NORTHWEST UNIVERSITY

18 TO 30 YEAR OLDS:
THE RELATIONSHIP GAP IN THE CHURCH

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my new daughter Elizabeth Hope and my wife Amy.

This project is also dedicated to my grandparents who made the decision to live with total surrender to the Lord.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend thanks to my wife Amy for her support through the past couple of years and especially through the last few months while I have been working on this project.

I would like to thank my parents for their teaching me that I can do anything I put my mind to and more than anything putting my hope and trust in the Lord.

I would like to thank my lead pastor, Devon Wood and the Board of Belfair Assembly of God for allowing me the opportunity to participate in the Missional Leadership Cohort at Northwest University, as well as their devotion in prayer and encouragement.

To the congregation of Belfair Assembly of God, your support and your generosity are unparalleled.

Thank you to my classmates in the Missional Leadership Cohort from Northwest University for your friendship and all that you add to my life and ministry. Bless you!

I would like to thank Dr. Joe Saggio. I know you have had to "go to bat" for me more than once. Thank you for your patience and your input into this project to help me realize my full potential.

I would finally like to thank the leadership at Northwest University for their investment in preparing men and women to "Carry the Call" through programs like the Missional Leadership Cohort. It has changed my life and my ministry forever

Abstract

This research project is a qualitative study that used a phenomenological approach to consider its primary research questions. Wildwood Community Church is the pseudonym for a church in rural western Washington and is the subject of this study. People between the ages of eighteen and thirty that have a history with Wildwood Community Church were the participants.

This study explores the experiences of people age eighteen to thirty have in attending Wildwood Community Church. The primary research questions are "what is their experience with being in a church setting and what causes them to stay or leave?" There were two sets of questions used with the realization that one set is needed for those who continue to attend and one set for those who no longer attend Wildwood Community Church. For Millennials who continue to attend Wildwood Community Church the supplemental questions: 1) What things attracted you to Wildwood Community Church at first? 2) What kind of experience have you had with WCC that fosters continued participation in WCC faith community? 3) Do you find fulfillment for your perceived needs at WCC? For those who no longer have affiliation with WCC, the supplemental questions were: 1) What things attracted you to Wildwood Community Church at first? 2) What experience did you have at Wildwood Community Church that resulted in strong enough feelings to outweigh the original attraction? 3) Do you find fulfillment of your perceived needs at the church you are presently at if you attend a church?

This project outlines a process of research to analyze the experience of Millennials and their experiences at Wildwood Community Church. Data was collected through eleven face-to-face interviews with eight females and 3 males. Four of the participants attend Wildwood Community Church only, three participants attend WCC as well as another church, and three no longer attend or have any affiliation with WCC.

The data collected from the participants in the study shows the significance of relationships and their influence on whether Millennials choose to attend WCC or not. Three spheres emerged from the data that specifically applies to WCC and may be of use in understanding relationships with Millennials in other establishments. The role of church programs, the role of peer relationships, and the role of relationships with leaders are all themes that emerged from the data as factors in reaching, engaging, and retaining Millennials at WCC.

These findings suggest that young people are looking to be where other young people are. Their absence from WCC however, is not related solely to differences among generations, but lack of authentic relationships primarily with leaders and secondarily with peers. While church programs play a role in facilitating relationships with leaders and peers, there must be an underlying comprehension of the importance of relationships. Therefore an active process to develop a broader leadership base through mentoring Millennials as well as readily involving members of the Millennial generation in substantive and meaningful roles.

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Abbreviations

DNA   Does not attend

MOPS   Mothers of Preschoolers

SFC   Secondary faith community

WCC   Wildwood Community Church

Introduction

Numerous church growth seminars have been given with the best intentions. The reader has probably heard of the "back door" being left open referring to the idea that people are coming to church, but not staying in any one location for very long.[1] Sustaining growth is of great concern to today's Church. Gordon McDonald has said, "You need to think about the fact that any church that has not turned its face toward the younger generation and the new challenges of reaching unchurched people in this world will simply cease to exist. We're not talking decades – we're talking just a few years."[2] Church attendance statistics among eighteen to thirty year olds clearly demonstrate that this is an area of strong concern.

The Barna Institute indicates sixty-one percent of today's young adults have been a part of a church and actively practiced faith at one point during their teen years but they are now "spiritually disengaged." They no longer actively attend church, read the Bible, or pray. The research shows only one-fifth of "twenty-somethings" have maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their experiences during high school. Another twenty percent of teens was never significantly reached by a Christian community and has remained disconnected from the Christian faith.[3] This idea does not escape the mainstream media as

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[1] Larry Osborne. *Sticky Church* Zondervan Publishing: Grand Rapids, MI. Larry Osborne Mobipocket reader format. Larry Osborne 2008 Loc.139-47.

[2] Gordon MacDonald. *Who Stole My Church?: What to Do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century.* Thomas Nelson: Nashville. Gordon MacDonald, 2007. P. viii.

[3] George Barna, Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years, September 11, 2006.http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-

indicated in an article published April 27, 2010 in USA Today. The headline reads "Young adults less devoted to Faith: Survey shows steady drift from church life." The article quotes the president of LifeWay Christian Resources; "the Millennial generation will see churches closing as quickly as GM dealerships."[4] Clearly, the relationship between those 18 to 30 years old and the Church is suffering as we watch sixty percent walk away from participation in a faith community and the remaining nineteen percent that still have not been adequately been reached by the Church.

Several questions emerge in this discussion. When it comes to those 18 to 30 years of age attempting to engage a Christian faith community, what is their experience? What is it about their experience that causes sixty percent of this age group to walk away from the church? What can be done to help this population re-engage with the local church? Further, what needs to happen to reach the final nineteen percent who have to this point not been adequately reached with the message of Jesus? To explore these questions and answers, this case study will focus on the experience of those eighteen to thirty years old who have attended or attend Wildwood Community Church (WCC). Wildwood Community Church[5] is a medium sized church in rural western Washington with an average attendance of 270 people. In a comparison of those who have stayed engaged with this specific faith community and those who have chosen to walk away from this local fellowship, we may find there is a common experience

gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years. Accessed October 28, 2010.

[4] Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Young Adults Less Devoted to Faith: Survey Shows Steady Drift From Church Life," *USA TODAY*, April 27, 2010.

[5] Wildwood Community Church is a pseudonym for a church in rural western Washington.

that will point to the importance of relationship between peers and relationship with those who serve in leadership at the local church level.

Literature Review

Definitions

Traditionally, generations have defining moments or events that often turn into labels for individuals born in proximity of that event. The boundaries for generations differ in many cases because there is disagreement on which is the most prominent defining moment, however the following date ranges for each generation are acceptable in most academic circles. The Greatest Generation consists of those who were born before 1928 and were responsible for fighting and winning World War II. The Silent generation refers to individuals born between 1928 and 1945, most noted for their conformity and civic instinct. Following the end of World War II, the United States population saw a spike in the birth rate, which came to an abrupt halt with the introduction of the birth control pill. This era from 1946 to 1964 gave us the Boomer generation. Originally, the next generation was labeled the Baby Bust, however those born between 1965 and 1980 became known as Generation X. The final group of people born in a generation that saw the turn of a millennium is of concern to us at present. They are people who are currently eighteen to thirty years old and account for more than 45.8 million people in the United States as of 2009.[6] Pew Research Center has labeled this young generation as "confident, connected, and open to change.

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[6] Millennials: a Portrait of Generation Next, February 24, 2010. http://pewresearch.org/millennials/ Accessed October 27, 2010.

TABLE 1

GENERATIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS: PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Year of Birth	Name	Current Age
Through1926	The Greatest Generation	84+
1927 to 1945	Silent	65 to 83
1946 to 1964	Boomers	46 to 64
1965 to 1980	Generation X	30 to 45
1981 to 1992	Millennials	18 to 29

Source: Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, eds., Millennials : A Portrait of Generation Next. (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Research Center, February 2010) 4, under "full report PDF," http://pewresearch.org/millennials/ (accessed November 9, 2010).

Common Characteristics of Generation X and Millennials

Despite their diversity of characteristics, Generation X and the Millennial generations have had similar influences that have shaped a worldview often found to be dissimilar to parents and grandparents.

- ◈ Both generations were born during times of radical change in society, politics, and economics.
- ◈ Both generations have seen the degradation of family unit.
- ◈ Products of both generations want relationships with adults.
- ◈ Both generations are interested in and want to be involved in global affairs.[7]

Not only were Generation X and the Millennials born into times of change but also they are still moving though very dynamic, life developmental events. As the reader can see from Table 2, a major shift that has taken place within the two generations from the Boomers is the racial diversity. The two generations share an almost identical demographic composition. The Caucasian population

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[7] Michael Thompson *Beyond Generation X: A Baby Boomer's View of Training Generation X and the Millennials for Ministry.* (Ann Arbor, MI 2002) 38-39.

experienced a sharp decline from the Boomer generation to Generation X at a

loss of 11 percent losing one more percentage point moving into the Millennial

generation. The Hispanic population raised 8 percent from Boomer to

Generation X, gaining another percentage point with the arrival of the Millennials.

These shifts echo global shifts in ethnic populations as the Hispanic population is

on a rapid increase.

TABLE 2
DIVERSITY OF ETHNICITY AMONG GENERATION X AND MILLENNIALS

	White	Hispanic	Black	Asian	Other
Boomers	73%	10%	11%	4%	2%
Generation X	62%	18%	12%	6%	2%
Millennials	61%	19%	13%	4%	2%

Source: Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, eds., Millennials: A Portrait of Generation Next.
(Washington, D.C.: The Pew Research Center, February 2010), 9, under "full
report PDF," http://pewresearch.org/millennials/ (accessed November 9, 2010).

Millennials (17%) and members of Generation X (15%) are more likely to

say that factors relating to behavior and lifestyle are more of a distinguishing

factor among generations. Boomers (14%) and members of the Silent

generation (18%) are more likely to identify differing historical experiences to be

a defining mark of their generations.[8]

Generation X (12%) and Millennials (24%) share the sense that the use of

technology is the primary distinction between their own generation and all the

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[8] Paul Taylor and Scott Keeter, eds., Millennials : A Portrait of Generation Next. (Washington,
D.C.: The Pew Research Center, February 2010), 14 under "full report PDF,"
http://pewresearch.org/millennials/ (accessed November 9, 2010).

others.[9] As an example of their technological identity, three-quarters of

Millennials and half of the Xers have created a profile on a social networking site

contrasted with 30% of Boomers and 6% of the Silent generation.[10]

Characteristics of Millennials

Millennials are quite different in traits from their predecessors the Xers.

