, is intentional (Campbell-Enns, 2020). By embracing the complexities of this cultural gap, culturally contextual ministry and leadership methods that relate to the next generation can emerge, ones that can protect the integrity and purity of the gospel message, while providing a further connection with Millennials. By using authentic relationships and contemporary technology, such as social media, as tools for engagement and storytelling, they can connect the story of Jesus Christ to the next generation and begin to reverse the tide of those leaving their faith behind to explore alternatives to faith.

Related Literature

The main foci of this research were (a) the generational gap between the leadership of the church and Christian Millennials; (b) Christian practices of worship, generational transference, and cultural contextualization; and (c) transformational leadership. Previous sections provided both theological and theoretical frameworks for the topic. At the outset of the chapter and based on a review of the literature, this researcher offered six observations:

1. The Bible supports a lifestyle of worship encapsulated by an expressed love for the Lord, gathering together with other believers, and serving the body that centers every Christian life and is necessary for spiritual formation.
2. There is a divine mandate for generational transference founded in scripture.
3. There is biblical support for cultural contextualization of the gospel message.
4. Due to the cultural needs of the Millennial generation, there may be a demand for transformative leadership in ministry that can navigate the needed changes in ministry methods to form a connection with the local church community.
5. Millennials are trending away from religious affiliations.

6. The culture of Millennials has disrupted the contemporary culture of the local church and has presented a need for more innovative ministry methods.
7. The Millennials' need for networked theology and digital engagement has created a cultural divide between generations in local churches.

This chapter provided theological data in support of the connections between Christian practices and those of worship, generational transference, and cultural contextualization. It also offered theoretical data to support a relationship between the Millennials and the need for transformational leadership to bridge the gap. The following section focuses on the primary population of this study, Millennials. This researcher considered how the culture of Millennials has disrupted normative ministry methods, how there exists a cultural shift of Millennials to networked theology, and how that theology requires the church to explore new ministry connections and fostered belonging. The section concludes with an analysis of literature related to the effects of transformational leadership on Millennials.

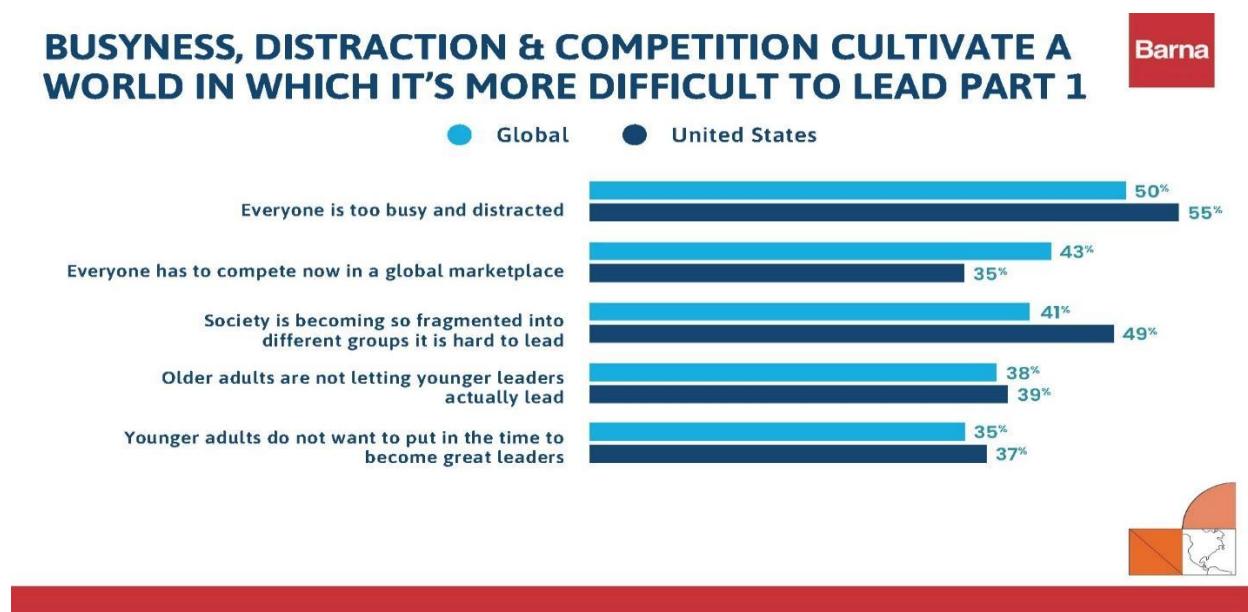
Millennials

This study employed the term Millennial to describe those born between 1984 and 1998 (ages 25-39), as determined by Barna Group (Barna Group, 2019a). “The values and behaviors that emanate from a generation are a manifestation of the interaction between parents, siblings, influential people, the media, and even the historical events that occurred during their formative years” (Dannar, 2013, p. 2). Easy access to information has become second nature for Millennials, who can access universal information stores via smart devices. Restricting information repels their sense of fairness and contradicts virtual sharing ideals (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Wilson, 2019). Technology has become part of a Millennial's physiological and psychological development from an early age, shaping how they think and act. A recent study on

the influence of social media on Millennials found that “Millennials are more inquisitive, and they want to learn about why things happen, how things function, and what they can do next. Because of the development of information technology, Millennials have more ways of researching and educating themselves about what they want” (Sai & Sreekanth, 2022, p. 6998).

Social media and technological advances have dramatically influenced Millennials' culture, and the literature reveals that it has become the daily language they navigate (Barna Group, 2019a; Matsunaga, 2024; Sai & Sreekanth, 2022; Vogels, 2019). Incidentally, the technology that has shaped their culture is also one of the most significant sources of busyness, distraction, and competition, creating challenges for ministry leaders seeking to connect Millennials to the life of the local church (Allen & Santos, 2020; Csorba, 2016; Khan et al., 2020; Mazor, 2018). Research from Barna Group (Barna Group, 2019b) indicates that Millennials have identified the barriers to leadership efforts that keep them from connecting to the local church (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 *Busyness, Distraction & Competition Part 1*



Source: Barna Group, *The Connected Generation: United States Report*, 2019b, p. 37. With permission of Barna Group (see Appendix C).

Note. Millennials have expressed that the increase in busyness, distraction, and competition has cultivated a world in which it is more difficult to connect. In part 1, the most notable reasons expressed by the Millennials in the United States that pertain to the purpose of this research were: (1) “Everyone is too busy and distracted” (55%), (2) “Older adults are not letting younger leaders lead” (39%), and (3) “Younger adults do not want to put in the time to become great leaders” (37%).

Communication

The Millennial generation desires clear, informative communication. “One of the most noticeable differences between Millennials and earlier generations is their strong relationship to technology. Millennials are often referred to as digital natives, implying their generation’s incorporation of technology to be an intuitive part of their lives” (Grotkamp et al., 2020, p. 59).

The Millennial generation favors leadership styles that accentuate the acceptance of subsidiary opinions, open or transparent communication, and employee feedback (Valenti, 2019).

Millennials desire leaders who build interpersonal relationships, listen, pay attention, communicate well, and provide trust and room for Millennials to prove themselves (Putriastuti & Stasi, 2019). Principles of teaching a new language to minister to Millennials could be of significant benefit, as Millennials communicate differently from any previous generation. No prior generation has been as rooted in the need for imagery and visual illustration as the Millennials, going far beyond mere propositional teaching or communication (Quinn, 2019).

Due to the influx of technology, this younger generation assimilates most of their information visually (Campbell & Garner, 2016). Strong (2015) emphasized that the culture of this generation is influenced by images and stories rather than propositions and principles. The gospel story needs to be lived and come alive through storytelling to impact this generation. "The

challenge...in this postmodern era is to bring the gospel in a fresh and artistic way by using stories, other art forms as well as the developing technology—without losing the truth of the gospel" (p. 7).

What would be more beneficial for leaders would be to *ask* their Millennials what they have questions about and what they would like to learn to ensure that ministers effectively present the gospel message and the principles of the Bible to the next generation of believers. Furthermore, Millennials can guide church leaders in *how* those topics can be communicated best to them to achieve assimilation and discipleship. Rather than leading with assumptions often driven by bias and personal norms, it is far better to dialog with the intended audience to discover its preferred method of communication around needed topics. As Hughes (2013) said, "The more serious side of youth group activity frequently revolves around the discussion of topics chosen by the young people themselves" (p. 99). Suppose the church wants the succeeding generation to develop engagement with the Word of God. In that case, it ought to create environments where the Word of God can be shared, discussed, analyzed, contextualized, and applied. Every method of ministry to the next generation ought to effectively communicate the story and message of Jesus Christ both verbally and visually (Simmons, 2015). And this story of faith must have relational ties to the community. For this generation to grow into its faith, it must do so within a living community, sharing the gospel story (Quinn, 2019).

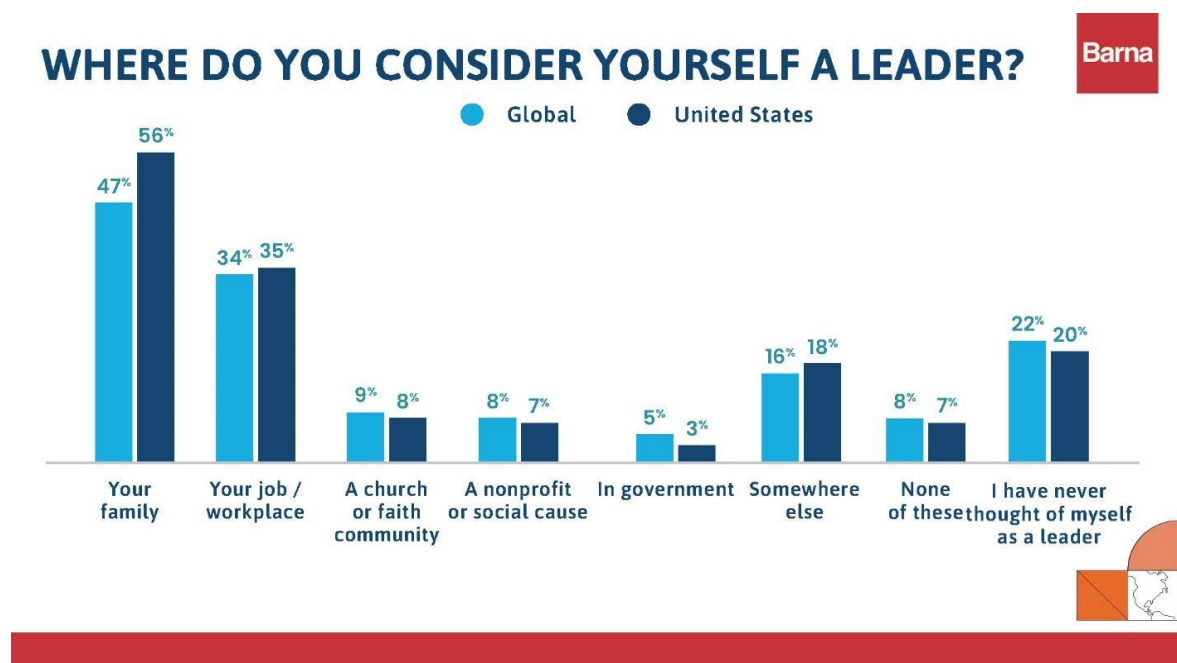
Community

One of this generation's greatest shared needs, and one of its greatest strengths, is how they value their community. The dynamic and living process of becoming a disciple of Jesus is rooted in connections. Becoming a disciple of Christ involves the process of connecting and belonging—the process by which we develop an intimate relationship with God and with others

(Cox & Peck, 2018; Ogden, 2016). Learning the truth of the Bible ought to be experienced first in connection with God and with others. Millennials thrive in connection with their peers but also connection with their leaders and mentors. When disciples have a growing relationship with God and an honest and increasing understanding of themselves, they can grow in the ability to connect with other disciples (John 1:12; Romans 8:16).

One of the primary methods of developing disciples was expounding on the truth within the context of relationships and the community (Bonhoeffer & Barnett, 2015; Willard, 2014). The community shared ideas, explanations, and a developed passion for understanding and connecting to the truth of God’s Word (Campbell & Garner, 2016; Conway, 2019; Cox & Peck, 2018; Hayes, 2022; Wilhoit, 2022). Research provided by Barna Group (2019b) indicates that Millennials have identified areas where they feel the most comfortable connecting to leadership opportunities (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 *Where Do You Consider Yourself a Leader?*



Source: Barna Group, *The Connected Generation: United States Report*, 2019b, p. 36. With permission of Barna Group (see Appendix C).

Note. Millennials in the United States expressed that the areas where they feel the most comfortable leading are in their family (56%) and their job/workplace (35%). However, statistics indicate that the percentage of those who feel comfortable leading in their church or faith community remains low at only 8%.

Suppose the Millennial generation is demanding a community by which it can experience the personal nature of Christ. In that case, creating, inspiring, and developing a community that draws in this generation should be one of the main priorities for ministry leadership. Thus, part of bridging the gap between the church and the next generation is developing community opportunities that contextualize the gospel's message using relationships as its foundation (Elowsky, 2016; Kleinhans, 2015). Ministers need to look no further than the example of our own Savior to demonstrate an effective model for a biblical community. Jesus fostered relationships with others, and inside of these dynamic, growing, and thriving relationships, he shared biblical truths using story, imagery, and answers to questions. Relationship with Christ and Christ's model of community, the church of Christ, inspires authentic relational ties that result in bold faith (Barna Group, 2019a; Fuist & McDowell, 2019; Ogden, 2016; Packard & Ferguson, 2019; Wilson, 2019).

Christ

The centrality of Jesus, or conformity to Christ, in the life of the believer is the cultural context needed to complete the biblical worldview of the next generation. Whether Millennials fully recognize or can articulate their shared need for connection with Christ, the next generation desperately needs it. Millennials need to experience the power of the gospel message beyond being a story but instead as the message of a living Savior (Putman et al., 2013). Their inability to articulate their own generational need is primarily due to a lack of a cultural context of a

biblical worldview. Many in the next generation have no frame of reference within which to organize and connect with the principles of the Christian faith.

It is possible that the lack of understanding concerning how a biblical worldview develops is part of the reason for this phenomenon. Without having a model for biblical worldview development, parents, educators, and ministry leaders may be overlooking important concepts as they design and implement curriculum and as they select pedagogies for use in the classroom and other venues. (Erdvig, 2016, p. 24)

However, even though Millennials may not be able to articulate a worldview, they recognize opportunities for relationships, given their desire for connection and belonging. A relationship with the person of Christ holds more excellent value for the Millennials than practicing religious traditions associated with the church. Conformity to Christ cannot be communicated as conformity to a religious norm. Conformity to Christ “focuses on the implications of Christ’s lordship over every aspect of life in such a way that even the most mundane components of life can become expressions of the life of Christ in us” (Boa et al., 2020, p. 202).

True maturity in the Christian’s life looks like the body of Christ, or connection with other believers. Christ is the standard of spiritual maturity (Barkley, 2017; Boa et al., 2020; Whitney, 2014). To be considered spiritually mature, the targeted outcome of spiritual growth is a lifestyle that mirrors the life of Christ. Each generation has to learn to process culture and community through a biblical lens to maintain true faith in the coming age (Conway, 2018; Law, 2019). As each generation adapts and evolves, establishing its own culture, the context for presenting the biblical worldview could also adapt. While the timelessness of the gospel message transcends the evolution of culture, adapting the gospel in practice can transform culture and mold it without losing the integrity of its original shape (Carson, 2008).

Though truth has become subjective in Millennial culture, Jesus still maintains that he is *the truth* (John 14:6). “Evangelicals must affirm that objective truth can be discovered, known,

and communicated because all truth is ultimately grounded in the person of God and the propositional revelation of that God” (Pettit, 2008, p. 35). It is essential that church leadership prioritize teaching the next generation to believe and trust that all truth is found universally in the person of Christ. When the shared needs of connection and community are rooted in the person of Christ, ministers can develop ministering methods that bridge the cultural gap between them and their audience and begin to see the resulting transformation (Almas et al., 2020; Foulkes-Bert et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Keita & Lao, 2020).