Given the principles laid out by Howe & Strauss, Millennials will rebel against

Gen-X styles and attitudes, correct for Boomer excesses, and fill the role vacated

by those of the World War II generation.[11] Howe and Strauss quote Vincent

Shiraldi of the Justice Policy Institute:

> We like to let people in on a little secret. These
> kids are less likely to take drugs, less likely to assault
> somebody else, less likely to get pregnant, and more
> likely to believe in God.[12]

TABLE 3
CHARACTERISTICS OF MILLENNIALS
AS IDENTIFIED BY HOWE AND STRAUSS

- Close to parents
- Focused on grades and performance
- Intent on pursuing higher education
- Interested in interactive learning
- Insistent on secure, regulated environments
- Respectful of norms and institutions
- Verge on conformist thinking
- Less concerned about questions of ethnic and gender identity

Source: Neil Howe and William Strauss . *Millennials Go to College, Strategies for a New Generation on Campus: Recruiting and Admissions, Campus Life, and the Classroom 2nd Ed.* Life Coach Associates, 2007 38.

The Generation Gap

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[9] Ibid., 5.

[10] Ibid., 6

[11] Neil Howe and William Strauss. *Millennials Go to College, Strategies for a New Generation on Campus: Recruiting and Admissions, Campus Life, and the Classroom 2nd Ed.* Life Coach Associates, 2007, 21 -22.

[12] Ibid., 25.

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The Pew Research Center found in their 2010 study of Millennials that approximately seventy-nine percent of Americans acknowledge the existence of a generation gap. The reason for the perception of a generation gap is not necessarily centered around a difference of opinion or conflict, but more on the use of technology. Only a quarter of the people responding to Pew Research identified a big conflict between young and old.[13] Another noticeable difference in generations is the overall reaction to the condition of the United States. In 2010, forty-one percent of the Millennials are optimistic about the direction of the country while a smaller twenty-six percent of those thirty and older are pleased in spite of an economic recession, housing crises and a pair of wars being fought.[14] These differences between generations are obvious and expected, but how we deal with them is crucial as we look to be about the task of propagating the Gospel in our communities.

A Trend Toward Postmodernism

One of the differences between generations is the extent to which postmodern thought has had an effect on the culture of each generation. Within the millennial generation we see perhaps the most evidence of postmodern thought. Modernism says, "People no longer need to cling to superstitions or even biblical revelation because now, through empirical study and scientific rationalism, one could conclusively determine what was true and real."[15] As man pursues

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[13] Taylor and Keeter, 7.

[14] Ibid. 7-8.

[15] Graham Johnston. *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first Century Listeners.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001) 25.

knowledge and overcomes the problems that plague the human race, the world will become a better place. Postmodernism is "an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set."[16]

Both Thompson[17] and Long[18] agree that regardless of how one wishes to break down the generations, what is more important to identify is the difference between that of modern and post-modern worldviews. Long makes a mistake by labeling Generation X as the first fully postmodern generation however.[19] "It is how one views the world, what one values and thinks about life, that makes one postmodern, not because one falls into a certain age range."[20]

Creps helps shape the lens through which we should view postmodernism. "Modernity's hold on our culture has been weakened, and a postmodern shift has happened, but the latter has not swept away the former away by any means."[21] This should be a comfort to those who shudder at the idea of radical and deep change. This is a shift, that while it is in process, it is not an overnight event. Kimball reminds us that postmodern thought affected

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[16] Stanley J. Grenz. *A Primer on Postmodernism.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 12.

[17] Michael Thompson. *Beyond Generation X: A Baby Boomer's View of Training Generation X and the Millennials for Ministry.* (Ann Arbor, MI 2002), 4.

[18] Jimmy Long. *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching The Postmodern Generation.* (Downers Grove, IL., Intervarsity Press. 1997), 18.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations.* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing. 2003) 62.

[21] Earl Creps. "Moving Target: Reframing Discipleship for Postmoderns." *Enrichment* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 70.

architecture and writings as early as the 1930's and 1940's![22] Further, Creps

indicates that Postmodernism's impact is relative to the specific location of

discussion.[23]

Secondly, we need to change the way in which we try to understand

postmoderns. In the past, scholars and analysts have broken down

characteristics of postmodernism and postmoderns into a neat bulleted list, which

is a very "modern" approach. The result of understanding the "citizens" of this

community results in labels, which postmoderns dislike very much, and does very

little service to them or the Church as whole[24] As a matter of fact "the central trait

of this worldview is its lack of a central trait."[25] However, it seems that the core or

most radical thoughts of postmodernism is what has attracted the bulk of the

Church's attention. As a result, many in the middle have been misunderstood,

mistreated and turned off to the Good News of Jesus. Creps proposes "we

should think of individuals not so much as *postmoderns* but as *people* who have

been influenced by postmodernism in varying ways."[26]

Lastly Creps proposes we shift our understanding of the postmodern idea

from "absolute relativism" to "relative absolutist." It is a shift from the idea that

there is no truth, relativism, to the idea that "people have the right to choose

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[22] Kimball, 62.

[23] Creps, 70.

[24] Ibid., 71.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

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which truths are absolute for themselves – today." A friend of Creps describes this idea as "personal absolute truth."[27]

Postmodernism and the Millennial Response to the Church

While the Enlightenment touted the scientific method and the idea that relative certainty could be arrived at regarding just about any question, the postmodern viewpoint is more about the *process* or *journey*. Hear one blogger as he writes,

> A modern church would want to debate the issue, but an unspoken theme of the debate would be "We're going to end up with the 'right answer' after we're done talking about this, right?" I don't think we should discuss things that way. I don't think we need the "right answer," and I don't think we will ever be "done."" I think we need to recognize that since we all are human and flawed, our visions individually are limited, which is why we need not worry if we all cannot immediately come to agreement. Indeed, agreement on this issue may be impossible; the "right answer" might not even be possible to write down, just as writing down exactly what the trinity means might not even be possible. I also think that this isn't necessarily a bad thing. The process of searching is far more interesting than actually finding the "answer," especially if this "answer" doesn't even exist in a form that is humanly comprehensible.[28]

When it comes to Millennials, McDowell says that there will most likely not be a return to the Church by the Millennials for three reasons. One, "spiritual things and church aren't even in the top seven things they want out of life."[29] This is reflected in a recent survey of the Pew Research Center where Millennials place the importance of living a religious life (15%), behind being a good parent

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[27] Ibid. 72.

[28] sbryan "A Post-Modern Response." October 4, 2005 http://www.opensourcetheology.net/comment/1363 Accessed October 27, 2010.

[29] Jeanne Mayo, Josh McDowell, and Ron Luce "Capturing the Heart of Millennial Youth. *Enrichment* 6 no. 1 (Winter 2001): 10.

(52%), having a successful marriage (30%), helping others in need Owning a home (21%), and being in a successful career (15%).[30]

Secondly, McDowell says, they believe that education will adequately replace those who have abandoned them. McAllister shows the differences in his statement: "Boomers live to work, Xers work to live, Millennials live to know."[31] They will not rely on parents, not the church, but themselves to accomplish their own desired lifestyle.[32] Feinberg notes that as Millennials tend to marry later in life, they are used to dealing with challenges and difficulties that previous generations were not as likely to take on.[33] Yet relationships are very important, especially within the arena of the family. A survey conducted by Pew Research Center revealed sixty-three percent of Millennial Adult children view allowing their parent to live with them as a responsibility, if that is what the parents wish.[34] Pew Research has also shown that a majority of Millennials, (56%) either never or hardly ever have disagreements with parents. Perhaps the sense of abandonment contributes to the importance of relationships for Millennials given that thirty-one percent of Millennials surveyed have grown up in

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[30] Taylor and Keeter, 18.

[31] McAllister, 10.

[32] Jeanne Mayo, Josh McDowell, and Ron Luce "Capturing the Heart of Millennial Youth. *Enrichment* 6 no. 1 (winter 2001): 10.

[33] Margaret Feinberg, "What Twentysomethings Wish You Knew," *Enrichment* 14, no.3 (Summer 2009): 36.

[34] Taylor and Keeter, 16.

a single parent home and seven percent had neither parent residing in their home.[35]

Thirdly, it is a generation that lacks conviction. "Average Christian young people today know so little, not only what they believe, but why they believe it, that they're not speaking up."[36] In 2007, Barna Institute found that Millennials are in fact striving to figure out what they believe. Second to making a connection with God (45%), Millennials say they attend worship services to better understand what they believe (42%).[37] It is not so much that Millennials are relativists that believe there is not absolute truth, Millennials tend to be ones that believe very deeply their own truth with great conviction. Creps calls this a "compound spirituality."[38]

Implications of Postmodern Influence on Millennials for Ministry

There is an old proverb that says the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over again and again and expecting different results. With the tension that exists between the two worldviews of modernism and postmodernism, and the Millennials swimming in the ocean where the two collide, there are implications which the Church would do well to take note of as we attempt to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our world.

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[35] Ibid., 53.

[36] Jeanne Mayo, Josh McDowell, and Ron Luce "Capturing the Heart of Millennial Youth. *Enrichment* 6 no. 1 winter 2001 10.

[37] The Barna Group, Ltd. "What Teenagers Look for in a Church" October 8, 2007. http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/93-what-teenagers-look-for-in-a-church. Accessed October 27, 2010.

[38] Creps, 72.

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Kimball lists four important considerations, the first of which is "we cannot assume that everyone is going to learn, relate and think the same way."[39] Since the variety of experiences and beliefs are many and Millennials are so committed to their personal beliefs, the Church cannot limit itself to presenting the Gospel in a simple formulaic process as we have in the past, such as "the Four Spiritual laws" or the "Roman Road" or even a logical explanation of how an individual has violated God's law. While these methods have played an important role in evangelism, the Church needs new methodologies to supplement the old.