Networked Theology

Technology is one of the most defining aspects of the Millennial culture. New technologies have become the native language of this generation. The Millennial generation uses and understands technology quicker and easier than most generations. According to Vogels (2019), “More than nine-in-ten Millennials (93%) own smartphones... Almost all Millennials (nearly 100%) now say they use the internet, and 19% of them are smartphone-only internet users – that is, they own a smartphone but do not have broadband internet service at home” (para. 7). Such skills go beyond the mere use of technical devices or the abundance of digital social interaction. Millennials have a wired psyche that perceives and interacts with their surroundings from a digital perspective (Barna Group, 2019a; Quinn, 2019). Deitsch (2012) stated, “They speak their language that to most adults has the same familiarity as one trying to read Morse Code. They do not prefer face-to-face communication and will respond quicker to Facebook or text than to a note, phone call, or email” (p. 14). This trend is still true today that this generation's digital culture and language have influenced how Millennials interact with faith and assimilate it (Campbell & Garner, 2016; Sai & Sreekanth, 2022; Vogels, 2019).

According to the leading research on faith development across generations presented by the Barna Group (2013), “Today, there’s a new dimension that is reshaping personal spirituality, particularly among younger generations. The advent of the Internet and, more recently, social media have shaped personal habits significantly” (para. 1). For the Millennial generation, technology and faith have converged; they cannot see one as disconnected from the other. Instead, they seem to enhance one another for Millennials. The research addressed this by concluding, “Millennials live in an era of radical transparency, powered by social and digital tools.... The digital world simply makes this kind of interaction and transparency a nonnegotiable among the youngest generations” (Barna Group, 2013, para. 17). Digital tools can provide church leaders with limitless opportunities to spiritually engage and interact with Millennials, creating points of connection to keep them within the faith community.

Kinnaman, Barna Group (2013) also said, “How the Church acknowledges and engages the digital domain...will determine much about its long-term effectiveness among Millennials” (para. 19). For ministries to reach and connect with Millennials, they will need to address their attitudes and predispositions toward this digital culture, and the way these attitudes have created fractures between the Millennial and previous generations. Wilson (2019) stated, “These factors allow Millennials to notice the disconnect between their generation and previous generations. Knowing this information, these fractured relationships stem from a lack of empathy and insufficient relationship building when older generations and Millennials are in direct contact with one another” (p. 21). While data from Barna Group draws attention to the growing concern in the local church regarding the future of the faith of the Millennial generation, it does not negate that it should be first understood to bring resolution. The literature showd that poor

methodology selection to reach the next generation and a lack of cultural contextualization are some of the root causes for the mass exodus of young adults from local churches.

Church leadership needs to acknowledge and understand the cultural gap between the generations if they are to discover and deploy culturally contextual ministry methods of leadership to reach the next generation for Jesus Christ. By embracing the complexities of this cultural gap, ministry leaders can develop culturally contextual ministry methods that relate to their audience and protect the integrity and purity of the scriptures. Kinnaman and Matlock (2019) conveyed that if ministry leaders use authentic relationships and contemporary technology, such as the internet and social media, as tools for engagement and storytelling, they have the opportunity to share and connect the story of Jesus Christ relationally to the next generation in a way that Millennials can understand and receive that message for themselves, resulting in a transformation of the Millennial culture (Barna Group, 2019a; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Nxumalo, 2020; Obmerga, 2021; Wilson, 2019).

Millennials and Transformational Leadership

Because transformational leaders wield idealized influence, inspire motivation, stimulate the intellect, and individualize consideration in the lives of those they lead, they are ideal candidates to create ministry programs that address the needs of the Millennials. Wolor et al. (2021) stated, “Previous studies say the Millennials want leadership figures who build interpersonal relationships, listen, pay attention, communicate well, and give trust to Millennials to prove their performance” (p. 107). The Millennial generation prefers a leadership style that emphasizes the acceptance of subordinate opinions, ranging from decision-making suggestions, communication, and feedback from employees to leaders (Valenti, 2019). They like to be

allowed to express their potential and participate in organizational decision-making, but work processes should remain within prescribed work procedures (Solaja & Oguntola, 2016).

Leaders need to ensure that Millennials see their leaders' initial contributions so they can experience satisfaction with their leaders, which, in turn, can guarantee Millennials' involvement and commitment to the cause. "Given that Millennials prefer to express their thoughts, ideas, and opinions, this can be done using open discussions and panels, considering the Millennial generation likes to express their opinions, ideas, and thoughts" (Wolor et al., 2021, p. 109). Under the guidance of transformational leaders, whose leadership traits support the consideration of the cultural needs of Millennials, there is great potential for developing ministry methods and programs that would compel and entice Millennials to remain connected with the local church.

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

The motivation for this research was the literature that called attention to the widening cultural gap between current church leadership and the Millennial generation and the concurrent exodus of Millennials from the church and environments of faith (Barna Group, 2019a, 2019b; Bauman et al., 2014; Flanagan, 2021; Grotkamp et al., 2020; Horan, 2017; Maiers, 2017; Okpaleke, 2021; Park et al., 2023; Sai & Sreekanth, 2022; Simmons, 2015; Wilson, 2019). The Barna Group statistics irrefutably indicate that Millennials are leaving the church (Barna Group, 2019a, 2019b). However, even though some are leaving the church, others are choosing to remain connected, and not merely connected but are actively seeking leadership opportunities (Almas et al., 2020; Badar & Lasthuizen, 2023; Bennett, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Løvaas et al., 2020; Solaja & Oguntola, 2016; Valldeneu et al., 2021; Wolor et al., 2021). Research from Barna Group (2019b) indicates that Millennials have expressed that the church has a role in inspiring them to grow and connect as leaders in the local church (see Figure 3).

Figure 3 *The Church Has a Role to Play*



Source: Barna Group, *The Connected Generation: United States Report*, 2019b, p. 36. With permission of Barna Group (see Appendix C).

Note. Only 27% of Millennials in the United States polled indicated they had access to a church leader who inspired them by their example of leadership. Only 24% of Millennials in the United States surveyed believed they even had access to leadership training despite their desire to be cultivated for future leadership opportunities.

Suppose churches hope to become more adept in choosing appropriate and successful cultural strategies of ministry to communicate Christ to the next generation. In that case, those who minister to Millennials ought to consider becoming more culturally aware of the needs of their audience. Livermore (2015) expounded on how good people, ministers included, can practice misguided leadership in their ministry context because they navigate by their personal histories, cultural biases, and traditional behaviors. Leaders are required to let go of their cultural norms and preferences in order to work diligently to understand the cultural norms and values of the people they are called to reach and connect with the local church.

Rationale for Study

When applied in cross-cultural and multicultural contexts, preconceived cultural norms become obstacles to ministering effectively to those who most likely do not share the same cultural background. It may be in the best interest of ministerial leadership to learn how to lead and minister with cultural intelligence if they desire to reach Millennials effectively. “Cultural intelligence is the capability to function effectively across national, ethnic, and organizational cultures. It can be learned by most anyone. Cultural intelligence offers leaders an overall repertoire and perspective that can be applied to myriad cultural situations” (Livermore, 2015, p. 4). Ministering to the next generation requires crossing a wider cultural gap than most ministry leaders realize. To cross this gap, leaders need to learn new ways of communicating, connecting, and contextualizing. Church leaders need to set aside their preconceived notions and assumptions about what they think they know and begin with the understanding that they still have much to learn. Pew Research Center found, “In 2020, about 64% of Americans, including children, were Christian. The projections show Christians of all ages shrinking from 64% to between a little more than half (54%) and just above one-third (35%) of all Americans by 2070” (*Modeling the Future of Religion in America*, 2022).

Church leaders cannot lead with bias or presupposition concerning what connects Millennials to church membership, and instead begin to ask authentic and transparent questions about why the gap is widening. The alternative is that these metrics from Pew Research Center could be fulfilled (Wilson, 2019). Churches ought to prioritize deploying methods and styles of leadership that reach Millennials through their mediums of exchange and connection. Statistics like those provided by the Pew Research recommend that ministers ask the right questions and exhibit cross-cultural considerations, regarding themselves as ministers and the next generation

as their mission field (Bauman et al., 2014; Elmore, 2017; Johansen, 2018; Simmons, 2015; B. C. Whitney Sr., 2022). The message of the gospel is what changes lives. How that message is lived within the context of the Millennial generation is where contextualization of the message begins. To contextualize the message of the gospel without losing its purity gospel or subjecting it to the human flaws or weaknesses that are present in every generation, ministry leaders need to investigate the gap and ask themselves what the key priorities or values of this generation should be considered when presenting the biblical message of the gospel (Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019).

Gap in the Literature

The survival of local churches depends upon these churches' leaders' ability to transfer the story of God's people and his plan to save them from one generation to the next. Without this intergenerational transfer and cultural contextualization of the gospel's message, the local church risks its future viability by losing its Millennials (Earley & Dempsey, 2013; Earls, 2022; Jones, 2021; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019; Packard & Ferguson, 2019; Wilson, 2019). The research surveyed in this study exposed a gap in the literature regarding the cultural divide between the generations of the church and how this gap influences Millennial involvement. Identifying the ministry leaders with the transformational capacity to honor the divine mandate of generational transference using cultural contextualization of the gospel message for the next generation is needed for Millennials to remain in the local church. According to Del Rosario and Bock (2017):

Millennials are looking for authentic, meaningful relationships with mature believers who love them well as they navigate the tensions of life and seek to grow in their faith. Rather than being most concerned about a pastor's Sunday sermon, many young people are desperate for discipleship. (p. 351)

Understanding the lived experience of those in the Millennial population who have remained connected to the local church will help ministry leaders determine what leadership styles are adept at creating Millennial disciples who seek to be a part of the local church's future.

Reaching the next generation of Millennials and preparing them to take over leadership of the Church is not merely a good idea; it is the highest priority for ministry leadership (Conway, 2019; Shiflett, 2018; Simmons, 2015; Sumpter, 2019; Wilhoit, 2022).

Profile of the Current Study

This literature review helped to form the current study in two ways. First, it revealed a substantive gap in ministry connection to and retention of the Millennial generation. While retention has been the subject of numerous religious and institutional studies, very little attention is given to leadership styles and ministry methods concerning the exodus of Millennials, which has become a reoccurring conversation among ministry leadership. Still, only a select few have attempted to study the cause behind this gap, and even fewer have tried to identify solutions to bridge the generational gap. A gap in ministry exists between conventional and transformational churches, which is a practical gap of connection. This research addresses how to identify the cultural needs of the Millennial generation and determine which leadership styles and ministry methods can bridge cultural contextualization across the generational gap. This study also sought to ascertain the connection between transformational leadership and the phenomenon of Millennials who choose to remain connected to the community of the local church.

Second, this literature review provided a theological and theoretical framework for motivating the biblical mandate to reach the next generation with the gospel message and supporting transformational leadership theory for ministers attempting to connect with the Millennials at risk of leaving their local churches. Using the hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology, this study examined how the principles of transformational leadership provide the needed leadership components necessary to develop a ministry method to reach and connect the next generation with the faith community and thereby save the local church's future.

The following chapter presents the research methodology procedures, data collection, and data analysis for this research design.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches. This researcher examined whether the Millennial generation responds to specific behavioral characteristics of transformational leaders and if this influence affects the extent to which the Millennial generation chooses to remain connected to the faith community and leadership of the local church. This chapter provides a synopsis of the research design, population, sampling procedures, limitations of generalization, and ethical considerations of the study.

Research Design Synopsis

The study utilized a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research design. “A phenomenological study is a study that attempts to understand people’s perceptions and perspectives relative to a particular situation” (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 233). This section provides an overview of the problem addressed by the study, purpose statement, research questions and hypotheses, and the research design and methodology.

The Problem

When examining current trends in church attendance statistics, there is a clear pattern of disconnection, by which this researcher means the growing numbers of Millennials who are leaving the local church. According to Gallup: “Americans' membership in houses of worship continued to decline last year, dropping below 50% for the first time in Gallup’s eight-decade trend. In 2020, 47% of Americans said they belonged to a church, synagogue or mosque” (Jones, 2021, para. 1). Also, according to Lifeway Research: “Fewer people regularly attend church now than prior to the COVID-19 pandemic... In 2019, 34% of Americans attended a religious service

at least once or twice a month. That fell to 31% in 2020 and 28% in 2021” (Earls, 2022, para. 5).

The research also showed that specific populations or demographics, such as the Millennials, have disconnected from long-term attendance or have quit attending.

The largest age demographic drop, however, happened among young adults. In 2019, 36% of 18- to 34-year-olds attended church at least once or twice a month. That has fallen to just 26% now. While every demographic group has seen declines, the drop has been most pronounced among Black churchgoers. Prior to the pandemic, Black Americans were by far the group most likely to attend religious services regularly, with 45% attending at least monthly, according to IFS. Today, 30% of Black Americans attend, similar to the current rates among white (27%) and Hispanic Americans (31%). (Earls, 2022, para. 11)

These statistics highlight that the motivation for leaving the church connects to a lack of connectedness, usually associated with a lack of belonging.

The decline in church membership, then, appears largely tied to population change, with those in older generations who were likely to be church members being replaced in the U.S. adult population with people in younger generations who are less likely to belong. (Jones, 2021, p. 10)

In the context of this study, the term “Millennial” is used to describe those born between 1984 and 1998 (ages 25-39 in 2023), as stipulated by Barna Group (2019a). Kinnaman talks about the three types of Millennials: nomads, prodigals, and exiles (Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2016; Kinnaman & Matlock, 2019). The prodigals are leaving Jesus. The other two, the nomads and the exiles stay with Jesus; they’re just leaving the church. Millennials are disconnecting from engagement with the people of the church in pursuit of other opportunities for connection. Millennials desire to be a part of a life-giving community. Yet, cultural differences and antiquated ministry methods designed to connect people seem to no longer achieve that purpose, that is, to draw in the population of Millennials who are lost, wandering, questioning, and seeking to connect with a welcoming community of faith.

The research surveyed in this study concluded that there is a gap in the literature regarding the cultural divide between the generations of the church, how this gap was created, and how it influences Millennial involvement. Reaching the next generation of Millennials to prepare them to take over leadership of the Church is not merely a good idea; it should be ministry leadership's highest priority (Sumpter, 2019), as this is the only way to ensure the longevity and legacy of the local church. Understanding the Millennials' values and culture will help the church to identify leaders who can reach this next generation with the gospel message. The survival of the local church depends upon the current church leadership's ability to transfer the story of God's people and his plan to save them from one generation to the next within the community context (Heb. 10:24-25). Without competent leadership that prioritizes generational transference and the cultural contextualization of the gospel's message, the local church risks its future by losing its Millennials.

Purpose Statement

This research is a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, the purpose of which was to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches.

Research Questions

RQ1. What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for deciding to remain connected to their local church community?

RQ2. What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for engaging in volunteer leadership in their local church?

RQ3. Has the influence of transformational leadership on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders in the Millennial population resulted in a continued connected engagement with the local church?

Research Design and Methodology

Since a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological methodology focuses on the personal experiences and perspectives of the research subjects (Chavez, 2021; Hall, 2015; Perley-Huebscher, 2022; Romick, 2020; Whitney Sr., 2022), phenomenology is well-suited to revealing the Millennial generation's perceptions of connectivity, which were this study's concern.

“Phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 91). A phenomenological study aims to portray the significance of personal experience by better understanding *what* was experienced and *how* it was experienced. “To understand subjective experiences, phenomenological research often uses interviews with research participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13).

This study's research subjects were representatives of the Millennial generation, namely those who demonstrated the phenomenon by remaining connected to the local church community and who had pursued volunteer leadership opportunities, in order to understand how the role of transformational leadership played a part in their decision to remain connected. “In its broadest sense, the term phenomenology refers to a person's perception of the meaning of an event, as opposed to the event as it exists external to the individual” (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 233). The data collection process sought to determine the extent of the research subjects' exposure to and guidance from transformational leaders of their churches and whether these interactions played a definitive role in the research subjects' continued affiliation with their churches. This researcher interviewed these research subjects to discover their perceptions regarding transformational leaders' role in remaining committed and connected to their local church.

While several theorists have helped to advance phenomenology, most phenomenological methods draw upon either Edmund Husserl's descriptive approach or Martin Heidegger's interpretative approach to phenomenological design. This current study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological research design first proposed by Max van Manen (1990). Van Manen's approach differs from other phenomenological methods by encompassing both descriptive and interpretive concepts.