One necessary shift needing to occur is in the very philosophy of what evangelism and descipleship is. Evangelism as defined by Bishop William Temple is "to so present Jesus Chist in the power of the Holy Spirit that men might come to trust Him as Savior and serve Him as Lord in the fellowship of His church."[40] This process empowered by the Holy Spirit requires the Church to risk openness and vulnerability. Lingenfelter's insight to cross-cultural interactions applies well here. "Our cultural palaces are our prisons; in them we find comfort, security, meaning, and relationships. Yet the wall of culture restricts our freedom and sets barriers between us and others of different ethnic origin."[41] The context in which Lingenfelter is speaking is refering to crossing ethnic barriers, however his thought applies to crossing the gap between Millennials and traditional Christian culture. Those in the church culture find comfort, security, meaning and

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[39] Kimball, 63.

[40] Randy Hurst, "The Cycle of Evangelism and Discipleship: An Unending Process," *Enrichment* 13, no.1 (Winter 2008): 30.

[41] Sherwood Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission,* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1998) 20.

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relationships and it does indeed become our prison. The Church must ask, were a Millennial to enter the church building today would they find comfort, security, meaning and relationship? Based on Kinnaman and Lyons' findings, the answer is a resounding "no" in most cases.

In their work *UnChristian*, David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons relate how Millennials view the Church. Many of the Millennials they interviewed view themselves as "outsiders." The discussions with the outsiders revealed six themes that reveal how the Church really appears to this new generation. Four of those six themes apply directly to this conversation. The Church appears hypocritical and the outsiders are skeptical of the morally superior attitudes. Putting on a polished product does not help our cause, Millennials want something real and authentic. The second theme is that Christians are too focused on getting converts. People are not targets and when we take it upon ourselves to "get them saved," they question our motives. Third, Christians are known for being antihomosexual. It appears that the Christian stance against homosexuality is more about "curing" them and "leveraging political solutions against them." Christians also come across as sheltered, not able to or willing to deal with the complexities of life and reality. The Church is seen as too political, as if Christianity equaled being a Republican, it is driven too much by an agenda other than the Good News of Jesus. Lastly, the Church is seen as judgemental and Millennials doubt the Church really loves people like it says it does.[42] As

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[42] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books 2008) 29-30.

unpleasant as these characterizations are to take in, they nevertheless are how

the Church is percieved by Millennials in general.

Another mistake often made is to view evangelism and discipleship as two

separate functions of the Church. The Church must see evangelism and

discipleship as connected. In addition, tradition has made discipleship almost an

achievement-oriented expectation. History of discipleship would dictate that a

person be a learner, a worker, a committed person, a mentoree or belong to a

small group[43] If one could be classified into one of those catagories, they would

be considered a disciple. This is not what scripture has to say about discipleship

however.

> Jesus said that we are to make disciples of all
> nations, not to make disciples out of Christians. So
> the moment a person believes in Jesus and recieves
> eternal life, he becomes a disciple of Jesus.[44]

The process of making disciples then, again is to bring people to a place where

they will trust Jesus as their Lord. If they cannot trust Christ's representatives on

earth, how will they trust Christ Himself? Evangelism cannot then be merely a

ministry of the Church or one of the core values of the Church and its mission, it

"ecompasses all the Church does."[45] Further, it depends not on what we do, but

who we are and what our character is like. A shift must be made from a

programatic system toward an organic process of discipleship.

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[43] Michael J. Wilkins, "Disciple Making for Changing Times and Changing Churches," *Enrichment* 13, no.1 (Winter 2008): 42.

[44] Ibid. 43.

[45] Ibid.

Another key factor regarding sharing the gospel and making disciples is that "a non-believer must understand the significance of the decision to receive Christ's forgiveness and follow him."[46] Hurst's comments are within the context of "counting the cost," but Millennials also need to understand the significance of the positives of making a decision to make Jesus lord of their lives as well. This idea is supported from the business world as it relates to engaging, energizing and leading the Millennial generation. Leaders from the business world comment that Millennials are not apathetic, but indifferent. The millennial voice does not say "We don't care," it says "Give us a reason to care."[47] In other words, "What is the point of being a Christian?"

Second, Kimball contends "We cannot blame emerging generations for believeing what they believe."[48] Ten years ago, twenty-seven percent of eighteen to twenty-nine year olds attended church weekly.[49] Pew Research now indicates 18% of Millennials currently report attending religious services weekly or nearly weekly, compared with 26% of Boomers in the late 1970s. Each generation on record shows a decline in most areas of faith, we should only

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[46] Hurst, 31.

[47] Clark Severson, Mick Ukleja and Chip Espinoza, "Leading the Millennials," LeadershipTraq Website, iTunes media player video file 28:30, http://www.leadershiptraq.com/traqpod.rss(Accessed October 27, 2010).

[48] Kimball, 63.

[49] Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1999), 46.

expect that pattern to continue. This world, as Kimball points out, is the only

world that Millennials know.[50]

Third, in Kimball's list of considerations is "we should not expect

postmoderns to one day grow up and become modern."[51] Kimball quotes Dan

Allendar who spoke at the Willow Creek Leadership Summit in 2002.

> We are principle-oriented, linear, simplistically
> driven people who want answers so much more than
> we want the person of Jesus Christ. The dilemma is
> we now live in a postmodern world that does not
> embrace, and will never reembrace, some of the core
> values of modernism.[52]

If it is true that there are aspects of modernism that will never be embraced

again, then we can certainly not expect that one day those inclined to

postmodern thought will change their worldview

Kimball finishes his thoughts regarding implcations of postmodernism to

ministry with a couple important statements. "Modern leaders may have a

difficult time understanding post-Christian ministry."[53] Nevertheless the mission

of the church has not changed. We are called to reach the lost and make

disciples for Jesus Christ. "Our modern catagories and values just might need to

be rearranged if we want to reach emerging generations."[54] The theme that

comes to mind is adaptation. We have seen this very shift in the business world.

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[50] Kimball, 63.

[51] Ibid., 64.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 65.

While some resist dealing with characteristics of millennials now showing up in the work force, others are wanting to engage Millennials to unlock the full potential in this generation of interest. After all, they really are hard workers but with a different paradigm than previous generations. It has been said "Boomers lived to work, Millennials work to live."[55] Millennials need to be heard so business counsel to managers and leaders is make a way for Millennials to have a voice in their schedule, in decisions, and in the processes of the business.[56] It is not that Millennials need to have their way, they simply want to be heard and taken seriously.[57]

<center>Beyond Differences Toward Relationship</center>

Some would argue despite the great differences between generations and worldviews, it is possible to build relationships which are meaningful. Pehaps the best approach to exploring this idea is presented by Rich and Kathy Hicks in their book Boomers, Xers, and other Strangers. They say the three necessary ingredients to developing quality relationships are understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness.[58] Understanding in this context goes beyond a thorough comprehension of meaning, "it also involves having a sympathetic or tolerant attitude toward something or someone."[59] The authors here make the

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[55] Severson.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Rich and Kathy Hicks, Boomers, Xers, and Other Strangers: Understanding the Differences that Divide Us. (Wheaton, Il: Tyndale House, 1999) 322.

[59] Ibid.

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argument that when there is open communication it is easier to relate to each other.[60] Further, the more one understands the motivation or values of another, the less one is likely to "misconstrue the intentions of either and overreact or react inappropriately."[61] Another key to developing understanding is adjusting expectations to be more realistic. That is to have expectations based on an understanding of another, their motivations and their values.[62]

The second key presented by Hicks and Hicks is acceptance. Acceptance is the goal of the prior element, understanding.[63] To be clear, this does not mean that we must approve of what another believes or does, acceptance can be extended despite these things.[64] Nevertheless acceptance is a powerful tool in that it frees another from feeling like they have to discover what is required to be accepted and provides a feeling of security and value.[65] In a survey the authors conducted with 100,000 children, they discovered ten things children wished from their parents. Of the ten things children wish for, there are a number of desires that require parents acceptance of the children and may also require the acceptance of themselves or the other parent. Evidence children are looking for acceptance is found in their desire for equal treatment of family members, their desire for parents to tolerate others, and their friends to be welcomed into their

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 323.

[62] Ibid., 324.

[63] Ibid., 325-326.

[64] Ibid., 327.

[65] Ibid.

home, among others. These top ten things children wished for from their parents

are listed in the following table:

TABLE 4

WHAT CHILDREN WANT FROM THEIR PARENTS
ACCORDING TO RICH AND KATHY HICKS

- Parents who don't argue in front of them.
- Parents who treat each family member the same.
- Parents who are honest
- Parents who are tolerant of others
- Parents who welcome their friends to the home
- Parents who build team spirit with their children
- Parents who answer their questions
- Parents who give punishment when needed, but not in front of others, especially their friends
- Parents who concentrate on good points instead of weaknesses.
- Parents who are consistent

Source: Rich and Kathy Hicks *Boomers, Xers, and Other Strangers* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1999) 328

A further element to acceptance is trust and risk.[66] This is particularly true

given the need for participation that Millennials have. For example, if one is to

delegate responsibility to a Millennial, we need to offer trust that they will make

good decisions and give them the authority to see the thing through.[67] Even with

these elements in place, it will not be enough to sustain relationships invarriably.

This leads us to the final ingredient prescribed, forgiveness.

When our vlaues our different from one another, we can sometimes find

ourselves in hurtful exchanges of words and actions and thus the building of

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[66] Ibid., 329.

[67] Ibid.

barriers in relationship. Forgiveness is the only thing that can bring down those barriers.[68] Conflict always begins with an offense (person A does something person B does not like). Following the offense, there is an emotional reaction and the other person is hurt (person B feels hurt). Hurt becomes anger which is manifest through an attack on person A, by stiffling the anger and therefore build resentment, or by completely giving in to person A without resolution of the conflict.[69] Forgiveness actually has several key elements according to Rosberg.