Hermeneutic phenomenology tries to be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena. (van Manen, 1990, p. 180)

For van Manen (1990), "The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence" (p. 36). Van Manen suggested that in the beginning stages of research, a researcher could initially adapt to the phenomenon by corroborating an identified perspective. "Then the researcher should gather experiential descriptions from others through interviews, close observations, and by asking individuals to write their experiences down to generate original texts or 'protocols'" (Gill, 2020, p. 81). Van Manen (1984, 1989) describes the implementation process this way: "There are four analytical activities in which researchers acknowledge their assumptions as presuppositions that may "persistently creep back into our reflections" (van Manen, 1990, p. 47).

First, the researcher begins by conducting thematic analyses of the information collected in the interviews to identify and catalog the themes or experiential structures that comprise the particular experience or phenomenon to separate incidental themes. Themes can fluctuate without disturbing the phenomenon and essential themes that make it what it is (Beck, 2021; Bynum & Varpio, 2018; Gill, 2020; Larsen & Adu, 2022; Smith et al., 2022). Second, the

researcher describes what occurs in the phenomena through the art of writing, which requires multiple revisions to become “depthful” (van Manen, 1989). Third, the researcher maintains proximity and connectedness to the phenomenon to contextualize the meaning and impact of the phenomenon on the research subjects in the study thoughtfully. Fourth, “the researcher should balance the research context by considering the parts and whole, remembering to step back from specific details of ‘what something is’ to construct a piece textual expression” (Gill, 2020, p. 82). This study utilized a semistructured screening questionnaire, interviews, the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire), and journaling as the instrumentation for this hermeneutic phenomenological research.

Setting

The setting for the study was the locale where the phenomenon of interest was taking place: local churches. This research study limited the setting to three non-denominational churches with an average worship attendance of 1,500 or more with an organizational structure comprised of a senior pastor and lay leadership who oversee the church's daily operations. The three church settings were located in Syracuse, New York; Baltimore, Maryland; and Orlando, Florida. This researcher selected these three local churches because she had pre-determined (a) the church is a community of faith that includes representatives of the Millennial generation, (b) transformational leadership is present among the ministry leadership team as determined through the use of the MLQ designed by Bass and Avolio (1995), and (c) the phenomenon was present, whereby Millennials have remained connected to the local church through continued involvement in volunteer ministry leadership for a minimum of one year.

This researcher contacted the senior leadership of the three church settings by phone and email and invited them to participate in this study. The senior leadership of each church was

required to sign a permission request form, giving their permission for their church to take part in the study and for their attendees who fit the criteria of the research subjects for this study to be contacted via email. The senior leadership consented to the agreement that personal information on the selected research subjects and their involvement in the study would not be released to them during or following the study. For this study, pseudonyms A-C were assigned to the selected churches to preserve confidentiality and privacy.

Participants

The population for this study consisted of 12 individuals from the Millennial generation (ages 25-39, born between 1984-1998). In phenomenological research, “a sample size can range from 5 to 25 individuals, all of whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied” (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 233). This researcher used a purposive sampling process. “Purposive sampling is the intentional selection of informants based on their ability to elucidate a specific theme, concept, or phenomenon” (Michalos, 2014, p. 5243). The sampling is purposive in that the research subjects selected for this study were based on specific characteristics of the study population and the research objectives. The purposive sample was identified from individuals attending worship at non-denominational churches with an average worship attendance of 1,500 or more. The research subjects met three key criteria: (a) born between 1984 and 1998, (b) active attendees of one of the three non-denominational church settings selected for this study, and (c) research subjects must also be volunteer ministerial leaders for a minimum of one year in one of the three non-denominational church settings selected for this study. The data collection process sought to determine the extent of the research subjects’ exposure to and guidance from transformational leaders of their churches and whether these interactions played a definitive role in the research subjects’ continued affiliation with their churches, even in the

context of the reported decline in church membership by the Millennials in the general population.

With the written consent of the senior leadership of the three churches in this study, a digital questionnaire with specific questions about the population selection criterion was used to identify the 12 research subjects from the selected church environments based on the three criteria for participation. The questionnaire was a digital form designed in Google and linked to an invitation email. The church leadership provided the database with the email addresses of those in the congregations who fit the research subject population and criteria. Churches A and B gave access to the pool of applicants by providing their phone numbers and email addresses, which this researcher contacted directly with the invitation email. However, Church C requested to send the initial invitation email to their applicant pool directly, and this researcher provided the drafted invitation email content and the digital questionnaire link that was then sent by Church C on behalf of this researcher. This screening questionnaire included age, birth year, volunteer leadership involvement at the church, duration of service, and admission of mentoring by leadership (see Appendix H). Responses to the questionnaire were sent directly to this researcher through the private Google form and were not released back to the churches at any time. From the pool of individuals willing to complete the questionnaire, four research subjects were selected from each of the three churches to participate in the second data collection phase.

This questionnaire, with specific questions about the population selection criterion, was used as a first stage in identifying the research subjects from within the pre-selected church environments based on the three criteria for participation. Once identified, this researcher asked them to take part in an interview process that provided the following benefits:

[It will allow] students to construct interview questions relevant to the research question so that key aspects of the research study are sure to be covered while allowing for the

participants to discuss other information that may end up being relevant to the study. (Peoples, 2021, p. 52)

These interview questions helped to determine the validity of the phenomenon based on the narratives collected from the research subject's experience and interaction with transformational leaders. "Phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews (perhaps 1 to 2 hours in length) with a small, carefully selected sample of participants" (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 233). This researcher maintained confidentiality by assigning a numerical code to each applicant (Millennial and transformational leader).

Role of the Researcher

As the primary instrument of the research process, this researcher first assessed how her personal experience could lead to assumptions, prejudices, or biases before interacting with the research subjects. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated, "In qualitative research, inquirers reflect about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data" (p. 182). During the data collection process in a phenomenological design:

Researchers try to suspend any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence what they "hear" participants saying. Such suspension—sometimes called bracketing or epoché—can be extremely difficult for researchers who have personally experienced the phenomenon under investigation. (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 233)

However, in the interpretative process of phenomenological research, the researcher should develop some measure of connection with the research subjects if the researcher is to gain an understanding of the research subjects' experiences. It can be beneficial for a researcher to use personal experiences as a starting point in studying a phenomenon, and being aware of one's own life experiences of a phenomenon may "provide the researcher with clues for orienting oneself to the phenomenon and thus all the other stages of phenomenological research" (van

Manen, 1990, p. 57). Bynum and Varpio (2018) stated that hermeneutic phenomenology “requires that researchers acknowledge their own past experiences and existing knowledge as embedded in and essential to the interpretive process” (p. 252). The researcher completed bracketing before interacting with the research subjects during data collection.

Having been born in 1984, this researcher is classified as a member of the Millennial generation. Therefore, this researcher has an innate understanding and empathy from studying her Millennial peers. The statistics regarding the decline of Millennial attendance in churches have motivated this researcher to determine why, in contrast, specific Millennials stay connected to the faith community, seek ministry leadership opportunities in it, and explore whether this connectedness is due to the influence of particular leadership traits present in the personal development of the research subjects. The nature of the phenomenological study, particularly the use of questionnaires, forged a unique interaction between this researcher and the research subjects. “Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, or interviewing participants. They may use a protocol – an instrument for recording data – but the researchers are the ones who actually gather information and interpret it” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 181). The interpretation of the data by this researcher may be influenced by her membership in the Millennial generation and by having been a Millennial influenced by transformational leadership that resulted in her maintaining her connectivity with the local church as a volunteer. A relationship with Christ and Christ’s model of community, the body of Christ, inspired authentic relational ties that resulted in bold faith (Ogden, 2016). This researcher believed that her personal experience with transformational leaders and her ability to relate to the needs of the Millennials would only add to the scope of this study.

However, it should be noted that this researcher selected her home church as one of the

research settings for this study. The motivation for choosing this church was as follows: (a) Having previously been a staff member at this church, this researcher had familiarity with the leadership team and structure of this church organization and has access to the setting for research; (b) Her familiarity with this church guaranteed this researcher access to transformational leaders on its staff; (c) at the time of this research, this church demonstrated the phenomenon whereby Millennials have remained connected to the church and are actively pursuing volunteer ministry leadership. This researcher did acknowledge that her relationship with this church differs from that with the other two subject churches. Nonetheless, this researcher did affirm that she is no longer a member of the staff leadership team and is not in a position of power to sway the study results before the start of this research.

Ethical Considerations

This study protected the confidentiality of the data collected by numerically coding each research subject (Millennial and transformational leaders alike). Pseudonyms A-C were assigned to the three churches serving as settings for the study. The research subjects and the senior leadership of the three churches completed a consent form before participating in the study. They also consented to capturing and using audio and video-recorded interviews during the research. This researcher secured the data collected on a new password-protected hard drive purchased by this researcher, used only for this research, and copies of the data were downloaded to a hard copy and secured in a locked, passcode-protected safe, accessible only to this researcher.

Also, as the scope of this study was limited to a population of 12 research subjects selected from the Millennial generation (ages 25-39), applicants under 18 do not fit the parameters of the study group. They were not included in the scope of this research. And while it did not occur during this research, the option was available for research subjects to withdraw. At

the start of each interview, they were told that if they wanted to withdraw from the study, they only needed to complete a withdrawal form advising their intent to leave the study. In that case, the withdrawal form would have been filed with their initial consent and locked in secure files. All other research information would have been disposed of immediately and no longer used during the study. This researcher secured all raw data, data analyses, and results on a password-protected external hard drive used only for this research. She also secured printed hard copies in the locked safe, where they will remain for three years following the conclusion of this study. After three years, all secure data and findings will be destroyed.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Qualitative research designs include the following criteria to achieve their objectives: a natural setting (data collection in a setting that is natural for the research subjects), a researcher as a critical instrument (researchers collect data themselves), multiple sources of data (interviews, observations, documents, audiovisual materials), inductive and deductive data analyses (building categories, patterns or themes and supporting with evidence), research subjects' meanings (a focus on research subjects' intentions and not this researcher's impression), emergent design (shifts and changes to the process once this researcher enters the field), reflexivity (how the background of the research impacts the overall study), and a holistic account (complex picture of the problem considering multiple perspectives) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Phenomenological research is rooted in philosophy and psychology as data is gathered through the individual and personal interpretation of a lived phenomenon that results in experiential data. "This description culminates in the essence of the experiences of several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13).

For the phenomenological research design: “Data collection generally involves 5-15 interviewees with a three-interview sequence using an interview guide that articulates the respective function of the three interviews (background, interactions, reflections)” (Durdella, 2019, p. 248). Data collection for phenomenological research designs can include the following instrumentation: observations (complete research subjects, observer as research subject, and complete observer), interviews (face-to-face, telephone, focus group, or email internet interview), documents (public documents or private documents), and audiovisual materials (photographs, videotapes, art objects, computer messages, audio, and film) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Research that includes documents, artifacts, or archival information should include the steps to locate and secure the data for protection. For this study, this researcher utilized data collection methods of van Manen’s (2014) hermeneutic phenomenological research method.

Collection Methods

In the beginning stages of hermeneutic phenomenological research, a researcher should initially adapt to the phenomenon by supporting a particular perspective. “Then the researcher should gather experiential descriptions from others through interviews, close observations, and by asking individuals to write their experiences down to generate original texts or ‘protocols’” (Gill, 2020, p. 81). This researcher sent an invitation email to the senior leadership from three non-denominational churches, including an invitation for all members of volunteer leadership who represented the criterion of the Millennial generation (born between 1984-1998). The population for this hermeneutic phenomenological research originated as a purposive sampling and identified 12 individuals from the Millennial generation (ages 25-39) who were actively attending one of the three non-denominational churches with average worship attendance of

1,500 or more and who had established volunteer church communities and ministerial leadership involvements for a minimum of one year.

This study employed instruments and protocols to question and interview the selected research subjects to ascertain their perceptions regarding the role of transformational leaders in their lived experiences. A trained observer sat in on all interviews to ensure that the interviews aligned with IRB protocols and provided a detached and additional interpretation of the recorded interviews. This study also deployed the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) developed by Bass and Avolio (1995) to determine whether the research subjects' perceptions correctly identify transformational leaders who have influenced their lived experiences. During the data collection process, this researcher also maintained a separate journal to record information on the critical steps of the research process, as well as this researcher's previous experience with the phenomenon and the anecdotes of the research subjects as discussed in the data collected. The data gathered aided in this researcher's ability to carefully analyze categorical codes, thematic analyses, and phenomenological reflection, leading to the data analysis phase.

Instruments and Protocols

In phenomenological research, the inquiry primarily focuses on gathering data directly from the research subjects involved in the lived experience under study. The hermeneutic phenomenology of research is conducted through empirical (collection of experiences) and reflective (analysis of their meanings) activities (van Manen, 1989). Therefore, instrumentation in phenomenological research typically includes direct communication with the research subjects or data collected through interaction with the research subjects (Peoples, 2021). For this study, the following instruments were utilized: (1) a semistructured screening questionnaire, (2) two rounds of audio and video recorded interviews (the first for no more than 60 minutes and the

second for no more than 30 minutes), (3) the use of the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire), and (4) journaling to capture this researcher's impressions while interviewing the research subjects in real-time.

Semistructured Questionnaire

A semistructured screening questionnaire with specific questions about the population selection criterion was used to identify the 12 research subjects (see Appendix H). Once the research subjects had been identified and the questions administered, the data collected had the benefit of “allowing students to construct interview questions relevant to the research question so that key aspects of the research study are sure to be covered while allowing for the participants to discuss other information that may end up being relevant to the study” (Peoples, 2021, p. 52). These questions helped to determine the validity of the phenomenon based on the narratives collected concerning the research subjects' experiences and interactions with the Church and their churches' transformational leaders. The questions on this screening questionnaire were derived directly from the selection criteria for research subjects, including age, birth year, leadership positions held at the church, duration of service, and admission to prior mentoring by potential transformational leadership.

Interviews

Once the questionnaires were collected and the initial data coded and processed through the beginning stages of analysis, a first and second round of interviews with the research subjects were conducted for clarification. “Phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews (perhaps 1 to 2 hours in length) with a small, carefully selected sample of participants” (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 233). As noted by Peoples, “It was expected that many of the descriptions provided in the initial individual interviews will need further extrapolation”

(Peoples, 2021, p. 50). This researcher conducted the interviews via *Zoom Video Communications, Inc.* (2023) and recorded audio/video (with the research subject's signed consent) for data collection and thematic analysis. The interviews were no more than 60 minutes long for the first interview and no more than 30 minutes for the second interview. This duration allowed this researcher to ask more personalized, open-ended questions concerning their interactions with transformational leaders and the effects of these interactions on their desire to remain as members of their church communities (see Appendices I and J).

A trained observer assisted this researcher with maintaining detailed notes while conducting interviews with the research subjects. This individual has a masters degree in biblical counseling with crisis and trauma certifications through Liberty University and Light University, as well as formal training to observe body language, facial expressions, and anecdotes shared regarding lived experiences. With interviews, the data collected can be subjective and varied in meaning, so the presence of a trained observer can assist with maintaining an accurate interpretation of the research subject's responses to avoid incorrect or misrepresented data. Furthermore, a trained observer will assist by bringing attention to any discrepancies by this researcher so that the interviews remain consistent throughout the data collection process as described in the research procedures. This partnership was formed to ensure that this researcher's methods and activities were consistent with IRB-approved guidelines.

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)

Through a series of questions in the first interview, research subjects identified a transformational leader who had influenced their life experiences in such a way as to motivate them to remain connected with the local church through volunteer leadership. Following the first interview, with the consent of both parties, the research subject and the identified leader were

emailed the *MLQ*. The MLQ is a transformational leadership tool developed by theorists Bass and Avolio (1995) that identifies three different leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant.