If we are willing to forgive, we and those we are in relationship will experience the fruit of this wonderful process. Forgiveness sets us free, allows us to live in grace, and gives everyone a second chance.[70]

> Sometimes we need to accept who we are,
> gaining a more realistic picture of ourselves. (Some
> need to see themselves in a more positive light;
> others need to recognize their weaknesses more.)
> There also may be things we need to forgive
> ourselves for –failures, disappointments, not living up
> to our own standards, or having unrealistic
> expectations. Feel free to give yourself a dose of our
> key elements – understanding, acceptance, and
> forgiveness – to improve your relationship with
> yourself and others.[71]

Relationships: Key to Keeping and Developing the Next Generation

Margaret Feinberg has found in her research with people in their twenties a deep desire for relationship. The predominant struggle she found with both

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[68] Ibid., 330.

[69] Ibid., 331.

[70] Ibid., 333.

[71] Ibid., 334.

married and single individuals in their twenties was loneliness.[72] It is a desire of

young people to as Danah Boyd says, "find spaces where there are other young

people there."[73] Josh McDowell says of Millennials, "Relationships are the main

reason young people attend church for the first time. They come because their

friends invited them. But the only thing that will keep our young people in church

is relationships plus substance, or truth in context of relationships"[74] Reaching

the people of the Millennial generations will require intentionality, how we follow-

up and connect one person to another. Mayo notes that in her ministry at Cross

Current ministry if a newcomer is not connected to a small group within four

weeks of their first visit the probability of losing that individual increases by ten

percent.[75] This rate is almost equal with Willow Creek's small group experience:

> We learned that in some places the annual turnover
> was 10 percent. So if we hoped for 10 percent net
> growth, we would have to assimilate 20 percent more
> people into groups. If we could do a better job at
> retaining the 10 percent, we would not have to work
> ourselves into a frenzy trying to connect people.[76]

Searcy gives a quality framework to understand relationships and how

they are connected to Spiritual growth. There are four "spaces of spiritual

growth." First, there is the public space in which there is "little to no personal

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[72] Feinberg, 35.

[73] Judy Woodruff *Millennials, Media and Information: Experts on Media and Technology Examine How Millennials are seeking, sharing and creating information* February 24, 2010 12.

[74] Jeanne Mayo, Josh McDowell, and Ron Luce "Capturing the Heart of Millennial Youth. *Enrichment* 6 no. 1 winter 2001 10.

[75] Ibid., 11.

[76] Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson. *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) 209-210.

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interaction." Social space is then next area where we tend to grow spiritually. "This mode of social interaction will often have 5 to 20 people participate and is "most conducive for getting to know people. Examples would include the break room at work, event at church or a group of friends hanging out.

The third space is personal space where there are typically two to five people who are in this space. This space includes private conversations you would not want other people to hear. Last, Intimate space where there is only one other person in relationship with you in this area.

In this framework of "spaces" Searcy gives five truths regarding relationships. Truth number one, "We grow spiritually and connect with others in all four spaces." Each space is important, from church services to quality small group interaction, they all work toward our growth.

Truth number two, we need relationships in all four spaces. Searcy says "The goal is not to have balance in all four spaces, but to have harmony between the spaces. Thirdly, we must consider that "no one space is more important than the others"[77] The last two rules are the spaces are interrelated and connected together. Last rule is a there is a deficit of social space.

> Americans today have a deficit of social space.
> Of course we don't see this problem in High School
> and college. During those years, ready- made social
> spaces are all around us. But after graduation, we
> have a hard time finding safe social spaces where we
> can meet together with five to twenty peers.[78]

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[77] Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008) 23.

[78] Ibid.

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TABLE 5

THE FOUR SPACES OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Public Space	20 or more people	12 ft. apart	Church, Shopping Mall, concert, or sporting event
Social Space	5 to 20 people	4 to 12 ft. apart	Break room at work, fun event at church, hanging out with friends
Personal Space	2 to 5 people	18 in. to 4 ft.	Road trips, sitting on a park bench, conversation around a small coffee table
Intimate Space	1 person	Less than 18 in.	Romantic destinations, private dinners, personal communication

Source: Nelson Searcy. *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* Ventura, CA, 2008. 21-22

There are two major problems that Searcy discusses out of the deficiency of these relationships. The first problem he gives is because there is a "breakdown in our social relationships, we experience a breakdown in our personal and intimate relationships."[79] Without social relationships there is no well from which we can draw on a new friend for a personal relationship.

The second problem Searcy identifies is "because there are fewer safe places to socialize, we look to unsafe places to find those personal and intimate relationships we need."[80] Searcy closes this discussion of spaces and

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[79] Ibid., 24.

[80] Ibid.

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relationships saying, "People will settle for unhealthy relationships rather than have no relationships at all."[81]

The following are a few examples of how certain individuals or churches are communicating "truth in context of relationships." Jimmy Long's church by University of North Carolina Chapel Hill has a program called "Adopt-a-Student." In this program, families in the church "adopt" a university student into their lives, not necessarily to live with them, but to be involved in those special occasions where family would be together, such as the holidays or birthdays. The purpose is to link families and college students with one another."[82] The experience that most college students have is they are able to safely tell their story complete with struggles and victories. When we stop to listen to people's stories, we gain their permission to empathize with them. It doesn't matter what generation one comes from. If one is from Generation X, we can probably identify with some of their story. If we come from an older generation, then "we can share our own points of pain and a perspective of experience that only age can bring."[83]

Mentoring is a powerful tool for attracting, keeping and disciplining Postmodern Christians as well. Egeler states that they beauty and power of mentoring is "passing the baton to the next generation, who will then take it and hand it off to the generation behind it."[84] Granted, mentoring is a "relational

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Long. 53.

[83] Long. 54.

[84] Daniel Egeler, *Mentoring Millennials: Shaping the Next Generation.* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2003) 137.

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process" not a formulaic answer or quick fix to disciplining in these troubled times.[85] In fact Egeler himself discovered through mentoring, "that I needed to continue to risk establishing relational connections with Millennials, and then be ready for that moment when they are ready to respond with mutual attraction and a responsive heart."[86] While taking a risk to establish connections with Millennials is a part of mentoring, much more is involved. There are aspects of skill and personality that are important as well. There is not room for an exhaustive exploration of the topic of mentoring, the following provides a framework that shows there are a number of elements required to have a healthy, successful mentoring relationship.

TABLE 6

ELEMENTS OF MENTORING

SKILL	PERSONALITY
• Select Protégé carefully	• Warmth
• Be there	• Listen Actively
• Expect excellence	• Show Unconditional reward
• Affirmation	• Respect Privacy and Confidentiality
• Teach and Coach	• Tolerate Idealization
• Encourage and Support	• Embrace humor
• Shape behavior using reinforcement	• Do not expect perfection
• Counsel	• Attend to interpersonal cues
• Protect	• Be Trustworthy
• Self-disclose when appropriate	• Respect Values
• Intentionally Model	• Do not become jealous

Source: W. Brad Johnsons and Charles Ridley *The Elements of Mentoring* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008) 1 - 71

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[85] Ibid., 75.

[86] Ibid., 84.

Feinberg affirms that mentoring is not about a quick fix or necessarily providing answers. "We are not really asking for advice as much as we are hoping for a listening ear. We are also looking for people who will be honest about their own mistakes and misgivings."[87] That is good news for most people. Millennials are not looking for perfect people. Millennials are looking for friends. As we look beyond programs that develop relationships, the only way to find out what really "works" is to simply have a conversation with the very ones we are talking about

Research Question

The characteristics of the Millennials certainly do present challenges to the Church as it looks to move forward and continue to exist. One question that church leaders need to ask Millennials affiliated with the Church is what is their experience with being in a church setting and what causes them to stay or leave? More specifically in this case, we will be asking eighteen to thirty year olds what there experience has been at Wildwood Community Church (WCC) and how has that affected their church attendance and participation. For our purposes and for the sake of the identity of the church under scrutiny, Wildwood Community Church is a pseudonym for a church in Western Washington. A precipitating question from the primary investigation, should we find any trend of significance, is what can be done to reverse any negative trends discovered?

Methodology

Methodology and Rationale

This project is a qualitative study that employs a phenomenological research approach. Phenomenological research is a method that identifies the

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[87] Feinberg, 35.

essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants.[88] As we understand the experiences of Millennials with WCC, we will be able to establish principles that will help establish a philosophy of ministry to Millennials. The goal is to learn the story of a select group of Millennials. As their experiences make up their spiritual story, their experiences also form a framework of understanding social dynamics and provide insight into the activities of the church and any adjustments that may need to be made as WCC seeks to fulfill the great commission in its own community.

Sample

This method required interviews with individuals who are Millennials and who have at one time attended Wildwood Community Church and no longer attend or are Millennials who still attend WCC. In this investigation eleven Millennials were interviewed. The selection process was carried out by examination of a church database and identification of individuals that belonged to the Millennial generation based on age. Certainly, there is more than eleven Millennials who have attended WCC at least one time and are contained in the church database, however the sample does provides a cross-section of the Millennial population based on age, gender, various levels of participation at WCC and status of attendance. The researcher determined a qualitative approach with a phenomenological strategy of research would be the optimal approach for the goal is to "make interpretation of data, create and agenda for

88 John Cresswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 13.

change or reform and collaborate with participants."[89] The work done in this

presentation is particular to WCC and its community, therefore it must involve the

local people who have at one time been a part of the fellowship of Wildwood

Community Church *and* lived in the community. Secondly, since the problem is

inherently experiential we will only gain an appreciation for the experience of an

18 to 30 year old through their individual stories.

TABLE 7
PARTICIPANTS IN STUDY OF 18 TO 30 YEARS
AND THEIR EXPERIENCE AT WCC

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Current Attendance Status
Marguerite	30	Female	WCC
Kari	30	Female	WCC
Steven	27	Male	WCC
Larry	22	Male	WCC
Joe	30	Male	WCC
Sydney	18	Female	WCC & SFC
Jane	20	Female	WCC & SFC
Abby	20	Female	WCC & SFC
Monica	24	Female	DNA
Abigail	31	Female	DNA
Augustina	27	Female	DNA

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[89] Ibid. 17.

Instrumentation

This method required face-to-face interviews with individuals who currently have affiliation with Wildwood Community Church or who no longer attend WCC and may or may not attend another church. The data was gathered from a sample of eleven millennial individuals, people who are in the 18 to 30 year old age group. As the reader can see from Table 7, five of the participants currently attend WCC, three attend WCC and another church concurrently, and three do not attend WCC anymore. Of the three that do not attend WCC, one attends another church with similar doctrine, one attends a church of a different faith, and one does not attend any church.