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire is a well-established instrument in the measure of Transformational Leadership as well as being extensively researched and validated. Avolio and Bass's MLQ manual shows strong dissertations, and master's theses, along with several constructive outcomes for transformational leadership. Construct validity is also thoroughly explained with factor analyses, which resulted in a six-factor model for the MLQ. (Pittenger, 2001, p. 806)

The MLQ has been used in hundreds of research programs, doctoral dissertations, and master's theses around the globe since first being published in 1995. The current version of the MLQ has also been translated into over 15 international languages for use in various assessment and training research projects. This leadership assessment tool has been used by Fortune 500 companies in business and finance, medical organizations, and military training (Avolio & Bass, 1995). The MLQ assessment tool was designed as a feedback form (including both self and rater evaluation forms) to identify one of three leadership styles. Each research subject completed the rater form to verify that their recognized transformational leader proved to be a transformational leader. The leaders identified by the research subjects also completed the MLQ self-form (also called the leader form) to determine whether the perceptions of the research subjects correctly identified them as transformational leaders when compared to the leader's assessment of themselves. Through the questions of this electronic questionnaire, the MLQ determined whether the leader was a transformational, transactional, or passive-avoidant leader.

The MLQ asked research subjects to respond to "45 items in the MLQ 5x-Short (the current, classic version of the MLQ) using a 5-point behavioral scale ("Not at all" ranging to "Frequently if not always")" (Pittenger, 2001, p. 806). The MLQ test took approximately 15 minutes to complete, but one could take as much time as is needed to complete the test. The

MLQ offered an online hosting site, which enabled this researcher to send the questionnaire via email to local and non-local research subjects and to receive a group report for the research subject rater forms and leader self-forms. The MLQ results from the research subjects and the identified transformational leaders were coded numerically and assisted this researcher with maintaining privacy procedures during data gathering. A second interview (audio and video recorded) was also conducted with the research subject for no more than 30 minutes via *Zoom* (2023), with the presence of the trained observer, to determine how the MLQ results either affirmed or denied their perceptions of their identified transformational leader.

Journaling

During the questionnaire and interview process, this researcher maintained a separate, written journal to capture notable steps in the research process and the anecdotes of the research subjects as they shared their experiences. “‘To anecdote’ is to reflect, to think. Anecdotes form part of the grammar of everyday storing. Anecdotes recreate experiences, but now already in a transcended (focused, condensed, intensified, oriented and narrative) form” (van Manen, 2014, p. 250). Anecdotes prepare the space for phenomenological reflection. The journal provided a space to capture this researcher’s interpretations of the anecdotes shared by the research subjects and this researcher’s observations and impressions of the meaning of the anecdotes to understand the phenomenon's impact better.

Personal biases of the researcher need to be explicit in the research process during a hermeneutic phenomenological study. Journaling can provide a means for cataloging biases before the analysis stage of research. “Students could write down any of their biases, their pre-understandings about a phenomenon prior to analyzing data. In this way, they could deliberately put their biases in front of them, fully expecting that they could be revised as data are analyzed”

(Peoples, 2021, p. 56). Maintaining separate journal entries with pre-determined space for each interview question served the purpose of accountability in the data collection process. The journal provided an area where the data and impressions of this researcher were gathered for reference, establishing credibility, dependability, and confirmability for this research.

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval to proceed with the proposed research study on November 29, 2022 (see Appendix A), the research process moved to the research subject selection and data collection stages in January 2023. Specific procedures of research guided the data collection. “A logical extension of data collection instruments or guides is the procedures that use them to elicit responses from research subjects, observe scenes in social settings, and secure documents in field settings” (Durdella, 2019, p. 254).

1. This hermeneutic phenomenological research population included 12 individuals from the Millennial generation (ages 25-39, born between 1984-1998).
2. This researcher contacted the senior leadership of the three church settings by phone and email and invited them to participate in this study. The senior leadership of each church was required to sign a consent form, giving their permission for their church to take part in the study and for their attendees who fit the criteria of the research subjects for this study to be contacted via email. The senior leadership also consented to the agreement that personal information on the selected research subjects and their involvement in the study would not be released to them during or following the study.
3. Churches A and B gave access to the pool of applicants by providing their phone numbers and email addresses, which this researcher contacted directly with the invitation email. However, Church C requested to send the initial invitation email to their applicant

pool directly, and this researcher provided the drafted invitation email content and the digital questionnaire link that was then sent by Church C on behalf of this researcher. The email included a hyperlink to a Google Forms digital screening questionnaire and contained specific questions intended to qualify research subjects based on the selection criteria. The questionnaire consisted of age, birth year, leadership capacity at the church, duration of service, and confirmation of having been mentored by leadership (see Appendix H). Google Forms sent the responses to the questionnaire directly back to this researcher and were not released back to the churches at any time.

4. From this pool of applicants who qualify as Millennials, four research subjects were selected from each of the three churches as interviewees in the second data collection phase. The interviews were used to determine the validity of the phenomenon based on the interview narratives. Interview questions pertained directly to the research questions in this study. Each interview question allowed the research subject to share their unique perceptions and anecdotes regarding their lived experience. Interviews were conducted via *Zoom* (2023), as some of the locations were not local for the research, and doing all the interviews via *Zoom* (2023) provided consistency in data collection formatting) for no more than 60 minutes. They were audio/video recorded (with the signed consent of the research subject). This duration allowed this researcher to ask more personalized, open-ended questions based on the research subjects' lived experiences and interactions with transformational leaders derived from the initial questionnaires.
5. A trained observer with counseling certification was also present during the interviews to ensure that the interviews aligned with IRB protocols and provided a detached and additional interpretation of the recorded interviews.

6. After completing the first round of interviews, this researcher began the initial stages of the transcription, lean coding, and thematic data analysis and determined ancillary questions in follow-up interviews.
7. Following the first interview, with the consent of both parties, the research subject and the identified leader were emailed the *MLQ*. The Millennial research subjects completed the rater form to determine whether they perceived their recognized transformational leader as a transformational leader. The leaders identified by the research subjects also completed the *MLQ* self-form to determine whether the perceptions of the research subjects correctly identified them as transformational leaders compared to the leader's assessment of themselves. The *MLQ* asked research subjects to respond to "45 items in the *MLQ* 5x-Short (the current, classic version) using a 5-point behavioral scale ("Not at all" ranging to "Frequently if not always")" (Pittenger, 2001, p. 806). The *MLQ* test took approximately 15 minutes to complete, but each subject was advised to take as much time as needed to complete the test. The *MLQ* provided access to an online hosting site, enabling this researcher to send the questionnaire via email to local and non-local research subjects and obtain a group report for the research subject rater forms and leader self-forms.
8. A second interview (audio and video recorded) was conducted with the research subject for no more than 30 minutes via *Zoom* (2023), with the presence of the trained observer, to determine how the *MLQ* results affirmed or denied their perceptions of their identified transformational leader.
9. During the questionnaire, *MLQ*, and interview process, this researcher maintained a written journal to capture notable aspects of the research process and the voiced

anecdotes of the research subjects as they shared their lived experiences. The journal captured this researcher's interpretations of the anecdotes shared by the research subjects and this researcher's observations and impressions of the meaning of the anecdotes to understand the phenomenon's impact better. The journal aided with the final data analysis stage of phenomenological reflection.

Throughout the data collection process in this qualitative research, this researcher maintained the confidentiality and protection of the specific data collected by assigning a numerical code to each research subject (Millennial and transformational leader alike). This numerical code links directly to their personal information, demographic background, and experience with the phenomenon. The pseudonyms A, B, and C were assigned to the churches that served as settings for the study. The data collected and printed hard copies were secured on a password-protected hard drive used only for this research and secured in a locked, passcode-protected safe accessible only to this researcher.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research methods require sequential steps that include multiple levels of analysis: (a) organize and prepare data for analysis; (b) read or look at all data; (c) start coding all data; (d) generate a description and themes; (e) and represent the description and themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These same strategies were deployed in this phenomenological research. "Phenomenological strategies for data analysis start in the field, as in most research traditions, and continue after exiting the field; they span a range of activities before, during, and after fieldwork" (Durdella, 2019, p. 269).

The data analysis for the phenomenological interpretative methodology primarily consists of (a) transcribing data collected from interviews (what is observed, discussed, or gathered from

data collection, including protocols for management, storage, and transcription), (b) lean coding (identifying categories or concepts of data from the information collected which frames the thematic data to be further analyzed), (c) thematic analysis (identifying themes, clusters or groupings of words embodied in the data that encapsulate of the lived experience of the phenomenon), and (d) phenomenological reflection (grasping the essential meaning of the phenomenon based upon data collection, as well as personal experience) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Durdella, 2019; Leedy et al., 2019; Peoples, 2021).

Analysis Methods

During the analysis process, the goal was to interpret the patterns or meanings to present a theorized story that better understands the lived experience of the phenomenon. “You use your worldview or paradigmatic view and methodological lens to make sense of what you are seeing ... you are generally applying the empirical and conceptual literature context to results” (Durdella, 2019, p. 283). There are four analytical activities in which researchers acknowledge their assumptions as presuppositions that may “persistently creep back into our reflections” (van Manen, 1990, p. 47). First, the analysis begins by identifying the themes or experiential structures that belong to the particular experience or phenomenon to separate incidental themes (which can fluctuate without disturbing the phenomenon) and essential themes (which make the phenomenon what it is (Gill, 2020)). Second, this researcher describes what occurs in the phenomena through the art of writing, which requires multiple revisions to become “depthful” (van Manen, 1989). Third, this researcher maintains proximity and connectedness to the phenomenon to contextualize the meaning and impact of the phenomenon on the research subjects in the study thoughtfully. Fourth, “the researcher should balance the research context by considering the parts and whole, remembering to step back from specific details of ‘what

something is' to construct a piece textual expression" (Gill, 2020, p. 82). The data analysis for this researcher's phenomenological study consisted of (a) transcription of data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and journaling, (b) lean coding, (c) thematic analysis, and (d) phenomenological reflection.

Transcription of Data

Once this researcher completed data collection from the questionnaires, recording of follow-up interviews, and journaling, she began the first phase of data analysis was transcribing all the data collected. To organize and prepare data for analysis, this first stage "involves transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing up field notes, cataloging all of the visual material, and sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the sources of information" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 193). After completing the questionnaire, recorded interviews, and journaling, this researcher used *Zoom* (2023) to create word-for-word transcripts and then both this researcher and the trained observer personally edited them for accuracy. Using an unbiased outside source to assist, such as *Zoom* (2023), increased its credibility with the data transcription accuracy. All data collected was input into a secure Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) selected for use in this research study, *NVivo* (2022). This easy-to-use platform is trusted and encapsulates the processes of transcription, coding, theming, and reflecting. The selected CAQDAS assisted with the research data collection and analysis process for this research study.

Lean Coding

The second stage of data analysis was lean coding, the process by which this researcher created a brief list of categories (usually about five or six) with labels and codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This process began by creating a short list of categories or codes based on a

literature review before data collection. Van Manen (1990) believed that it could be helpful for a researcher to use personal experiences as a starting point in studying a phenomenon. This initial list of codes was expanded, reassessed, and reformatted during the analysis process. The coding process grouped the data into identifiable parts to hypothesize a “storyline” (Stuckey, 2015, p. 10). The coding process contained three primary steps: “1. Reading through the data and creating a storyline; 2. Categorizing the data into codes; and 3. Using memos for clarification and interpretation” (Stuckey, 2015, p. 7). This researcher based the initial list of codes on the literature review, personal experience, and data collected from the initial questionnaires.

Thematic Analysis

The third stage of data analysis was thematic analysis. “Thematic data analysis generally occurs during and after you leave the field. In this phase, the following dimensions of data analysis take place: segmentation, categorization and coding, and linking coding segments to identify emerging themes” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 273). Van Manen (1990) stated that themes can be conceptualized as “the structures of experience” and that when a phenomenon is analyzed, “we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience” (p. 79). Themes are terms or phrases that embody a part of or the whole of an experience; they help this researcher represent the unfiltered data to derive meaning. Van Manen (1990) stated that “theme gives control and order to our research and our writing” (p. 79). The themes derived from the unfiltered data begin to “give shape to the shapeless” (p. 88).

When exploring themes, this researcher had the opportunity to treat the unfiltered data from the research subjects as “sources of meaning at the level of the whole story; at the level of the separate paragraph; and the level of the sentence, phrase, expression, or single word” (van Manen, 2014, p. 320). Van Manen (2014) explored three approaches to discovering themes: (a)

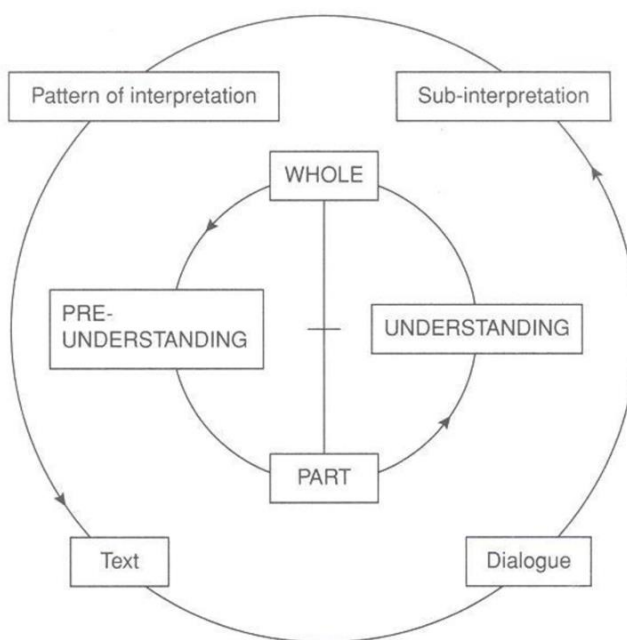
the wholistic approach, in which one looks at the text as a whole; (b) the selective or highlighting reading approach, where this researcher reads or listens to the text several times to discern which statements or phrases are particularly revealing or essential; and (c) the detailed or line-by-line approach, in which this researcher examines each line or sentence and ponders what it may reveal about the phenomenon. Each approach was undertaken systematically and hermeneutically by this researcher, one stage at a time, to pull from the raw data the meaning of the lived experience of the phenomenon. In this study, a thematic analysis was performed on all the data collected, including the questionnaires, recordings of follow-up interviews, and journaling, before moving to phenomenological reflection.

Phenomenological Reflection

The hermeneutic phenomenological method's final stage of the data analysis process was phenomenological reflection. The phenomenological review aims to “grasp the essential meaning of something” (van Manen, 1990, p. 77). In the phenomenological reflection phase of the data analysis process, this researcher sought to verbalize or articulate meaningful lived experiences studied by “(a) retrieving thematically organized and coded data, and (b) grouping coded sets into combinations to explore relationships among parts and the whole” (Durdella, 2019, p. 274). The aim was to build a narrative of the constructed parts that explained the lived experience. Van Manen (2014) concluded, “When we present an anecdote in phenomenological text, the sense of the text aspires to become an image. In other words, a phenomenological text aims to *explicate* and poetically *invoke* the phenomenological intuition” (van Manen, 2014, p. 261). In this final data analysis stage, this researcher journaled the narrative and reflected on the meaning derived from the phenomenon. “Writing does not merely enter the research process as a final step or stage ... human science research is a form of writing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 111).

Phenomenological reflection in this hermeneutic phenomenological study was guided by the “hermeneutic circle,” a process first described by Martin Heidegger. This interpretive process explains the role of preconceived knowledge fore-sight or fore-conception, in which the understanding and the analysis of the whole (transcript) is complemented by a deeper understanding of the parts (codes and themes; Peoples, 2021). See Figure 4 for an illustration of this interpretive process.

Figure 4 Alvesson and Skoldberg: *The Hermeneutic Circle*



Source: Alvesson & Skoldberg, *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*, 2000, p. 66. With permission of Sage Publications (see Appendix N).

Du Toit (2010) stated:

The hermeneutic circle describes the process of understanding a text hermeneutically. It refers to the idea that understanding of the text as a whole is established by reference to the individual parts and an understanding of each individual part by reference to the whole. The hermeneutic circle suggests that no individual part can be understood without reference to one another and therefore, it is described as a circle. (p. 129)

Using the hermeneutic circle in the final stage of data analysis helped this researcher to interpret the whole story in light of its individual parts and to explain the whole meaning to the audience

who would reflect on the study. Phenomenological reflection shaped the understanding of this researcher regarding the meaning of the phenomenon for those in the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of the local church.

Trustworthiness

The use of triangulation supported the trustworthiness of the analysis. This researcher chose to triangulate types of data sources and scrutinize evidence from these sources to build support for its established themes. “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). Increasing the study's trustworthiness involved assessing the validity and reliability of the research. “Qualitative validity means this researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, whereas qualitative reliability indicates that this researcher’s approach is consistent” (p. 199).

To ensure the validity of this study, this researcher (a) triangulated data, (b) used descriptions to articulate findings to share the validity of the experience with the reader, (c) clarified the bias of this researcher to protect the integrity of the findings with transparency and honesty, (d) and spent prolonged time with the research subjects to develop an in-depth understanding of the subject of study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure the reliability of this study, this researcher (a) checked all transcripts for obvious mistakes or errors, (b) ensured the continuity of language, in particular regarding definitions, codes, and themes throughout the study, (c) deployed the use of a trained observer during the interview process to help to confirm that the data collected is an accurate representation of the expressed lived experiences provided by the research subjects, and (d) cross-checked literature, coding, and themes across multiple

researchers in the field to ensure consistency with the study of the lived experience of the phenomenon.

Credibility

Credibility is “a characteristic of a research study, the study’s overall quality as judged by other scholars; includes the use of appropriate designs and methods, believable findings, and plausible interpretations” (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 413). The data collected used the hermeneutic phenomenological method defined by van Manen (1990). The data collection and analysis methods described by van Manen guided this study. This researcher used a phenomenological design to collect data from the research subjects’ lived experiences. This researcher followed this methodology to describe the phenomenon, triangulation, coding procedures, and journaling to achieve accountability throughout the research study. This researcher identified bias through the phenomenological process of bracketing before and throughout the interview process, noting personal experiences to counterpose “any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence what they ‘hear’ participants saying” (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 233). The bracketing process added credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability overall to the research study.

Triangulation, or the use of “multiple forms of data related to the same research question, to find consistencies or inconsistencies among the data,” added to the study's credibility (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 240). Identifying multiple settings, more than one individual per setting and more than one point of data collection, established evidence that the phenomenon in question was not a random occurrence but an identifiable and credible trend in need of study. A trained observer sat in on the interviews to ensure that the interviews aligned with IRB protocols and provided a detached and additional interpretation of the recorded interviews. The written interpretation

provided by the trained observer was compared to the data collected by this researcher and helped to confirm that the data collected accurately represented the expressed lived experiences provided by the research subjects, ensuring the credibility of the data collected.

Dependability

Data management, including data collection and analysis, is crucial in establishing the dependability of the research (Durdella, 2019). This researcher documented the research subject's responses and data analysis independently. Data was collected first using a semistructured questionnaire, followed up by recorded interviews, deployed the use of the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire), and supported by this researcher's journaling, which captured this researcher's interpretations of the anecdotes shared by the research subjects and this researcher's observations and impressions of the meaning of the anecdotes, and to confirm the research subjects' responses. Dependability relied on whether the details were provided in such a way that they could be replicated. Dependability was established through robust detailing of the research process, as outlined above.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the process by which the researcher makes an effort “to base their conclusions on their actual data as much as possible—and to describe their data collection and data analysis processes in considerable detail—such that other researchers might draw similar conclusions from similarly collected and analyzed data” (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 239). The data collection process listed above created a verifiable, systematic audit trail that transcribed and interpreted collected data, triangulated to add to a study's dependability, and this researcher's efforts to edit transcripts for inaccuracies and cross-check codes and data for discrepancies. The

data collection process utilized the CAQDAS, *NVivo* (2022), a program that accurately represented the raw data collected and analyzed in this study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the “extent to which a research study’s findings might be similar or applicable to other individuals, settings, and contexts; the term most frequently used by qualitative researchers” (Leedy et al., 2019, p. 420). This study used established interview instruments and protocols previously employed in other phenomenological studies. It is transferable due to data collection procedures and analysis typical in phenomenological studies. The data collection procedures were described in detail so that similar studies may be conducted utilizing a congruent population or data collection process. If others choose to study the generation known as Millennials or transformational leadership in context, this research can be emulated in any similar research context.

Chapter Summary

This chapter on research methodology began with a discussion on selecting a qualitative hermeneutical phenomenological study and why this researcher chose this method to derive meaning from the phenomenon under study. The purpose of the study was guided by three research questions about the perceptions of Millennials regarding their lived experience with transformational leaders. This hermeneutic phenomenological research population consisted of 12 individuals from the Millennial generation (ages 25-39, born between 1984-1998), selected as a purposive sample, four from each of three non-denominational churches with average worship attendance of 1,500 or more. This chapter dealt with the methods of data collection and protocols associated with using the following qualitative instrumentations: semistructured questionnaires, follow-up interviews, the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire), and journaling. Next

follows a detailed account of the data analysis process, which included four stages of implementation: (a) data transcription, (b) lean coding, (c) thematic analysis, and (d) phenomenological reflection. Finally, to conclude this chapter on methodology, the trustworthiness of the research was established by surveying the procedures this researcher undertook to ensure the qualitative validity and reliability of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study was to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation (born between 1984-1998) who have remained connected to the local church community. The findings of this research helped to determine whether the Millennial generation responds to the leadership characteristics of transformational leaders and whether this connection affects their decision to remain connected to their faith communities. This chapter clarifies the narrative themes from the data collected in this study in detail regarding the lived experiences of the research subjects. Three research questions guided this research study:

RQ1. What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for deciding to remain connected to their local church community?

RQ2. What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for engaging in volunteer leadership in their local church?

RQ3. Has the influence of transformational leadership on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders in the Millennial population resulted in a continued connected engagement with the local church?

Furthermore, this study's qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological methodology was employed in collecting and analyzing the data findings to establish validity, reliability, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. In this chapter, the methodology that guided this research study will be detailed, along with a review of compilation protocol and measures, demographic and sample data, data analysis processes and findings, and an evaluation of the trustworthiness of the research design to derive narrative and meaning from the lived experience of the research subjects at the center of this study.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

Protocols

Upon approval from Liberty University's IRB, this researcher contacted the senior leadership of each of the selected three church locations and invited them to participate in the study. The senior leadership of each church was required to sign a consent form, giving their permission for their church to take part in the study and for their attendees who fit the criteria of the research subjects for this study to be contacted via email. The senior leadership also consented that personal information on the selected research subjects and their involvement in the study would not be released to them during or following the study.

With the written consent of the senior leadership of the three churches in this study, a digital questionnaire with specific questions about the population selection criterion was used to identify the 12 research subjects from the selected church environments based on the three criteria for participation. Churches A and B gave access to the pool of applicants by providing their phone numbers and email addresses, which this researcher contacted directly with the invitation email. However, Church C requested to send the initial invitation email to their applicant pool directly, and this researcher provided the drafted invitation email content and the digital questionnaire link that was then sent by Church C on behalf of this researcher. From the pool of individuals willing to complete the questionnaire, four research subjects were selected from each of the three churches to participate in the second data collection phase.

Once identified, the research subjects were asked to participate in a two-part interview. All 12 selected research subjects chose to be included in the study and signed a written consent form approved by the IRB. This researcher maintained the confidentiality and privacy of the research subjects by assigning each a numerical code. The interview questions (see Appendices I

and J) determined the validity of the phenomenon based on the narratives collected from the research subjects' experience and their interaction with their transformational leaders.

Measures

This researcher employed a trained observer during the interviews with the research subjects to ensure that the interviews aligned with IRB protocols and to provide a detached and additional interpretation of the recorded interviews. This individual has a masters degree in biblical counseling with crisis and trauma certifications through Liberty University and Light University, as well as formal training to observe body language, facial expressions, and anecdotes shared regarding lived experiences. IRB protocol was followed to ensure consistency with IRB-approved guidelines. With interviews, the data collected can be subjective and varied in meaning, so the trained observer assisted with maintaining an accurate transcription of the research subject's response to avoid incorrect or misrepresented data. The trained observer served to ensure that the integrity of the interviews was consistent throughout the data collection process as described in the research procedures.

To ensure that the collected research data was analyzed correctly, this researcher employed the use of a certified NVivo coach. To minimize bias, collaboration with the coach ensured that the data collected was correctly analyzed and aggregated into the research design using the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), *NVivo* (2022), selected for use in this research study. Though academic research is often conducted in isolation, collaboration with other colleagues is often the key to ensuring the integrity of the research design. "CAQDAS platforms offer unprecedented opportunities to work as a team...connecting research teams to analytical tasks across web and desktop environments" (Durdella, 2019, p. 286). Using *Zoom* (2023) video conferencing to connect for coaching sessions, this researcher

partnered with a platinum-level, certified NVivo coach with over ten years of experience using this product to review the data analysis process to ensure that this researcher strictly followed the proper methodological steps in this research design. Finally, the data analysis in this hermeneutic phenomenology was guided by the “hermeneutic circle,” a process described by Martin Heidegger, which explains the role of preconceived knowledge fore-sight or fore-conception, in which the understanding and the analysis of the whole (transcript) is complemented by a deeper understanding of the parts (codes and themes; Peoples, 2021). In the final stage of data analysis, this researcher used the hermeneutic circle (see Figure 4, p. 101) as she interpreted the whole story (phenomenological reflection) presented in the data (transcription) set in light of its individual parts (lean coding) and to explain its meaning (thematic analysis) to the audience who would reflect on this study.

Demographic and Sample Data

Based on specific characteristics of the study population and the objectives of this research, the sampling was purposive to include individuals attending worship at non-denominational churches with an average worship attendance of 1,500 or more. The research subjects met three key criteria: (a) born between 1984 and 1998, (b) active attendees of one of the three non-denominational church settings selected for this study, and (c) research subjects must also be volunteer ministerial leaders for a minimum of one year in one of the three non-denominational church settings selected for this study.

The research population was limited to three non-denominational churches with an average worship attendance of 1,500 or more. An organizational structure comprises a senior pastor and lay leadership overseeing the church's daily operations. The three selected church settings were Syracuse, New York; Baltimore, Maryland; and Orlando, Florida. These three local

churches were chosen for this study because this researcher had pre-determined (a) the church is a community of faith that includes representatives of the Millennial generation, (b) transformational leadership is present among the ministry leadership team as determined through the use of the MLQ designed by Bass and Avolio (1995), and (c) the phenomenon is present, whereby Millennials have remained connected to the local church through continued involvement in volunteer ministry leadership for a minimum of one year.

Data Analysis and Findings

Data analysis occurred after all data collection procedures were conducted and the data set was transcribed. Once recordings from primary and secondary interviews, data collection from the questionnaires, and journaling were completed, the first phase of data analysis was transcribing all the data collected. The transcriptions were exported into Word documents using *Zoom* (2023) video conferencing and edited for accuracy compared to the audio and video files of the interviews by both this researcher and the trained observer. All data collected was stored for access by a secure Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). The CAQDAS used in this research study was *NVivo* (2022). The *NVivo* platform is trusted and encapsulates the processes of transcription, coding, theming, and reflecting. The selected CAQDAS assisted with the research data collection and analysis process. Following the first data analysis step of transcription, the research conducted the second step of lean coding. During data analysis, this researcher used the study's qualitative phenomenological methodology as a guide to report on the lived experiences of the research subjects. She used the data from the 12 initial interviews, the results collected from the MLQ, and the secondary follow-up interview data to expose themes connected to the research questions guiding this study.

Themes Connected to Research Questions

The analysis of the codes that emerged from the data collected highlighted significant themes that formed a narrative from the lived experiences of the research subjects, which also connected directly with the three research questions guiding this research study.

Research Question 1

The first research question explored why some Millennials have chosen to remain connected to the local church: “What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for deciding to remain connected to their local church community?”

Theme 1: Belonging is Found in the Local Church.

In connection to RQ1, it was clear that all 12 research subjects believed the local church to be an extension of their natural family. All described their perspective of the local church as their primary source of belonging, connection, and community and where they felt they could most strongly experience and express their faith. Their decision to remain connected to the local church as a member of the Millennial generation resulted from the strong familial tie they felt in connection to the body of Christ, the local church, due to their lived experience.

Research Question 2

The second research question explored why Millennials chose to connect to the church body through service: “What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for engaging in volunteer leadership in their local church?”

Theme 2: Service to the Local Church is Worship.

In connection to RQ2, all 12 research subjects believed serving the local church body with their unique gifts and talents was considered a responsibility and an act of worship. As a member of their perspective local church, they each explained that one of the reasons why they

had remained connected to the local church was their belief that it was their responsibility to serve the local church. This belief was scripturally-founded, but also heavily influenced by the example of their transformational leader. The research subjects shared that they felt compelled to live their life in service of others, just as their transformational leader had modeled for them.

Research Question 3

The third research question explored the transformation Millennials experienced from exposure to the relational influence of transformational leadership: “Has the influence of transformational leadership on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders in the Millennial population resulted in a continued connected engagement with the local church?”

Theme 3: Exposure to Transformational Leadership is Transformative.

In connection to RQ3, based on the data collected, this researcher concluded that all 12 research subjects experienced transformation as a byproduct of their relational exposure to a transformational leader. Each research subject identified a transformational leader present in their life. From the interview questions, it became clear that their exposure to this transformational leader resulted in their experience of the four principles of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. The presence of these components in their leader’s methodology helped to identify them as a transformational leader in practice (Almas et al., 2020; Avolio, 2021; Foulkes-Bert et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Løvaas et al., 2020; Nxumalo, 2020; Obmerga, 2021; Olaniyan, 2015; Valldeneu et al., 2021; Wolor et al., 2021). All research subjects shared that access to this transformational leader came from their access to the local church and was a motivator for remaining connected to the church.

Connections Between RQs, Themes, and Codes

Each of the 12 research subjects (RS 1-12) had the following files attached to their case in *NVivo* (2022): first interview transcript, first interview researcher notes, first interview trained observer notes, second interview transcript, second interview researcher notes, second interview trained observer notes, as well as the results file of the MLQ findings of both the research subject and leader. Therefore, there were 73 total files of data collected and imported into the CAQDAS for data analysis and referenced in this research design. The connections between the research questions, themes, and codes analyzed within the data collection are listed below in Table 1.

Table 1 *Connections Between RQs, Themes, and Codes*

RQ	Theme	Codes	Files	References
RQ1	1. Belonging to the Community of the Church (“Church” – 1,226 references)	Belong	37	54
		Community	50	294
		Connection	63	765
		Experience	72	224
		Faith	46	124
		Family	43	185
RQ2	2. Service as an Act of Worship (“Serve” – 1,371 references)	Member	44	131
		Volunteer	42	137
		Worship	36	199
RQ3	3. Transformational Byproduct of Leadership (“Leadership” – 1,519 references)	Empower	49	267
		Example	27	52
		Influence	52	207
		Inspiration	70	214
		Motivation	40	154
		Relationship	57	288
		Transformation	72	1219
		Worth	39	57

The codes found in Table 1 were derived from the lean coding process before moving on to thematic analysis. From the list of reoccurring codes contained within the data collected, three “master” codes (highest reoccurring codes in connection with the subcodes) became the foundation for the three narrative themes: (1) Church – recorded with 1,226 references, (2) Serve

– recorded with 1,371 references, and (3) Leadership – recorded with 1,519 references. When the narrative of the research subjects was analyzed alongside the subcodes (codes that occurred most often in connection with one of the three master codes), the following three themes became the focus of this researcher’s phenomenological reflection to derive meaning from the lived experiences of the research subjects.

Theme 1: Belonging is Found in the Local Church

In this first theme, the research subjects discussed why they believed, based on their own lived experiences, that some Millennials chose to remain connected to the local church community when, statistically, so many of their peers in their generation were exiting communities of faith. Several research subjects conveyed that the church provided an environment where they felt they could freely learn more about God, even as they learned more about themselves. The opportunity to discover God and themselves in a faith community was one of their primary motivations for remaining connected to the local church.

RS7: I think that people need to spend time in church just to know who God is and so that they could, you know, just touch base on themselves a little bit more. I think it's important for everyone to find out who their true self is. Like the self that God made them to be, and it comes with a lot of digging and a lot of honesty.

Research subjects also stated that the local church became the place where they were introduced to and formed meaningful connections and relationships. Growing together with other people who shared their faith forged a familial connection that they came to value, and made it impossible to hide in obscurity. This environment of belonging formed the foundation of the community they rely upon to sustain and support the development of their faith.