After selecting the sample from the church database, the researcher contacted the individuals via email soliciting participation in the study and provided a consent form describing the nature of the study, extending an invitation to share their experience with WCC and giving assurance that their identities will be kept in confidence and that pseudonyms would be used.

Following the affirmative response of the eleven participants, the interviews were carried out individually in a local coffee shop between March 21, 2010 and March 31, 2010. Specific questions in the interview for those who have maintained a connection with WCC were; 1) What things attracted you to Wildwood Community Church at first? 2) What kind of experience have you had with WCC that fosters continued participation in WCC faith community? 3) Do you find fulfillment for your perceived needs at WCC? For those who no longer have affiliation with WCC, there was a second set of questions similar to the first however placed in proper context to the participants' status with WCC. The

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questions asked to this second group were; 1) What things attracted you to Wildwood Community Church at first? 2) What experience did you have at Wildwood Community Church that resulted in strong enough feelings to outweigh the original attraction? 3) Do you find fulfillment of your perceived needs at the church you are presently at if you attend a church? Answers to the questions of each group were recorded in a personal notebook and the notebook's contents were kept confidential.

Analysis and Validity

Data Analysis was carried out by searching for themes among the interviews carried out with these eleven individuals. The data examined was extracted from real life experiences of the Millennial interviewees. Because the nature of the data is experiential and subject to researcher interpretation, distribution of the initial draft of responses were made to each participant for their submitted experiences so as to not misrepresent or expose information without clear permission. Since the responses were from real experiences, the results will be of great significance to WCC's ministry efforts. By comparing data gained from 18 to 30 year olds that attend Wildwood Community Church and those in the same age range that do not attend any longer, we hope to be able to determine if relationships are truly key to having a quality ministry to this age group.

Limitations

Due to the small N utilized in the study and the fact that this study did not utilize random sampling techniques, the findings cannot be generalized to all churches. The study is limited to the experience of Millennials at a single church
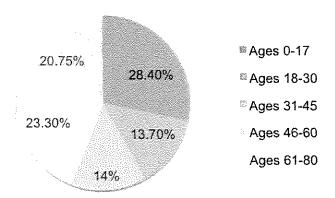
in western Washington. The localized information will be of special interest to the

local church as identified as WCC. The findings may have usefulness to other

churches that are dealing with similar difficulties in reaching and keeping

members of the millennial generation.

Data

As seen in Table 7, of the eleven participants, the researcher discovered a

third attendance status that was not originally considered in the structuring of the

study. The initial study only considered whether the individual interviewed

attended WCC or did not attend WCC. The third status that developed through

the course of the research was a secondary faith community attended by the

interviewee. A secondary faith community refers to a second church or church

affiliated group that is attended for the express purpose of connecting with fellow

Christians and spiritual growth.

FIGURE 1

PERCENTAGE OF ATTENDANCE OF WCC BASED ON CURRENT
INFORMATION IN CHURCH DIRECTORY PUBLISHED APRIL 1, 2010

20.75%

28.40%

23.30%

13.70%

14%

- Ages 0-17
- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-45
- Ages 46-60
- Ages 61-80

Eighteen to Thirty year olds attending WCC as their sole faith community
Marguerite

Marguerite is thirty years old and has been attending WCC for three years. She was initially attracted to the church because of the sense of authenticity in their worship. On a more practical and important note, she felt that her children were safe because of the structure in the children's ministry.

Marguerite has continued to be involved in a variety of ways at WCC. She has participated in the choir and worship team on Sunday mornings as well as helping teach the three to five year-olds on Wednesday evenings. Among her more recent involvement, she has served as a greeter. The afore mentioned roles as well as an appreciation for the relevance of the pastor's preaching and teaching have contributed to Marguerite continuing to be a part of the WCC community.

Marguerite's experience has not been without moments of tension with others in the church however. Marguerite shared that when she has encountered a conflict, her response has been to limit exposure to the source, whether it be a ministry of WCC or an individual, instead of completely disconnecting from WCC altogether. The first occurrence of conflict was a relational issue with friend and fellow parishioner regarding one of her children. Marguerite and her friend ultimately resolved differences in a manner that restored their relationship and to this day continue to worship alongside each other with no tension. The second issue is Marguerite identified was safety of her children in the children's ministry was compromised; therefore, she has had

to decrease her involvement so she can accompany her children in the main services when they attend.

Kari

Kari has attended WCC for nearly all her life. She is thirty years old and with the exception of her years in college, WCC is the only church she has ever known. Her realization of the attractiveness of WCC occurred to her the years she was in college out of state. The first attractive aspect of WCC to her was the sense of family, which manifests in a couple of ways. First, there was an affinity with the senior pastor. She developed a deep sense of appreciation for his leadership, his preaching, and his dedication to the people. The other sense of family is manifest in the accountability relationships she has developed with two couples over the years. Both couples have served on the church board as well as Sunday school teachers for adult classes and various other leadership positions. In addition, the first couple Kari connected with moved in 2005 for an employment opportunity in another city. The second couple started attending WCC in 2004 and has become her mentors in the absence of the first couple.

The second aspect of Kari's attraction to WCC was her ability to participate and serve in the church. Her involvement in the youth ministry at WCC encompassed the tenure of three youth pastors and two youth directors. Her early years were simply as a student in the youth ministry, however, upon her return from college she became involved as a youth leader where she continues to serve to this day.

Steven

Steven's experience with WCC began at the age of 10 years old; he is now 27 years old. When he became old enough to join the youth group at church, he had a positive experience through the transition, however it was short lived as the youth pastor at the time left WCC for a youth ministry position at another church. Following the youth pastor's departure, Steven quickly became disconnected from the rest of the youth group. From the ninth to the eleventh grade Steven recounts, "Back then I didn't really have many peers that I went to church with, and the ones that were there really lacked maturity. My school and my church were in different communities and we just had a change in youth pastors, so there wasn't really any accountability either." During his senior year of High School, WCC appointed a youth ministry director in lieu of hiring a new youth pastor. This new youth ministry director actively discipled Steven and developed a friendship. "He showed interest in what was going on with me. He even came to my graduation, which meant a lot to me."

Steven left his hometown and WCC to attend college in another state. Upon his return to the community and WCC following college, he reconnected with the youth ministry director. Given the foundation of the relationship established in the past, Steven quickly found himself in a role of limited responsibility of leadership in the youth ministry. His involvement was based more on relationship than a specified role. The key was to "be there for the kids." Other key elements to Steven continuing to attend WCC following college was that a good friend from high school years was attending and Steven also found the pastor's preaching style suited to his personality and spiritual needs.

Friendships and the Sunday morning experience, that is the preaching and the worship style continue to be main attraction points for Steven.

Currently Steven serves on the board as one of the youngest board members ever. As a young leader in the church he has heard comments regarding his young age, such as "Is he old enough to pray for my need?" His involvement with the board has been a very positive learning experience, which has taught him what it means to be a part of a unified group of leaders as well as a unified church. Further, he feels listened to by the pastor and peers.

When asked about the importance of relationships, Steven shared with me just how important they are to him. Steven sees the necessity for mentor relationships for himself. There are two mentoring relationships that have a more formal tone to them in a fellow board member and in the current lead pastor. These are relationships that carry with them expectations that are challenging, especially the expectation to weigh issues of church business in representation of the greater church body. Less formal mentoring relationships are found in two of the associate pastors on the ministry team of WCC.

In addition to being mentored, Steven sees himself not only as a leader but a mentor as well. There are three people that Steven feels that in an informal way he is a mentor. Each person that he is mentoring is in a different place in his or her spiritual walk; however, he feels that his influence is equally valuable in each individual's life. As Steven leads the college age group, he recognizes a "tension between what is needed and what is right."

Larry

Larry age twenty-two began attending WCC at age 12 with his mother. Several factors played into Larry's interest in personally continuing attendance at WCC. The initial event that facilitated an introduction to WCC was the church hosted "Heaven's Gates, Hell's Flames." It was at the special presentation that Larry's mother decided to make a decision to embrace a faith relationship with Christ. Larry, continued to come with her, although did not make the same decision right away. As he consistently attended with his mother, he observed that his friends who were Christians seemed happy, at least more than the average person. He also observed that the belief system was not as unreasonable as he had once thought. Further, Larry had a growing interest in the paranormal as well as dealing with the death of a loved one. All these things spurred Larry on to search for answers within this Christian faith community.

When Larry decided to become a Christian and be baptized, he had a key moment with the senior pastor at that time during a baptism class. Larry remarked during our discussion, "He made everything really understandable; he took the time to make sure I understood what I was doing being baptized. Because he did that I felt like I was more sure of being a Christian and it has made me stronger later on." As Larry has grown in his faith, he has also had opportunities that allow him to express his faith through involvement with the worship band where he plays the trombone and in the technical team where he runs the audio mixer in the sound booth. As for participating on the worship band it is "more than just entertainment but an opportunity to facilitate people to worship." Larry is more at home in the sound booth however. He feels he can

more effectively facilitate worship behind the scenes from the audio mixer. He feels like a key contributor to the congregation at large and is not up on the platform "on show."

Despite these positive aspects of his experience at WCC, Larry lives in the tension of participating in the big picture at WCC and at the same time says "it feels like I am wandering, there's nothing for me." For one, Larry feels that because of his special interests of video games and technology, he is somewhat marginalized. Further, Larry struggles with the approach that many seem to take when it comes to living out or expressing their faith with respect to Jesus. "Jesus has been made childish, we only really ever hear about Jesus in Children's ministries but then when you move on to youth the verbiage is more 'God' than Jesus. What we need is a church culture centered on Jesus, starting with adolescents."

Joe

The first time that Joe came to WCC, he was rather skeptical about fitting in. It was at the church barbeque that Joe felt like he started to connect. Those acquaintances were rather limited on flourishing into much more. A sustaining factor for Joe continuing to be a part of the church is that his children are happy and enjoy themselves.

Outside of the regard for his children's experience, Joe does not desire to connect on a deeper level to the community at WCC. There are multiple factors that are limiting Joe's acceptance and assimilation into the community. First, Joe finds connecting with the senior pastor very difficult. There is a perception of things being polished to the point of inauthenticity on the part of the senior

pastor, and that inauthenticity, from Joe's perspective, makes it difficult to feel like the senior pastor is being real in a personal conversation. "It's kind of the feeling like you are talking to a used car salesman." In addition to this perception of the leadership, there is also a feeling of being misunderstood as he voiced the "leadership needs to learn to read people's attitude well and respect where people are at and what they are going through, and don't be pushy about participation."

Eighteen to Thirty year olds attending WCC as a supplemental faith community
Sydney

Sydney is an eighteen year old who has attended Wildwood Community Church (WCC) since the middle of 2007. When Sydney first came to WCC, there were four aspects to the church community that resonated with her. Most notable to Sydney was the church's emphasis on prayer and the importance of the Bible. On a more personal level, she appreciated the accessibility of the lay leaders of the youth ministry as well as the Children's pastor. A final point of attraction for Sydney was the senior pastor's preaching.

During the past three years, Sydney has developed connections through her involvement with church ministries. Sydney currently serves on the youth ministry team as well as a group leader for a ministry designed to help children of addicts. These are roles that allow her to use knowledge and speak from her personal walk with God. Beyond her roles of responsibility, Sydney's connection to WCC is reinforced by the sense of community and openness she feels in the corporate setting, a positive worship experience, and the communication style of the current lead pastor. Finally, she has developed a deep appreciation for the

Youth ministry leadership in their stand toward breaking of cliques and establishing a sense of community as well as a shared desire for outreach to the community WCC is in.

Sydney does not solely attend WCC however. While to this point Sydney has had many positive experiences, there are also enough key factors missing where Sydney feels the need to attend a second church, which meets in a home. There are three reasons that bring Sydney to this decision. Sydney senses prayer is not an emphasis like it was in the past for WCC, whereas her passion for prayer has only increased. Secondly, there is a perceived lacking of opportunities for relationship building and strengthening within the church membership. Sydney feels the operation of the church seems to be more oriented toward sustaining programs than sustaining people in their spiritual life.

Jane

Jane is 20 years old and began attending WCC when she was 9. Originally, the attraction for her family was the quality of the children's ministry and the size of the church body. As a child, the greatest attractions to Jane were the Missionettes ministry, a ministry focused on discipling young girls until they are ready to enter into the youth ministry venue on a consistent basis. The best part of the group to Jane was simply the friends that she was able to be around. Another point of attraction for Jane was relationship she found with two leaders in particular. Both leaders connected with Jane during her years in the youth ministry. One was an adult leader who connected on many levels with Jane because of life experiences; the other leader is a member of the pastoral team at WCC. The primary connection between the two is in the interest of music. Both

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leaders took one-on-one time with Jane to work through struggles. Through these moments, Jane identifies both leaders as mentors.

A theme that describes Jane's journey with WCC is responsibility. Not because it was something that was added, but because it perpetuated a burden that she would bring with her to church each week. Her initial opportunity of experience came through children's ministry. Jane was not given a formal role with a job description, but the children's ministry director made a point to include Jane in preparation times for services and outreach events. Her later responsibility in the children's ministry at WCC has been to help take care of snacks at Vacation Bible School. As Jane entered into the youth group on a consistent basis, her sense of responsibility was ingrained enough that it diminished her felt need for peers. "It was as if every friend that I had, it was a friendship, but as a leader." Her involvement with the youth group and attendance to WCC came to an abrupt halt for a time. This was due to "people making assumptions about me and some of my so-called friends started rumors about me, then it seemed like everyone believed them. I know I didn't make it easy from some choices I may have made, but youth group and church for me became a very unsafe place for me. I would just get really mad."

Jane entered into what she calls her "lost phase." During this time she became a wife and a mother. She found things very difficult for a couple of years, however, she was able to maintain contact with a few women of WCC who were a part of Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), a group hosted at WCC. It was these women that were able to help her through those difficult times and ultimately reconnect her to WCC. She identified three main needs that are being

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met by being part of this group. The first need she sees being met through the group is comfort. Comfort in that the group meet apart from the stresses of home, school and even some aspects of "church life." Secondly, she has found quality friendships with women who are at a common place, that is, mothers of pre-schoolers. Thirdly, she finds practical help regarding issues the young and new mothers face with their children or on a broader level, family.

Jane is mostly content with how things are at WCC, but there are a couple of concerns that weigh on her. First, as she considers family members who are younger than she, the need for the teenagers of the church to have adequate tools to gain and maintain consistency in life. The need for tools to make better choices and to deal with the stresses that one encounters as a youth in today's world. Another concern or perhaps a need that Jane has is that she recognizes the need for leaders recognize "just how connected things and people are in church. There is also a need for leaders to be open to conversation and not be offended if we don't see things the same way as they [leaders] do. They've got to realize that what they do and say impacts others and can affect a person's everyday life."

Abby

Abby is twenty years old and has attended WCC for three years. When she first came to WCC, her initial attraction to the church was the senior pastor's preaching, which was "deep and meaningful." It did take some time for her to connect with other students in the youth ministry, but eventually was able to break through, in large part due to relationships built and developed with adult

leaders involved with youth ministry. There was enough connection that her family decided to stay because "the kids liked it."

After graduating in 2008, her most meaningful experience was volunteering with the Junior High youth ministry, where her responsibilities included developing relationships with Junior High girls, games for Jr. High services and often teach or lead a small group during breakout time. As life changed in areas of school and work for Abby, so did church life.

In part, the initial attractions for Abby were no longer relevant for her to remain attending. With respect to peers, she had never been able to completely relate to them, and now going through graduation, the number of peers has been drastically reduced. Abby relates "it just feels like I am in the middle, there's really no place to go that fits." Because of this lack of a peer group, Abby tried an age appropriate group at another church, where she had a good experience, but not good enough where she felt like her needs were going to be met. Another reason why Abby is attending other places of worship is because her family has found little support in times of great need from the leadership and fellow believers attending WCC. They did find friendship and support from friends that attend a house church however. Abby's family now attends part time at WCC and part time at a house church. Despite a partial disconnect from WCC, Abby maintains relationship with her past youth leaders who are now simply friends.

Eighteen to Thirty year olds who no longer attend WCC

Monica

Monica is a 24 year old who no longer attends WCC. She describes her generation, the Millennials, as diverse and outspoken. She says, "We are a generation of extremes. It seems like they really don't care or they are very passionate."

There are three things that originally attracted Monica to WCC. The first and foremost attraction is that a member of the pastoral staff was open and honest with her as well as a good listener. Monica felt as though this was someone she could safely open up and talk to. Secondly, Monica found a sense of community in the church, first in the music department, then eventually within the youth program as well. Lastly, she loved the traditional feel of the services at WCC.

Monica also had her share of struggles throughout her time at WCC. The first struggle that she encountered was with a few fellow students. As she attempted to establish relationships with students in the youth ministry, it seemed to her as if "everyone was wearing a mask, there seemed to be very little authenticity," she says. Despite these initial observations, and in part because of her difficult home-life, Monica sought out friendship and support from fellow students. She made an attempt to make friends by being open about her troubles, only to have that information be mishandled and misinterpreted. The consequences of information being handled poorly were hurt and emotional strain between her and her peers. At first, Monica simply dismissed this interaction as "not that bad." The mistreatment continued however, until it resulted in an overall sense of betrayal by her peers.

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A second struggle that Monica experienced was in her acceptance of how the church handled a particular discipline problem. The primary difficulty with the discipline problem is that there was no process of restoration enacted.

Monica also struggled with the teaching of the church. "It always seemed like 'here are the standards – now it's up to you to live up to them.' I think what is better is the way things are taught at the church where I go to now. The philosophy of our priest is 'here are the standards, let's learn how we can grow to become better.' There is more of an emphasis on becoming a better follower of Christ than trying to act like we have arrived."

In spite of differences and difficulties, Monica did make an effort to connect with the church and did find some ministries she was able to joyfully participate in. As a musician, she easily fit into the music department participating music ministry on and off the platform. Having a close relationship to the music pastors, she spent significant time helping them with preparation for Sunday morning services filing, organizing, and in some cases arranging music. She also participated in choir and had little trouble connecting with people in rehearsal settings.

Monica stayed involved through the end on high school and then moved out of town to attend college that belonged to the same fellowship as WCC. Relationships established with peers at WCC continued to be difficult despite Monica's efforts to repair them. Given the difficulties with WCC and the continued strained relationships, Monica began looking elsewhere for a church that would provide what she was looking for.

She eventually did find a church that met her needs at a local Catholic parish. Monica says there are three things in particular that captivated her with this new place of worship. One, "I agree with the general doctrine of the Catholic church. If you think about it, it goes back further in church history than any other doctrine. With that I also was so appreciative of the priest at our parish who took time to talk with me about the doctrines of the church." A second aspect of the Catholic Church that attracted Monica was the church's desire to problem solve for people in difficult situations and the opportunities that provided for other people to participate in ministry. Lastly, there is a sense of undying loyalty to the church members. After experiencing a community where she felt she could only trust a handful of individuals, it was refreshing to feel safe with not only the leadership of the Catholic church, but safe with its members, something she had not previously felt anywhere else.

Secondary to these attractions, Monica is encouraged that the population of the church has a desire to be relevant, even though they often struggle to do so, and is already multi-cultural, however realizes there are some difficulties they face as well:

> Out of 400 people that usually attend, about twenty
> percent of the congregation fits into the eighteen to
> thirty age group. While there are some of us there,
> we tend to stick with who we know. So if a family has
> been going there for a long time, someone who is
> eighteen to thirty is more likely to hang out with their
> parents than connect with someone their own age
> that they might not know as well

This inward focus has presented the problem of making and developing relationships outside the church. A final difficulty that Monica identifies is the

struggle of keeping current with worship music. Given these difficulties, Monica observes, "One thing I really appreciate about the church we are at now is they look at salvation as a process or a journey, not a destination or a list of standards you now have to live up to."

Abigail

Abigail recently turned 31 and no longer attends WCC. She has been attending a different Assembly of God church for the previous six years. As a child, she grew up with a Catholic influence and her family was consistent in church attendance until 1988. The church they were attending at the time became overly focused on money and so the family simply stopped going to church. In 1993 a friend invited Abigail to church at WCC, where she quickly connected with the youth pastor and other kids in the youth ministry. "The youth pastor had an unconditional love for the students, it didn't matter who you were, you were important to him and he made you feel that way."