RS8: Everybody my age, for the most part, they're all looking for those deeper connections, friendships, significant others. And if they are not finding them in church, then they're finding them somewhere else. And the relationships outside of the church can be risky. But I feel like the relationships that are formed from serving - the friendships and even the romantic relationships - are safer in that space when you're

surrounded by people who want to help you grow in a healthy way and have God at the center. When you come into that community, you're just setting yourself up for success, whereas outside of that, you're not.

RS2: My church gives me the chance to meet people I wouldn't necessarily meet out in the world. I love the classes and learning environments. I love connecting to the community. I love the friendships and relationships that I've developed. I would say it's fostering my growth. I mean, people can say like, you know, you can have a relationship with God, but if you're not connected in a local church, then how are you providing your gifts and talents to others and to the body, and how is the body providing their gifts and talents to you? I could not imagine my life without my church. I really can't.

Many of the research subjects claimed that they could not imagine their life without the local church, described much in the same way they articulated their need for family. The community and connection, as well as their access to transformative leadership, provided in their church was the primary reason they gave for remaining connected to the local church when so many others in their generation were walking away from faith communities. The Millennials at the center of this study have forged connections and community that motivate them to regularly return to where they feel they most belong.

RS9: I think that a lot of it has to do with the connections they built through other people like having the friendships there and then, when you establish those friendships, they'll keep, they'll keep on you to keep coming back. I know that's why I do a lot of it, is to have those friendships and that's why I continue it, especially when you have those connections.

Theme 2: Service to the Local Church is Worship

The second theme builds off the first theme to articulate why the research subjects chose to serve and engage in volunteer leadership in their local church. The research subjects felt that the church offered them access to communities where they could simultaneously create relationships and explore their unique gifts and talents, which were their serve teams. They felt that their invitation to serve deepened their connection to the church. All of the research subjects expressed that they felt serving the body of Christ, or the local church, was an act of worship and

a sacred duty they felt honored to perform. RS1 captured why serving is viewed as an act of worship:

RS1: I go back to the Scripture, where it says many of you serve angels without knowing so, right? (Hebrews 13:2) It also goes back to recognizing that every single person is created in God's image, and that means they are the direct replica of what God is to be seen as. So, if I am to worship God, how do I do so? It would be to serve him well, right? When Jesus came, he became obedient even unto death, and he did that for us.

Not only did they consider serving an act of worship, but they also shared that serving the community of the local church filled that inward desire for their life to have purpose, impact, and meaning. Serving in the church was viewed as the avenue by which a Millennial could explore their calling while simultaneously providing a structure where there was accountability. They each articulated how they felt seen and valued, and felt they were a part of something where people relied upon them to show up. Serving fostered their commitment to the community and became a strong motivator for remaining connected to the body.

RS3: I think everybody is starving to be heard and feel like they're making an impact on others—people in general. I mean, I'm an introvert, and I still want to impact the church and do my part, whatever that is that God called me to. I definitely think Millennials want to do that. They want to make a statement and be known.

RS5: I think people need purpose, and the local church provides that. They provide the structure for that. Sometimes, you don't know where to start or what to do. You believe something, but you're just not really sure, like what your part is. And the church provides the ability to do that, to step into that role and step into those callings.

Unlike the natural occupations they fulfilled daily, the research subjects felt that serving the local church was a supernatural calling with a more significant impact and purpose. In the serving community, they felt more interconnected with one another. The research subjects were empowered by the ministerial command to the church “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness

of Christ” (Eph.4:12-13, NIV). Being an active church member, serving the body with their gifts and talents as an act of worship, and belonging to an environment where they felt seen and valued motivated these Millennials to remain connected to their faith community.

RS10: I didn't even know that you could know this much love or appreciation. I think that comes from people recognizing my gifts and actually letting me use my gifts as much as I'm letting them use theirs. I previously never, you know, felt like people took them into any consideration. I assumed it was kind of like it is with a worldly job. But I think that my local church has really empowered me. Like, “Hey, you have this gift, so run with it. I want your input.” So, that's amazing.

Theme 3: Exposure to Transformational Leadership is Transformative

In conjunction with the first and second themes, the third theme explained why the influence of transformational leadership in the lives of the research subjects motivated them to continue to connect and engage in the community of the local church. The research subjects strongly expressed that while forged relationships and opportunities to serve were compelling reasons to remain connected to the local church, the most powerful influence was their exposure to and relationship with a transformational leader in their life. To these research subjects, these leaders were not merely coaches or mentors to them; they received them as spiritual parents. RS11 expressed that the transformational leaders in his life represented fathers, someone to look to for guidance and wisdom, someone to model and emulate in their relationship with the church.

RS11: I see those men in my life, and I see their relationship with the Lord and the relationship, you know, that they have with their families, and it spurs me to want what they have. I want to grow up to be a man like them. Even if you have a father in the house does not mean he's a father. He can just be that guy who's related to you by blood, and I think that, you know, the father's role is to say I'm proud of you and to push you to greatness, to be your biggest cheerleader. And I think that's why these men and these leaders that exude that are so effective with young people, because they're taking on the spiritual mantle of the father that is absent in so many homes, and basically, just being fathers to an entire generation.

The research subjects explained that the transformational leaders in their lives were a catalyst for growth and development in their journey of spiritual discipleship. The research

subjects described how their exposure to this transformational leader resulted in their experience of the four principles of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Each research subject compared their experience with their transformational leader to what they believe the disciples experienced with Jesus. They felt their relational and biblical connection with their transformational leader had resulted in a transformation in their own life, evidenced by maturity, discipline, spiritual development, and increased commitment to serving the local church.

RS6: If you're connecting with such a transformational leader, whatever they're connected to, you obviously want to be connected with. Because when you know that it's not just them alone, but also the people that they're connected to that also are pouring into them, you want to be a part of it, and you want to be a part of their walk, in their vision, in the future. It's probably what the disciples felt when they were walking with Jesus. Being connected with that transformational leader and the life change that they're bringing into your life just on a personal basis, it's like, well...I want to be able to share this with other people, too.

RS4: Sometimes, we want leaders to make us feel good, but then that means we're being driven by emotion. Emotions are fleeting to the point where we can be emotionally drained, and then we're left with nothing. So, I think having a transformational leader is being led by truth. Like there's a difference between being led by emotion and being led by truth. And the more that we're rooted and grounded in the Word, that is really where that transformation happens.

The presence of leadership and community who took on the responsibility of investing in them as members of the Millennials generation, but more so as members of the body of Christ, ensured that the research subjects could not slip away into obscurity but instead felt challenged to do their part to strengthen the church.

RS12: Transformational leadership, you know, has the potential, if you're open to it, to change you as a person. But to also see that there is a real, true, and authentic connection. I think, especially within the church if people and Millennials don't have that opportunity to connect with someone on that level or see that transformational leadership, it's easy for them to stay anonymous. You can come in and grab your free coffee, sit in a seat in the back of the church, and then, when service is over, slip right back out. I mean, you may get a high and hello from the greeters, but it's surface level, and they can just slip right back out. And when that happens it's easy for you to go, "Oh, I don't feel like going this

Sunday." And then next, you know, one Sunday turns into two or turns into three or turns into four, and then, before you know it, you're just busy. So, I think that interacting with a transformational leader brings a deep connection that would help Millennials stay within the church as opposed to making church optional.

To determine whether or not the perception of the research subject accurately captured the transformational nature of the leader they identified, the 12 research subjects were tested using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by theorists Bass and Avolio (1995), a questionnaire known for accurately identifying three different leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant. The MLQ assessment tool was designed as a feedback form (including both self and rater evaluation forms) to identify leadership style. Each of the 12 research subjects completed the rater form, which each individually verified that their recognized transformational leader proved, in fact, to be a transformational leader. The identified leader of each research subject then completed the MLQ leader form, called the self form, which also confirmed and validated each be a transformational leader. Example questions from the MLQ leader and rater forms can be found in Appendix M with licensed permission.

The 12 research subjects who fit the parameters of the population chosen for this study are identified below as RS (research subject) 1-12. The 12 research leaders nominated to participate in the MLQ are identified below as RL (research leader) 13-23. The summative results of each MLQ rater form, also known as the research subject (RS), are listed in Table 2. The summative results of each MLQ leader form, also known as the research leader (RL), are listed in Table 3. The MLQ is graded on a 0.0-4.0 cumulative scale that identifies three different leadership styles along the spectrum: transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant. "The MLQ is not designed to encourage the labeling of a leader as Transformational or Transactional. Rather, it is more appropriate to identify a leader or group of leaders as (for example) 'more transformational than the norm' or 'less transactional than the norm'" (Avolio & Bass, 1995, p.

120). Therefore, the lower on the spectrum (closer to 0.0), the less transformational the leader, and the more transactional or passive-avoidant they are by nature. Likewise, the higher on the spectrum (closer to 4.0), the more transformational the leader is. Higher scores (above 3.0) mean that the leader is, more often than not, perceived to have a transformational effect on others.

Table 2 *MLQ Rater Summative Results*

Research Subject (RS) Identification	MLQ Summative Rating
RS1	3.8
RS2	3.4
RS3	3.6
RS4	3.5
RS5	3.3
RS6	3.9
RS7	3.1
RS8	3.8
RS9	3.9
RS10	3.4
RS11	3.9
RS12	3.9

Note. In the table above, the rater summative results show that all 12 Millennial research subjects rated their nominated leader as a transformational leader (3.0-4.0). As all 12 summative ratings were above 3.0, this researcher could conclude that their selected leader could appropriately be perceived as transformational, more often than not, if not always. The perceptions of the research subjects correctly identified their leader as a transformational leader when compared to the research leader's assessment of themselves (see Table 3 below).

Table 3 *MLQ Leader (Self) Summative Results*

Research Leader (RL) Identification	MLQ Summative Rating
RL13	3.1
RL14	3.5
RL15	3.0
RL16	3.1
RL18	3.6
RL19	3.3
RL20	3.4
RL22	3.3
RL23	3.4

Note. In the table above, MLQ results are missing from two nominated research leaders – RL17 and RL 21. RL17 never responded to the request to participate in the study, and ultimately, this researcher decided to move on without their findings. RL21 declined by email to participate in the study due to the busyness of the season of their life. Also, note that RS22 was nominated twice by two different research subjects from the same church location, so only eleven research leaders were identified in this study, and only nine leader summative ratings were recorded. When comparing the research leader’s MLQ results with the results of the research subject who nominated them, most research leaders rated themselves lower on the spectrum for transformational leadership (in most cases, 3.0-3.5). This researcher opines that the lower summative result is the byproduct of honesty and humility on the part of the research leader.

Access to transformational leadership, in connection with the feeling of belonging that the research subjects found in the church and the meaning the research subjects found in serving the church, became the three strands not easily broken for them (Eccl. 4:12). The research subjects all shared that this triple thread of commitment held them accountable to the local church, making it impossible to consider migrating away from their faith community.

Evaluation of the Research Design

A qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological methodology served as a suitable foundation for this research design as this methodology is well-suited to revealing the Millennial generation’s perceptions of connectivity that were the concern of this study. The phenomenological research design focused on the personal experiences and perspectives of the research subjects to narrate the heart of a phenomenon by examining it through the lens of the lived experiences of the research group, volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation (born between 1984-1998) who have remained connected to the local church community (Neubauer et

al., 2019). The data collection and analysis procedures associated with the phenomenological methodology followed by this researcher allowed her to successfully determine that the Millennial generation does respond to transformational leaders' leadership characteristics and that this connection does affect their decision to remain connected to their faith communities.

This researcher interviewed 12 Millennial research subjects who met the three key criteria: (a) born between 1984 and 1998, (b) active attendees of one of the three non-denominational church settings selected for this study, and (c) research subjects must also be volunteer ministerial leaders for a minimum of one year in one of the three non-denominational church settings selected for this study. Interviews, using interview questions that pertained directly to the three research questions guiding this study, were used to verify the validity of the phenomenon. A trained observer was also present in the interviews to ensure that the interview procedures aligned with IRB protocols and provided a detached and additional interpretation of the recorded interviews.

After the first interview, this researcher emailed the research subjects and the identified leaders the MLQ (the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire). The Millennial research subjects completed the rater form to determine whether they perceived their recognized transformational leader as a transformational leader. The leaders identified by the research subjects completed the MLQ leader (self) form to determine whether the perceptions of the research subjects correctly identified them as transformational leaders when compared to the leader's assessment of themselves. From the results data provided by both the research subjects and the transformational leaders they nominated for the study, this researcher was able to accurately determine that both the research subject's perception of their leader and the leaders' perception of themselves confirmed that each leader nominated was, in fact, a transformational leader. A second and final

interview was conducted with the research subjects to ensure no abnormalities existed in the data collection process while completing the MLQ.

The narrative themes from the data collected in this study provided evidence that the Millennial generation responds more effectively to transformational leadership characteristics and that their connection, example, and influence encouraged their decision to remain connected to their faith communities. The analysis of the codes that emerged from the data collected highlighted significant themes that arose from the lived experiences of the research subjects, such as 1) belonging, community, and connection are found within the context of the family of the local church, 2) service and membership within the faith community is an act of worship, and 3) transformation is a relational byproduct of exposure to the influence and inspiration of transformational leadership.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To increase the trustworthiness of this research design, this researcher assessed the validity and reliability of the research. “Qualitative validity means this researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, whereas qualitative reliability indicates that this researcher’s approach is consistent” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 199). To ensure the reliability and validity of this study, this researcher (a) checked all transcripts for obvious mistakes or errors, (b) ensured the continuity of language, in particular regarding definitions, codes, and themes throughout the study, (c) deployed the use of a trained observer during the interview process to help to confirm that the data collected is an accurate representation of the expressed lived experiences provided by the research subjects, and (d) cross-checked literature, coding, and themes across multiple researchers in the field to ensure consistency with the study of the lived experience of the phenomenon.

Credibility

On November 29, 2022, this research design received IRB approval. IRB guidelines and recommendations were applied during this process. A thorough description of the data collection and analysis procedures and an audit trail through the research study was provided. This researcher used a phenomenological design to collect data from the research subjects' lived experiences. To achieve accountability throughout the research study, this researcher followed this methodology to describe the phenomenon, triangulation, coding procedures, and journaling, as well as using a trained observer to ensure that the research design followed IRB guidelines.

Dependability

This researcher documented the research subject's responses and data analysis independently. Data was collected first using a semistructured questionnaire, followed by recorded interviews, as well as the use of the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire), and supported by this researcher's journaling, which captured this researcher's interpretations of the anecdotes shared by the research subjects and their impact on the narrative of lives experiences. Dependability was established by providing and recording the details so they could be replicated by others conducting research in the future and through robust detailing of the research process, as outlined above.

Confirmability

The data collection process outlined in this research design created a verifiable, systematic audit trail that transcribed and interpreted collected data, as well as the steps this researcher took to edit the transcripts for inaccuracies and cross-check codes and data for discrepancies. The data collection process was supported by the use of the CAQDAS, *NVivo* (2022), which assisted with presenting an accurate representation of the raw data collected and

analyzed in this study to establish narrative themes that best describe the lived experiences of the research subjects.

Transferability

This study used established interview instruments and protocols previously employed in other phenomenological studies, as well as the established instrumentation of the MLQ, used by companies around the world. The study is transferable due to data collection and analysis procedures standard in phenomenological studies. The data collection procedures were described in detail so that similar studies may be conducted utilizing a congruent population or data collection process. Were others to choose to study the generation known as Millennials or transformational leadership in context, this research can be emulated in any similar research context.

Summary

As a result of using the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to guide this research design, this researcher can clearly articulate the narrative associated with the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation (born between 1984-1998) who have remained connected to the local church community and how their response to the leadership characteristics of transformational leaders affected their decision to remain connected to and to serve their faith communities. This chapter provided a detailed overview of the analysis and findings of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, along with a review of compilation protocol and measure, demographic and sample data, data analysis processes and findings, and an evaluation of the trustworthiness of the research design. The conclusions, implications, and applications, as well as the research limitations and opportunities for further study that emerged from this research study, will be discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Chapter five details the conclusions, implications, and applications, as well as the research limitations and opportunities for further study, that emerged from this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research study in connection with the three research questions that guided this research design.