Her relationship with the youth pastor and other students in the youth ministry were not the only meaningful elements that were attractive to Abigail. "We did some pretty amazing things together. The one thing that made the greatest impact in me was when our Youth Pastor took us on a mission trip to Australia. I developed a passion for God and ministry because of his leadership and being willing to take us."

Shortly after this youth pastor left, a new one was hired, and it was in the short period where the initial attraction for Abigail began to wear away. She cites two reasons for her feelings. "He did things different and the attitude kind of became 'us' and 'them.' It always felt like we were excluded from the rest of the

church and what they were doing. The other thing that I noticed, and I know it wasn't just me that noticed, but our youth pastor didn't get the same support or "buy-in" from the rest of the church leadership like the last youth pastor did. And since the leadership didn't support the new youth pastor and his ministry, neither did the rest of the church."

Despite the tarnished attractions, in 1997 Abigail joined the youth ministry team with a third youth pastor with the hopes that things would be different this time. Things were more positive this time as they had a more mature youth pastor who also served as the associate pastor as well. Abigail found other areas of involvement besides youth ministry. She also participated in helping with Vacation Bible School (VBS) registration and puppet team ministering to children. In 1998, Abigail also participated in a dramatic role in "Heaven's Gates, Hells Flames" hosted by WCC.

While things were at least stabilized with a new youth pastor, Abigail observed there was still a lack of "buy-in" from the senior pastor not so much this time to the youth pastor himself, but the youth ministry in general. "There was just not the same investment in us that there was when our first youth pastor was there." She notes that this became obvious to other classmates and by the time she graduated, there was no place and no one to connect to that were her own age. At the same time Abigail is experiencing this decline among her peers, she also observed over time that the church had become stagnant. "The messages that were being preached were good, our senior pastor was a good preacher, but it was like the messages that were being preached were either answering questions that were not being asked or there wasn't a clear connection as to how

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the truth of the message connected to my life." The other thing that Abigail noted was that things had become very predictable and stale.

Abigail now attends another Assemblies of God church in a nearby town where she feels each of her needs and concerns are more than adequately met. The first need that has been met for Abigail is the development of friendships. "I feel like I have a relationship with the lead pastor just because of his authenticity and the style he communicates with. And I think that has just carried over to the people of the church because everyone is so welcoming." The other attractive element of her current church is the growth that is continually happening. "Our theme is 'On the Mission.' In fact pastor is teaching a series right now called, "People becoming the church." Not only is her church holding multiple services in their primary location, they are planting churches in outlying communities. She attends a church where the environment promotes personal communication and participation that provides an explanation for why they do what the do. "People are searching for and want answers and it's up to the church to provide those answers. And people are simple and want simplicity not a show where they can be entertained."

Augustina

Augustina is 27 years old and has not attended WCC since 2001. Her connection to WCC began when she was five years old. She consistently attended and participated in church activities through her senior year in high school. She participated in the Missionette program, a ministry designed for young girls up to the age of High school. She was faithful in helping anyway she could. She would show up early and help set up, she would stay late and clean

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up from the meeting. She was diligent in the studies of the program and achieved the highest honor in becoming an "Honor Star." She went on to participate faithfully in the youth ministry program and continued to show up early to set up and stayed late to clean up:

> I went to Bible study each week, if there was a prayer
> meeting I was there, I went every Wednesday to
> youth group, there was an activity each month – I
> made sure I went, I made it to every camp that our
> group went to, and when all is said and done I only
> had a couple of authentic friends.

Augustina was able to find mentor relationships with the youth pastor and the music pastor's wife who led the youth worship band. Having a mentor relationship was very meaningful to Augustina and fostered the idea that she, as an older high school student, could be a mentor to a younger high school student. However, it turned out to be a negative experience where there was conflict between Augustina and the younger student and ultimately a ruined relationship.

Following High School, Augustina went to an out of state secular college majoring in philosophy. In her extra curricular activities, she attempted to stay involved with other Christian college students by attending organized fellowship meetings. In fact many of the behaviors she displayed in her home town, showing up for every Bible study, every prayer meeting, went on every outing but only yielded very similar outcomes. Experiencing great frustration with relationships, she began to discover she had more authentic relationships with people that were either not followers of Jesus and professed no particular religious faith or were members of the Catholic Church.

> I was trying to live as a Christian and grew up
> successfully in that environment because I was really
> good at following rules, but then when I was faced
> with real issues in the real world, those rules didn't
> work very well anymore. Rules don't meet people
> where they're at and help them heal, they just make
> the wounds worse.

When questions of identity confronted Augustina, her church experiences didn't adequately address how she could deal with questions in a healthy manner. Her cries for help "fell on deaf ears" even within the Christian college student atmosphere. Fellow believers "came across as fanatics with their rules and morals and didn't help at all." Looking at her experiences through late high school and college, Augustina says,

> People that are leaders in the church need to think
> about the consequences of action and inaction and
> realize their choice can affect great loss and hurt. If
> they would just think about others before they do or
> say something, a whole lot of pain could be avoided.

Analysis

The goal of this qualitative study is to glean patterns or thoughts from individuals' experiences and point toward resolution of a problem reaching and keeping Millennials engaged in the local faith community of WCC. "Data analysis involves collecting open-ended data, based on asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by the participants."[90] To do so, the researcher underwent a process of reading and coding the data by

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[90] Creswell, 184,

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hand to isolate themes and descriptions for the purposes of interpreting their meanings.[91] From the data collected from the eleven Millennials, three main spheres developed. The first sphere is in regard to programs, what role they have, if any on the determination if a Millennial would leave or remain at WCC. The second sphere relates to the importance of peer relationships and the role they have played in the participant's lives. The final sphere is the importance of relationships with those in leadership roles of varying degrees.

The Role of Programs in Attracting and Keeping Millennials

Upon the examination of data provided by the participants of this study, it appears that programs play a strong role in attracting Millennials. Every individual interview indicated that at least one program at WCC played a role in attracting them initially. The dominant program attracting the young people is the Youth program being a key component for eight of eleven interviewees. Boyd indicates "young people are looking for spaces where there are other young people."[92] It only makes sense that the youth program would be a key program to draw other young people.

The second program that seems to play a large role is the children's ministry. There are several different avenues within the realm of children's ministry that have been an attraction to Millennials. The first way this program is attractive to Millennials is that it is a place where the children of Millennials can grow spiritually. This is reinforced by the idea that the primary concern for

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Woodruff, 12.

Millennials is to be good parents (52%), more than all the other priorities Millennials may express.[93] They want to know their kid is in a safe environment and that clear instruction is given. Note, when things started not going well and there was at the very least, a perception that the environment in children's ministry is somehow not safe, Marguerite took her children out of participation with their peers and reduced her own participation in other programs to care for her children.

Another reason why Children's ministry is a draw for Millennials is it appears to be a place where they can participate with some responsibility. Five of the eleven interviewees were involved with some kind of responsibility within children's ministry. Involvement ranged from planning and coordinating to simply providing support in the area of snacks at Vacation Bible School. This finding is somewhat reflective of the need Millennials have to participate in areas of responsibility. The advice given to business establishments attempting to engage Millennials is to allow them a voice regarding their schedule and other decisions in the carrying out of business.[94] Likewise, Millennials here are not wishing to be in charge, but to be involved and have a voice in the direction of Children's ministry at WCC.

Lastly, Children's ministry is the second most prominent program for engaging Millennials because it has provided space for relationship with peers. Two people interviews indicated that when they started attending WCC, that connection with other kids their age were among top priorities. Jane recalls that

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[93] Taylor and Keeter, 18.

[94] Severson.

being with her peers on Wednesday in Missionettes was the best part of the evening. For Augustina, programs such as children's ministry have been integral in her early spiritual walk.

Another ministry of WCC that is responsible for attracting Millennials is the music department. This reflects the creative tendencies of the Millennial generation and their desire to express their faith.

Despite the positive aspects of having programs that relate to and connect Millennials, churches of all shapes and sizes are not without difficulties. Despite the heavy involvement of Augustina in children's and youth programs, Abigail in youth, VBS, and outreach events, and Monica's involvement in youth and music ministries, these three did not stay. There were some negative factors that come in to the discussion regarding programs.

Sydney makes the observation that the operation of the church seems to be more oriented toward sustaining programs than sustaining people in their spiritual life. Augustina's experience a few years prior resonates with that sentiment. While Augustina invested a large amount of time and effort into being a part of these programs, she found at the end of the experience she had no close friendship relationships within the church. Jane had a similar experience with respect to finding she had only a few friends because of her responsibility that evidently is overwhelming. Sydney now finds there seems to be no place or opportunities for relationship building and strengthening. Larry too relates a sense of wandering as it relates to his belonging to WCC. "There's nothing for me." Even with a diverse offering of programs which all subjects were engaged

with, six of the eleven did not get their needs met in a way that would keep them committed to WCC wholeheartedly.

The Importance of Peer Relationships

Only one of the participants identified peers as an attraction when they first started attending WCC. Even though she was a child Jane said the best part of the group, Missionettes, was the friends she was able to be around. Jane also currently finds peer relationships as very strong and important within the context of MOPS and is an important part of her belonging to WCC.

There is an identifiable reliance on peer relationships as it relates to connection within the faith community. Proverbs 27:17 tells us "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." Scripture tells us we need each other to grow and so our spiritual walk, when authentic can be very attractive. For Jane this is a reality, not just in spiritual matters, but also in practical, everyday life issues. By her involvement with MOPS where she is amongst peers, is gains valuable tools for coping with life issues such as raising a child, financial insight, or even health issues.

Peers not only provide valuable resources to areas of practical growth, but are able to provide an environment that is attractive to Millennials, not by their mere numbers, but by their actions. Authenticity was one of the first things that Marguerite noticed about the people at WCC. The people were authentic in their worship. Even though the relationship was very "public space," it was impactful enough that it caused Marguerite to want to become part of the community.

Matters are different when we discuss the negative influence of peer relationships however. The negative aspects fall into two areas. One, there was

actually a damaged relationship or relationships. The other area as it relates to peers is simply lack of population with respect to Millennials at WCC.

Three of the four relationship rifts could be described as the participants having lost trust with a peer. For two of the three, Jane and Monica, trust was lost because information was mishandled by a peer, which resulted in harmful rumors. Marguerite lost trust for a short time with a peer because her children were at the center of the conflict. Augustina had a negative experience with a peer because she attempted to take on the responsibility of mentoring without the proper frame work. Of the four who have had conflict with peers, two have decided to no longer affiliate with WCC. The other two are finding their way back into greater participation. As they reconnect, they are choosing to be involved in areas that are different from their prior involvement. In some sense this is positive in that their experience at WCC involves more people as they attempt to grow spiritually. In another sense this is a difficult thing because as per Rosberg's conflict process the danger of never closing the conflict loop remains.

As we look at the data through the framework provided by Searcy, it is troubling to see the attempt by Millennials to develop personal relationships only to have the social space disturbed by the mishandling of personal information. One can extrapolate, with such continued behavior within the peer group that the social space will be perceived as unsafe, therefore at the very least hindering personal relationships. Without the ability to develop personal relationships, the youth ministry will remain relationally shallow among peers, and individuals will look elsewhere for close relationships. We have already seen this phenomenon occur slightly with Jane and Abby, and fully manifest with Monica, and Augustina.

The other aspect in which there are negative issues as it relates to peers is three of the eleven said their difficulty in attendance was that there was simply not a significant enough showing of peers. The Millennial population is simply not around, or at least visible to their own. Here too, as we consider Searcy's framework, if there is not a sufficient grouping to provide a social space, then it will be difficult to provide quality personal relationships within the peer group of Millennials at WCC. Based on this model of "spaces," it appears that Larry and Abby, who's sentiment is that there is no place to belong, with respect to peers will either live in an unhappy tension or will follow the path of Abigail and look elsewhere to relieve that tension and meet the need for others in the same age group. Perhaps technology and social networking would play an important role in keeping individuals who feel marginalized, connected.

The Importance of Relationship with Leaders

Relationship with a member of the pastoral staff at WCC has proved to be one of the most prominent reasons why Millennials connect with WCC. Two of the participants said that they were impacted through relationship with the senior pastor. Seven of the eleven cited significant relationships with pastoral staff members of WCC. This is in harmony with the idea that Millennials want relationships with adults.[95] In each case where there is a significant relationship with a leader, you will also find to a degree, participation or cooperation in leadership, which resonates with the desire Millennials have for interactive

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[95] Thompson 38-39.

learning as well as a pursuit of greater knowledge.[96] It seems that mentoring, in an informal way, is a keystone to connecting Millennials to WCC.

Involvement with a leader does not merely mean that the relationship is only within context of the church organization, it extends to events of life such as Steven's graduation or Abigail's participation in a missions trip abroad. Meaningful relationships with leaders happen in the coffee shop when Jane needs a listening ear or wise counsel when Kari needs to make a major life decision.

Lest it seem like Millennials are only looking for understanding and to be listened to, there is also a desire to perform. That is, to have challenges and expectations to live up to. Steven has found this especially with his involvement with on the church board. This can be found in personal expressions in what it means to be a leader, and it can also mean performing to a high level as they contribute service for the greater congregation, as Larry does in the technical booth for Sunday services.

Millennials, at least in the case of those at WCC are looking for a degree of accountability as well. Lack of accountability discouraged deeper participation by Steven. Further, accountability and mentoring perhaps would have led to proper handling of information as it relates to Jane and Monica.

Based on the data, Millennials at WCC also have a need to be led spiritually not only in their journey with God, but with each other. In the case of WCC, it is apparent that the Millennials of our study are focused more on learning about Jesus and growing closer to Him than observing the traditions of

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[96] Howe 38.

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the church. Larry expressed how he sees the importance of leaders talking about Jesus. Noting a mindset where it seems traditionally that Jesus is seen as a character that is discussed more in Children's church and the adults talk more about 'God.' Not only is there a desire for leadership to effectively communicate what it is to know God in the fullest sense, but there is a desire to be led in developing a relationship through prayer, where one not only talks to God, but listens to Him as well.

Not that there is any one particular answer Millennials are looking for, as the blogging Millennial identified as sbryan indicated, the process or journey is more important than arriving at the answers. Monica communicated the appreciation she had for her priest as he walked with her through figuring out what she believed and how that lines up with church doctrine. This sentiment is consistent with Barna's research showing forty-two percent of Millennials interviewed said they attend worship services to better understand what they believe.[97]

The need for Spiritual leadership seems to reach beyond the need for learning about God and discovering what we believe about him, to how we relate to each other and life, in light of Scripture. Larry, Sydney, Abby and Abigail all mentioned either feeling like they have no place or identifying that there is no place for people of their age to connect and develop relationship. It appears that often the way to developing relationship with others comes through the developing of relationship with a leader at some level in the church. This was the

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[97] The Barna Group, Ltd. "What Teenagers Look for in a Church" October 8, 2007. http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/93-what-teenagers-look-for-in-a-church. Accessed October 27, 2010.

case for Sydney, Abby and Monica. The difficulty lies in Searcy's "social space" as he indicated is the norm. If in fact there is only room for five to twenty people in our "social space" according to Searcy and WCC has limited leaders that are interested in letting people into that social space, the results are an upside down availability of social space and thus WCC will be limited as to how many people will be able to enter into relationship with others.

Fortunately being a leader does not mean a member of the pastoral staff of WCC. Leaders Kari has connected with have served as or are serving as board members. She sees that relationship as a mentoring relationship, where she finds accountability for life decisions, but also a listening ear. This is a confirmed characteristic of Millennials per Feinberg, Millennials are not asking for advice, and at the same time are seeking input, especially from life experiences of the older generations.

A surprising note regarding the data collected is that not one individual talked about technology as a barrier with being able to connect to the congregation at large. Nevertheless, much of the literature indicates technology is a way of life and an expected part of every significant experience in life.

Implications

The first implication from the collected data is many young people are looking to be where other young people are. This is precisely what Boyd said earlier in relation to discussing the importance of relationships.[98] Given nearly half the participants encountered relationship problems that hindered further

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[98] Woodruff, 12.

involvement and in some cases resulted in individuals leaving, Millennials need guidance in what it is to have healthy relationships.

In order to maintain those relationships and create new ones, there needs to be strong leadership that is open to mentoring members of the Millennial generation. This may be accomplished through programs which already exist, however, the leadership of WCC must understand that people may choose to end their relationship with WCC if they experience conflict in one or more of their relationships with members of the church.

Leadership must undergo the process of developing an understanding of the importance of relationship within the pastoral team and the congregation. There are many ways in which this may be accomplished; teaching, preaching, conversations, and modeling to list a few. Further, this understanding must be accompanied by tools which help members to create, sustain and grow relationships. Tools such as conflict resolution models, mentoring techniques, and simple understanding of our relationship "spaces," would all be helpful in this endeavor at WCC.

Lastly, current leadership of WCC needs to create space for and train more leaders in ministry opportunities no matter what generation they may come from. One the one hand, members of the older generation need to be brought into places of leadership with training, since it seems that leaders are the gateway for developing relationship with peers. In addition, there is already a lifetime of experiences that will be invaluable in establishing mentoring relationships with those of the Millennial generation and younger. On the other hand, it will be highly beneficial in keeping Millennials. Millennials will appreciate

the inclusion in the decision process and leadership responsibilities currently available and in the future.

This study does present some questions that would require further study:

- What is the experience of individuals 18 to 30 in a church placed in an urban setting?

- How do the needs between Millennial males and Millennial females differ, if at all, as it relates to the Church?

- How does keeping Millennials in the Church differ from keeping Millennials in a corporate setting?

- Are relationships as important in keeping members of other generations engaged in a faith community?

- What, if any, are the differences in the experiences of Millennials "of color" versus Anglos within the church in terms of their ability to engage the community of faith?

Conclusion

While the Church faces many challenges today, one of the major issues is sustaining ministry to the Millennial generation. There has been a tendency to cite generational differences as the central cause of disunity inside and outside the Church. As it relates directly to ministry at WCC, it appears that this is not the case, true issue lies deeper than mere generational differences. Instead of a generational gap, it appears that there is a relationship gap among the people where the generational gap is a factor, but not the sole issue. The relationship gap occurs when our expectations or views become more important than the individual we are connected to. This happens not simply across generational lines, but also within each generation without exception.

When it comes to church ministry, the pattern is often to develop programs that provide an environment best suited for reaching, keeping and teaching

people based on their age. The argument here is not to simply abandon the idea of age related ministry, but to advocate for a structure which includes age related programs as part of a overall understanding that relationship is more important than the programs we seek develop, sustain and grow. Relationships are more important than sustaining programs. If WCC as a church fail to make relationship a priority over our programs, we risk of losing our voice to the Millennial generation.

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Appendix

Appendix 1:Face-to-Face Interview Informed Consent Form

Consent form: 18 to 30 year olds: the relationship Gap in the Church

I am conducting research on the experience of 18 to 30 year olds at Wildwood Community Church and its connection with their disproportionately small representation in the congregation. If you decide to participate in this study you will be interviewed and given opportunity to tell about your experience at Belfair Assembly and how it has led to you a decision to either continue worshiping at Belfair Assembly or worship elsewhere. This experiment will last approximately two months.

This study involves the possible discomfort of discussing difficult times and damaged relationships and personal preferences. All your responses will be kept in confidences as no real names or identities will be used. If you choose to take part in this study you will benefit by being able to voice your experience and opinion on matters relating to your age group as well as help the staff to make better decisions as ministry plans are made for the 18 to 30 year old age group. Taking part in this experiment is up to you, and you will not be penalized in any way if you choose not to participate. If you do take part, you may stop at any time. This project has been approved by the Human Subjects Review Board at Northwest University.

If you have any questions or comments about this study please contact me at (360)509-6868 or Dr. Kevin Leach who serves as the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board at 425-889-5248

You will receive a copy of the form.

Sincerely,
Rev. Tyson deVries
Associate Pastor
Belfair Assembly of God

I agree to take part in this project. I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time.

_____   _____

Signature   Date