Research Purpose

This research is a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, the purpose of which was to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this hermeneutic phenomenological study:

RQ1. What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for deciding to remain connected to their local church community?

RQ2. What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for engaging in volunteer leadership in their local church?

RQ3. Has the influence of transformational leadership on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders in the Millennial population resulted in a continued connected engagement with the local church?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

Conclusions

This researcher answered the three research questions that guided this study based on the data and the themes that developed during the data analysis. This research study utilized a phenomenological methodological approach by conducting interviews, as well as the utilization

of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, to assess the lived experiences of 12 Millennial research subjects who met the three key criteria for this study: (a) born between 1984 and 1998, (b) active attendees of one of the three non-denominational church settings selected for this study, and (c) research subjects must also be volunteer ministerial leaders for a minimum of one year in one of the three non-denominational church settings selected for this study. Together in relationship with the literature review that served as a foundation for the focus of this research, the data collected from the lived experiences of the research subjects highlighted three major themes: 1) belonging, community, and connection are found within the context of the family of the local church, 2) service and membership within the faith community is an act of worship, and 3) transformation is a relational byproduct of exposure to the influence and inspiration of transformational leadership. From these central themes, in connection with the literature review, this researcher identified conclusions, implications, and applications for further consideration.

Conclusions for Research Questions

Conclusion for RQ1: Belonging is Found in the Local Church

What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for deciding to remain connected to their local church community?

This first research question was foundational to addressing the gap in literature proposed by the research study. This question explored why some Millennials chose to remain connected to the local church community when, statistically, so many of their peers in their generation were abandoning their faith communities. Through the responses collected for RQ1, this research study determined that Millennials who had chosen to remain connected to their local church had done so primarily because they felt the connection to the community of the church had fostered a sense of belonging. Many research subjects described their church with familial language, often

referring to it as “home” or “family.” While several of the research subjects conveyed that the church provided an environment where they felt they could freely learn more about God, even as they learned more about themselves, it was common in the interviews for the subjects to refer to the church as their “family of faith,” placing more emphasis on the connection to the people who attended the church than the facility of the building itself. Many of the research subjects claimed that they could not imagine their life without the community of the local church. The community and connection, as well as their access to transformative leadership, provided in their church was the primary reason they gave for remaining connected to the local church when so many others in their generation were walking away from faith communities.

RS7: There's also for me, I guess, the need to stay connected. I feel like this. This is the area that I'm supposed to live. We've been to several churches in the area, and I feel like this particular church, it's where God wants us. My motivation is that this is where God wants us. This is where God is doing something in my life, through my life, into others. It's just the demographic. It's just the geography of my life and where I live.

The research subjects’ understanding of the biblical mandate for communal connection with the church can be best articulated by Hebrews 10:24-25: "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (NIV). While a lack of authentic connection and community had motivated many of their peers to leave the faith community, the research subjects’ opportunity to grow with others who shared their faith forged an irrefutable sense of belonging that they had come to value.

If one greatest shared strengths of the Millennial generation is how they value their community, then the living process of becoming a disciple of Jesus is rooted in their connection to other church members. Learning to live the abundant life described in the Bible (Jn. 10:10) is experienced first in connection with God and others. Millennials thrive in connection with their

peers but also connection with their leaders and mentors. When disciples have a growing relationship with God and an increasing understanding of themselves, they can grow in connection with other disciples (John 1:12; Romans 8:16). In the local church, the research subjects found shared ideas, explanations, and a developed passion for understanding and connecting to the truth of God's Word (Campbell & Garner, 2016; Ogden, 2016; Shiflett, 2018; Wilhoit, 2022). They found a place where they belonged – to God and one another. As Jesus said in John 15:19, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world..." (NIV). Understanding that a follower of Jesus belongs first to God, and not to the world, that their allegiance has shifted to the family of God, is foundational knowledge necessary for establishing commitment and dedication, and ultimately, a capacity for remaining connected.

Conclusion for RQ2: Service to the Local Church is Worship

What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for engaging in volunteer leadership in their local church?

The second research question explored how a connection to the local church through the act of service not only tied the subject more deeply into the church community, it provided a physical outlet for expressing worship through volunteer service. The research subjects felt their invitation to serve deepened their connection to the church. They said that they felt serving the body of Christ, the local church, was an act of worship and a sacred duty they felt honored to perform. Serving in the church was viewed as the avenue by which they could explore their calling, while simultaneously providing a structure where they were depended upon and held accountable to the community. Each research subject articulated how they felt seen and valued and were part of something where they knew others expected them to share their gifts and talents

freely. Serving in the church fostered their commitment to the community, provided a tangible outlet for worship, and became a strong motivator for remaining connected to the church.

The research subjects considered serving the church an act of worship that was an extension of worshipping God. The scriptures encouraged them to serve one another, and that service was considered a personal act of worship. If the church is the body of Christ, then serving the body is worshipping Christ. Galatians 5:13 confirms this, “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love” (NIV). As church members serving one another, they demonstrated a liturgical expression of their love for God. The research subjects expressed their worship of the Lord by doing their part, knowing that by doing their part, they were adding to the full expression of worship represented in the body, the church. Ephesians 4:16 supports this: “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (NIV). The research subjects claimed that a lifestyle of worship that honors and glorifies God is a visible expression in the life of the church.

RS3: People think that they can do it themselves. I think my age group, because of all the information at their fingertips, were kind of taught to be, you know, independent problem solvers. Go figure it out, make your own way in the world, and all that kind of stuff. But like I said, throughout Scripture, God calls us to be part of the body, and I've come to believe, it's now my conviction, that you can't grow or go where God wants you to go apart from the body of Christ. It's that central. It's like you become saved, get baptized, and become a part of the body of the church. I've grown so much, and I've gone from where I had a hard time even just expressing what I believe to now I teach it to kids. I'm up there proclaiming what I believe, and I've become confident in it.

Millennials experience God's transformative presence for themselves in the church, an experience that results in an outpouring of worship. Millennials felt that connection to the local church was an essential component of this transformational experience. The church is where the transformed people of God come together to worship, fellowship, and serve one another. This

research study substantiated that while an extensive population of Millennials has progressively withdrawn from the church (from the act of worship), there is a phenomenon of Millennials who have remained connected to the local church through attendance and service and the act of worship. This research concluded that worship is an integral component of the Christian experience and should be experienced through service to the local church.

Conclusion for RQ3: Exposure to Transformational Leadership is Transformative

Has the influence of transformational leadership on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders in the Millennial population resulted in a continued connected engagement with the local church?

The final research question, reinforced by the findings of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire completed by the research subjects, supported that exposure to the influence of transformational leadership resulted in a transformative experience for the research subject, which influenced their decision to remain connected to the community of their local church. The research subjects strongly expressed that while forged relationships and opportunities to serve were compelling reasons to remain connected to the local church, their relationship with a transformational leader was the most potent motivator for staying connected. The research subjects explained that the transformational leaders in their lives were a catalyst for personal growth and development in their journey of spiritual discipleship. Exposure to this transformational leader allowed the research subjects to experience the four principles of transformational leadership: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

To these research subjects, these transformational leaders became spiritual parents they came to trust and emulate in their interactions within the community.

RS11: It begins with the fatherlessness epidemic we have. Even if you have a father in the house, it does not mean he's a father. He can just be that guy who's related to you by

blood. And I think that you know the father's role is to say I'm proud of you and to push you to greatness, to be your biggest cheerleader. And I think that's why these men and these leaders that exude that are so effective with young people, because they're taking on the spiritual mantle of the Father that is absent in so many homes, and basically just being fathers to an entire generation.

The presence of leadership and community who took on the responsibility of investing in them as members of the Millennials generation ensured that the research subjects could not slip away into obscurity but instead felt challenged to do their part to strengthen the church. They experienced the manifestation of Hebrews 13:17: “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you” (NIV).

Although the relationship between a leader and a follower is reciprocal (Valenti, 2019), the research subjects believed their transformational leaders were committed to their well-being and growth. This relationship aligns with transformational leadership theory, which articulates that transformational leaders are committed to manifesting the finished work of Christ in the lives of those who look to them for leadership. Transformational leadership goals reflect James 1:4: “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (NIV). Nothing less than individuals' preparation, maturation, and commitment to their unique calling in Christ constitutes the finished work of transformational leaders.

Millennials express a deep need to be a part of something meaningful with lasting impact resulting from their commitment (Sai & Sreekanth, 2022; Wilson, 2019). Transformational leaders understand this propensity for commitment intrinsic to the Millennial culture and know how to harness it. Access to transformational leadership, in connection with the belonging and the meaning the research subjects found in serving the body, became the foundation of commitment that held them accountable to their local church. This connection is largely the motivation the research subjects state as their reason for remaining connected to the local church.

Relationship of Conclusions to Literature

One of the foundational discoveries of the literature review in this study was found in the Barna Group study, *The Connected Generation*, which confirmed that while the church dropout rate of Millennials rests at 57% globally, in the United States, 64% met the church dropout definition (Barna Group, 2019a, 2019b). While this Barna study provided ample literature exploring the motivations for why Millennials were leaving the church, this research study provided evidence of/for the antipodal position, indicating that other Millennials were choosing to remain connected to the church, and not merely connected, but actively seeking leadership opportunities (Barna Group, 2019a; Conway, 2018, 2018; Fuist & McDowell, 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Nxumalo, 2020; Packard & Ferguson, 2019; Valenti, 2019; Wolor et al., 2021).

The literature and research data provided in this study attempted to fill a prominent literature gap by understanding which mediums of connection inspired Millennials to remain connected to the local church. The literature review helped to inform this study by first revealing a substantive gap in ministry connection to and retention of the Millennial generation. Cultural research studies substantively note the concern regarding the exodus of the Millennials. Still, limited literature was available to identify solutions to bridge the generational gap instigating the exodus. This research study addressed how to identify transformational leaders who were equipped to build bridges of cultural contextualization across the generational gap. Secondly, the literature review provided a theological (the theology of worship, the theology of generational transference, and the theology of cultural contextualization) and theoretical (the theory of transformational leadership) framework used in this research study's hermeneutic phenomenological methodology to determine the components necessary for identifying

leadership styles most adept at reaching Millennials and the necessity of developing ministry methodologies that could connect Millennials to the community of the local church.

Further Implications and Applications

The further implications and applications of the research conclusions of this study can lead to the development of effective ministry methods. Rather than focusing on the abundance of problem-oriented research exploring why Millennials leave their faith communities, this research chose a solutions-oriented approach. By studying the lived experiences of Millennials who had chosen to remain connected to their church to determine the motivating factors for continued connection, this research suggests actionable ministry methods to be employed by churches that could encourage Millennials to engage with rather than disconnect from the faith community.

The first application derived from the first theme discovered in this research can be translated into the actionable ministry method of intentional connection to community and belonging. Whether this manifests through programs that actively onboard Millennials into small groups, learning environments, or community events, this research has determined that Millennials require an intentional community to foster belonging (Wilson, 2019). The second application derived from the second theme discovered in this research can be translated into the actionable ministry method of purposeful integration and activation into the work of the ministry. Millennials are cause-driven by nature and crave environments where their life generates impact (Flanagan, 2021; Solaja & Oguntola, 2016; Wolor et al., 2021). Ministry programs that proactively partner Millennials with opportunities that utilize their natural and spiritual gifts and abilities will see long-term commitment and dedication (Komolafe, 2017; Packard & Ferguson, 2019; Petersen, 2021; Valenti, 2019). And the final application derived from the third theme discovered in this research can be translated into the actionable ministry method of intentional

investment and personal development through interaction with transformational leadership. The findings of the MLQ in this research study supported the fact that Millennials who receive regular access to idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration will develop into leaders who reproduce after the leaders who invested in them (Almas et al., 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2022; Løvaas et al., 2020). When the applications of connection discovered in this research are applied to actionable ministry methods of engagement, ministries could find that the percentage of Millennials choosing to remain connected to their local church will rise rather than fall.

Research Limitations

This study examined the relationship between the local church and the Millennial generation. This particular focus impacted the degree to which the findings generalize to other populations. This study's delimitations limited the research population to 12 individuals born between 1984 and 1998, who could be assigned the generational classification of Millennial, and who had established volunteer church communities and ministerial leadership involvements for at least one year. This research study was limited to research subjects selected from one of three non-denominational churches with an average worship attendance of 1,500 or more with an organizational structure comprised of a senior pastor and lay leadership overseeing the church's daily operations in Syracuse, New York, Baltimore, Maryland, and Orlando, Florida. Due to the distance of most of the research subjects from this researcher's location, all interviews were limited to a virtual (audio and video) medium of interaction. Also, this researcher chose to limit this research to examining only the characteristics of transformational leadership and no other leadership theory. Finally, this research was limited to a phenomenological research design and

only to the collected informed opinions resulting from the lived experiences of the interviewed Millennials (ages 25-39) from the surveyed churches selected for this study.

Further Research

The further implications and applications of the research conclusions of this study can be explored if expanded beyond the scope of the research limitations of this research. Outside of the limitations of this study, future research could be conducted in other denominations or regions of the country and could reveal additional insights into the lived experiences not explored in the parameters of this study. While the parameters of this study focused on the population of Millennials within the context of the faith communities of non-denominational churches along the East Coast, examining the same population outside of faith communities in different denominations outside of the East Coast of the United States could offer opportunities for future research. Also, this study was limited to the use of the phenomenological tool of conducting interviews and the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire to assess the influence of transformational leadership in the lives of the study group. Other insights into the connectivity of Millennials could be yielded if different instrumentation tools or methodological approaches were applied to the focus of this research.

The survival of local churches depends upon the ability of their current church leadership to transfer the story of God's people and his plan to save them from one generation to the next. Without the intergenerational transfer and cultural contextualization of the message of the Bible, the church risks its future viability by losing its successor generation. The literature surveyed in this study showed a gap in the research regarding the cultural divide between the generations of the church and how this gap influences Millennial involvement. This research study provided data to help churches to identify ministry leaders who possess the transformational leadership

skills necessary to honor the divine mandate of generational transference using cultural contextualization of the gospel message and persuade Millennials to remain connected to their faith communities.

Summary

This research was conducted in direct response to the abundance of research indicating an increasing lack of religious affiliation amongst Millennials who had become disengaged from a community of faith (Packard & Ferguson, 2019; Simmons, 2015; Sumpter, 2019; Wilson, 2019). This research laid a foundation for an overall better church leadership understanding of what particular components within the faith community have enticed Millennials to remain connected. Church leadership must better understand what is required to draw Millennials into becoming active church members of faith communities. This research could inspire the leaders to foster the necessary changes needed to disciple and deploy the successor leadership generation of the local church – Millennials.

Prioritizing relational and communal connectivity with the next generation of Millennials to prepare them to assume local church leadership is not merely a good idea; it should be the highest priority for ministry leadership today. Connecting the Millennial generation to their faith communities and ensuring long-term commitment is the only way to safeguard the longevity and legacy of the local church. It is time for the current leadership of the church to exemplify the words of Paul found in 1 Corinthians 9:22-23: "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means, I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings" (NIV). This research study validates that when the local church understands and prioritizes the spiritual needs of Millennials, Millennials will choose to remain connected to their communities of faith.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

1/3/23, 11:15 AM

Mail - Ginty, Brandi Lynn - Outlook

[External] IRB-FY22-23-422 - Initial: Initial - Exempt

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Tue 11/29/2022 2:15 PM

To: Ginty, Brandi Lynn <[REDACTED]>; Davis, Jeffrey (School of Divinity Instruction)

<[REDACTED]>

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 29, 2022

Brandi Ginty
Jeffrey Davis

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-422 The Influence of Transformational Leaders in Reconnecting the Millennial Generation to the Community of the Local Church

Dear Brandi Ginty, Jeffrey Davis,

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 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). 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).

Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) 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(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any

<https://outlook.office.com/mail/AQMkADUwODQ0ADi2Mi1jNTgzLTQ3NTMIYTg0OC05ZDA2NGY4ZWl0YWUAlGABJQPchSBikGk%2BxVsUu%2B4r...> 1/2

1/3/23, 11:15 AM

Mail - Ginty, Brandi Lynn - Outlook

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

APPENDIX B: BARNA GROUP PERMISSION REQUEST

Requesting Copyright Permission



Ginty, Brandi Lynn

To: permissions@barna.com



Fri 9/2/2022 12:42 PM

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to request copyright permission from Barna Group to obtain permission to utilize the illustrations from pages 36-37 from *The Connected Generation: United States Report* under the section, The Changing State of Leadership. I would like to use these two statistical illustrations as support for my dissertation research on Millennials in the Local Church. The purpose of my qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study is to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experience of volunteer leaders in the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of the local church.

The illustrations that Barna Group has provided in this study serve as evidence of the fact there is a shift in leadership needs particular to the Millennial generation. The illustrations will only be used and cited as support in the dissertation, will be credited to Barna Group, and will only be published in the final product of the dissertation.

If agreeable, I would need written consent from Barna Group, which will also be included in the appendices of the dissertation, as well as PDF/JPEG copies of the illustrations. The illustrations would be very influential in the support of my argumentation.

Thank you for considering my request, and please feel free to contact me at the information below with any questions.

Brandi Ginty



APPENDIX C: BARNA GROUP PERMISSION GRANTED

Re: [External] Re: Requesting Copyright Permission

From: Barna Group <barnagroup@barna.org>
Sent: Wednesday, September 14, 2022 2:05 PM
To: Ginty, Brandi Lynn <[REDACTED]>
Cc: permissions@barna.com <permissions@barna.com>
Subject: [External] Re: Requesting Copyright Permission

You don't often get email from barnagroup@barna.org. [Learn why this is important](#)

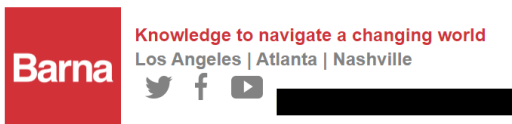
[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

Hello Brandi,

Thank you for reaching out!

It is okay to use our infographics (please see the attachments below).
We ask that you keep the Barna logo and properly reference our report.
You may consult our [permissions page](#), or as always reach out to us with any questions, for future permission requests.

Blessings with your dissertation!
The Barna Team



APPENDIX D: PERMISSION REQUEST FOR CHURCHES TO PARTICIPATE

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

Dear [Recipient],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate of education degree. The title of my research project is *The Influence of Transformational Leaders in Reconnecting the Millennial Generation to the Community of the Local Church*, and the purpose of my research is to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at [church name], and to utilize your membership list to recruit participants and to invite them to participate in my research study. Participants will be asked to complete the digital questionnaire attached to the following hyperlink [insert hyperlink]. If selected to participate in the study, participants will be contacted by phone or email to complete a 60-minute interview via Zoom. The interview will be video and audio recorded for the purpose of the research.

The data will be used to determine why some Millennials (born between 1984 and 1998) have chosen to remain connected to the local church, while statistics show that many are leaving the local church. This research will question Millennials who have served in volunteer leadership in their church for more than one year regarding their lived experience and their motivation for remaining connected. The purpose is to determine whether or not exposure to the influence of transformational leadership has had any influence on their decision to remain connected. Participants will be presented with informed consent information to sign prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Please note: While the final publication of the dissertation will be available to the church following the conclusion of this research, no personal information or responses from the participants collected during the study will be released to the churches.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval and email to the researcher's email address at [REDACTED]. A permission response document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Brandi L. Ginty

Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University



APPENDIX E: CHURCH PERMISSION RESPONSE TEMPLATE

[Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Company]

[Address 1]

[Address 2]

[Address 3]

Dear Brandi L. Ginty:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled *The Influence of Transformational Leaders in Reconnecting the Millennial Generation to the Community of the Local Church*, [I/we] have decided to grant you permission to access our membership list in order to contact our members that fit the criterion of your study and invite them to participate in your study. [I/we] have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at [church name].

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

We will provide a membership list of our members that fit the criterion of the study to Brandi L. Ginty, and Brandi L. Ginty may use the list to contact our members to invite them to participate in her research study.

We grant permission for Brandi L. Ginty to contact our church members ages 25-39 (born between 1984 and 1998) who have served in volunteer leadership for more than one year to invite them to participate in her research study.

We will not provide potential participant information to Brandi L. Ginty, but we agree to send her study information via an emailed invitation including the digital questionnaire to our church members ages 25-39 (born between 1984 and 1998) who have served in volunteer leadership for more than one year on her behalf.

The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of all identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before it is provided to the researcher.

We are requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

[Official's Name]

[Official's Title]

[Official's Company/Organization]

APPENDIX F: RESEARCH SUBJECT INVITATION EMAIL

[Date]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate of education degree. The title of my research project is *The Influence of Transformational Leaders in Reconnecting the Millennial Generation to the Community of the Local Church*, and the purpose of my research is to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

To take part in this study, participants must be classified as a member of the Millennial generation, born between 1984 and 1998, and they must also be a volunteer leader serving at their church for more than one year. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

- 1) Participate in an initial 60-minute audio and video recorded interview held via Zoom with both the researcher and a trained observer.
- 2) Complete a digital copy the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The MLQ ask participants to respond to 45 items using a 5-point behavioral scale (“Not at all” ranging to “Frequently if not always”). The MLQ test is estimated to take approximately 15 minutes to complete, but one can take as much time as is needed to complete the test.
- 3) Participate in a second audio and video recorded interview that will be conducted for 30 minutes via Zoom with both the researcher and a trained observer once the MLQ is complete.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. To participate, please click here on the following hyperlink [add hyperlink] that will take you to a brief online survey. It will take about 5 minutes to complete. Once you have completed the online questionnaire, the results will be sent digitally to the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to the results of the questionnaire. If you are selected for this study, you will be contacted by phone directly by the researcher. If you are not selected for this study, you will be notified by email from the researcher.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the online questionnaire. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document. By signing the consent form and completing the online questionnaire, you are consenting to taking part in the research. This consent form must be signed in order to take part in this research. A digital signature provided in the online consent form will suffice for your signature. After you have read the consent form, please click the next button to proceed to next page of the questionnaire. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Brandi L. Ginty

Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University



APPENDIX G: RESEARCH SUBJECT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: *The Influence of Transformational Leaders in Reconnecting the Millennial Generation to the Community of the Local Church*

Principal Investigator: Brandi L. Ginty, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be classified as a member of the Millennial generation, born between 1984 and 1998. You must also be a volunteer leader serving at your church for more than one year.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches. By understanding the phenomenon whereby some Millennials remain connected to the local church at the same time as so many are leaving the Church, church leaders will be able to determine whether some leadership styles are more adept than others at reaching the Millennial generation with the message of Christ. Such knowledge should inspire them to rise into leadership positions and take their place in their local churches' future leadership.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Agree to participate in a 60-minute, audio and video recorded interview held via Zoom with both the researcher and a trained observer.
2. Agree to complete a digital copy the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The MLQ ask participants to respond to 45 items using a 5-point behavioral scale (“Not at all” ranging to “Frequently if not always”). The MLQ test is estimated to take approximately 15 minutes to complete, but one can take as much time as is needed to complete the test.
3. Agree to participate in a second audio and video recorded interview that will be conducted for 30 minutes via Zoom with both the researcher and a trained observer once the MLQ is complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, benefits to society include the discovery of leadership methods that could impact the statistics regarding the connectivity between Millennials and the local church.

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 researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in 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 numeric codes assigned to identify participants without sharing their personal data.
- 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 external hard drive, and may be used in future presentations. All digital and hard copy files will be locked in a safe that only the researcher can access. After three years, all records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be audio and video recorded and then transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer and hard drive for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study after reading this consent form, please exit the online questionnaire by closing your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

If you choose to withdraw from the study after being selected to participate, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you 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 Brandi L. Ginty. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty supervisor, Dr. Jeffrey Davis at [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.

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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 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/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX H: SEMISTRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

This online screening questionnaire will include questions to identify research subjects based upon the selection criterion, including:

Please Note: If you are not selected for this study, all personal information will be deleted. If you are selected for this study, the confidentiality of all personal information will be maintained by assigning each research subject a numeric code. Throughout the study, all personal files will be password protected and only this researcher will have access to the files.

1. What is your full name?
2. What is your email address?
3. What is a phone number that you would like to be called at?
4. What is your age?
5. What year were you born?
6. What is the name of the church you attend?
7. How long have you been an attendee or member of your church?
8. What is your leadership capacity at your church?
9. What is the duration of your volunteer leadership service at the church?
10. Have you ever, or are you currently receiving mentoring by leadership in your role at the church?
11. If yes, what was or is the duration of your mentorship by leadership?
12. Has this leader had a positive impact on your life?

If you are selected for this study, you will be contacted by phone directly by this researcher. If you are not selected for this study, you will be notified by email from this researcher.

APPENDIX I: FIRST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions in the first interview process will include the following:

Interview Questions Pertaining to RQ1. *What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for deciding to remain connected to their local church community?*

1. What do you believe are the reasons that some Millennials (born between 1984-1998) have remained connected to the community of the local Church and become volunteer leaders?
2. Why have you chosen to remain connected to your local church?
3. In what ways do you connect to your local church?
4. What role does the church have in your Christian worship?
5. Why do you believe it is important to connect to your local church?
6. How do you believe it has benefited you to remain connected to the local church?
7. How does your church make you feel like you belong?
8. What efforts do you feel your church has made to help you create a connection with the community?

Interview Questions Pertaining to RQ2. *What are the reasons given by Millennials (individuals born between 1984-1998) for engaging in volunteer leadership in their local church?*

1. How long have you been an attendee or member of your church?
2. How are you currently serving your church?
3. Can you explain your leadership capacity at your church?
4. What is the duration of your volunteer leadership service at the church?
5. Why do you feel you need to serve your local church?
6. What role does serving the body have in your Christian worship?
7. Why do you believe that people your age should serve in the local church?
8. What do you believe are the benefits of serving in the local church?

Interview Questions Pertaining to RQ3. *Has the influence of transformational leadership on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders in the Millennial population resulted in a continued connected engagement with the local church?*

1. Do you think Millennials in the local church respond more effectively to a particular leadership style, and can you describe that style of leadership?
2. Have you ever interacted with a leader who made you feel motivated and inspired (inspirational motivation)?
3. Have you ever interacted with a leader who made you feel seen and valued (individualized consideration)?
4. Have you ever interacted with a leader who made you feel energized and empowered to lead (intellectual stimulation)?
5. Have you ever interacted with a leader who made you feel important and worth investing in (idealized influence)?
6. Have you ever interacted with a leader whose leadership made you feel transformed, simply by exposure to them?
7. Can you identify or name a transformational leader (someone who you believe has influenced transformational results or behavior) in your life?
8. Did this leader motivate or inspire you to remain connected to the community and leadership of the local church, and why did it encourage your decision?
9. Why do you think Millennials in the local church respond more effectively to these characteristics of transformational leaders (inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence)?
10. Do you believe more Millennials would remain connected to the local church if they had the opportunity to interact with transformational leaders?

APPENDIX J: SECOND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions in the second interview process will include the following:

1. On a scale from 1-5 (1 being poor and 5 being excellent), how would you describe your experience completing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)? Why?
2. After completing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), did you learn anything new about the transformational nature of the leader you identified?
3. Did you learn anything new about yourself after completing the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)?
4. Has this research process taught you anything new about your leadership needs?
5. Do you feel the leader you identified is properly meeting those leadership needs?
6. Is there any way they could improve as a leader?
7. What has this research process taught you about the impact of transformational leaders?
8. Has this research process inspired you in your own leadership capacity?
9. How has this research process added to your understanding of serving others?
10. What is your greatest personal takeaway from this experience?

APPENDIX K: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER MLQ EMAIL INVITATION

[Date]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate of education degree. The title of my research project is *The Influence of Transformational Leaders in Reconnecting the Millennial Generation to the Community of the Local Church*, and the purpose of my research is to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

To take part in this study, you must be a leader identified by one of the participants classified as a member of the Millennial generation, born between 1984 and 1998, and who is a volunteer leader serving at your church for more than one year. For the purpose of confidentiality, the personal information of the participant who identified you will not be released. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following: Agree to complete a digital copy the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, a tool used to confirm the presence of transformational leadership. The MLQ ask participants to respond to 45 items using a 5-point behavioral scale (“Not at all” ranging to “Frequently if not always”).

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. To participate, please click here on the following hyperlink [add hyperlink] that will take you to the online Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. The MLQ test is estimated to take approximately 15 minutes to complete, but one can take as much time as is needed to complete the test. Once you have completed the online MLQ, the results will be sent digitally to the researcher. Only the researcher will have access to the results of the MLQ.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document. By signing the consent form and completing the online MLQ, you are consenting to taking part in the research. Please sign the consent for and email to the researcher prior to completed the online MLQ. This consent form must be signed in order to take part in this research. The signed consent form can be emailed to the researcher at [REDACTED]

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Brandi L. Ginty
Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX L: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADER CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: *The Influence of Transformational Leaders in Reconnecting the Millennial Generation to the Community of the Local Church*

Principal Investigator: Brandi L. Ginty, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate in this portion of the research, you must be a leader identified by one of the participants classified as a member of the Millennial generation, born between 1984 and 1998, and who is a volunteer leader serving at your church for more than one year. For the purpose of confidentiality, the personal information of the participant who identified you will not be released.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the influence of transformational leaders on the lived experiences of volunteer leaders from the Millennial generation who have remained connected to the community of their respective local churches. By understanding the phenomenon whereby some Millennials remain connected to the local church at the same time as so many are leaving the Church, church leaders will be able to determine whether some leadership styles are more adept than others at reaching the Millennial generation with the message of Christ. Such knowledge should inspire them to rise into leadership positions and take their place in their local churches' future leadership.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

Agree to complete a digital copy the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, a tool used to confirm the presence of transformational leadership. The MLQ ask participants to respond to 45 items using a 5-point behavioral scale (“Not at all” ranging to “Frequently if not always”). The MLQ test is estimated to take approximately 15 minutes to complete, but one can take as much time as is needed to complete the test.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, benefits to society include the discovery of leadership methods that could impact the statistics regarding the connectivity between Millennials and the local church.

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 researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in 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 numeric codes assigned to identify subjects without sharing their personal data.
- Data, including the results from the MLQ, will be stored on a password-locked computer and external hard drive, and may be used in future presentations. All digital and hard copy files will be locked in a safe that only the researcher can access. After three years, all electronic and hard copy records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study after reading this consent form, please notify the researcher using the contact information below. Your information will not be recorded or included in the study.

If you choose to withdraw from the study after being selected to participate, please contact the researcher at the email address and/or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you 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 Brandi L. Ginty. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] and/or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty supervisor, Dr. Jeffrey Davis at [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.

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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/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name

Signature

APPENDIX M: MLQ LICENSE PERMISSION LETTER

For use by Brandi Ginty only. Received from Mind Garden, Inc. on February 15, 2023



www.mindgarden.com

To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

The three sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

**Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below.
Sample Items:**

As a leader

- I talk optimistically about the future.
- I spend time teaching and coaching.
- I avoid making decisions.

The person I am rating....

- Talks optimistically about the future.
- Spends time teaching and coaching.
- Avoids making decisions

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Sincerely,

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com

APPENDIX N: SAGE PUBLICATION PERMISSION GRANTED**brandiginty**

to Rights.Permissions ▾

3:01 PM (2 hours ago)



MaryAnn,

The information you requested is below:

Alvesson, M., & Skoldberg, K. (2000). *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi: Sage, p. 66.

The figure I am requesting to use is referred to as the "Hermeneutic Circle." A picture of the requested figure is attached for your reference.

Thank you!

Brandi Ginty

MaryAnn Price commented:

Dear Brandi,

Thank you for your ticket. I am pleased to report we can grant your request without a fee as part of your thesis or dissertation.

Please accept this email as permission for your request as detailed above. Permission is granted for the life of the edition on a non-exclusive basis, in the English language, throughout the world in all formats provided full citation is made to the original SAGE publication. Permission does not include any third-party material found within the work. Please contact us for any further usage of the material.

If you have any questions, or if we may be of further assistance, please let us know.

Kind Regards,

Mary Ann Price (*she/her*)
Senior Rights Coordinator

