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BETHEL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
BETHEL UNIVERSITY

TO BE CHURCHED OR UNCHURCHED:
THE MILLENNIAL'S DILEMMA

A THESIS PROJECT REPORT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE

BY
ROBERT J. PHILLIPS
ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA
JUNE 2021

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ABSTRACT

This project will address the decline of the millennial generation's church attendance within the 08033 zip code during the past decade. The statistical data was gathered by the author of this thesis through several one-on-one discussions with the clergy of the five surveyed churches and with several millennial residents of the town of Haddonfield, New Jersey. Examples in the ministry of the apostle Paul were gathered from the *MacDonald Believer's Bible Commentary* by William MacDonald and *A Theology of the New Testament* by George E. Ladd.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF MILLENNIAL ABSENCE FROM CHURCH

And being assembled with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now' (Acts 1:4-5 NKJV)¹

This researcher has witnessed first-hand the problem of decreased attendance of the millennial generation in the local church in the twenty-first century. In response to this problem, the researcher (a) examined the Book of Acts to understand how the church was culturally relevant in the time of Paul, (b) explored relevant literature related to characteristics of millennials and culturally-relevant churches, (c) conducted interviews with pastors and millennials to better understand how millennials view and engage with the local church, (d) identified recommendations for the local church to utilize in their work with millennials.

Researchers define millennials as “anyone born between 1982 and 2000, which is now 83.1 million people or more than a quarter of the U.S. population. The Pew Research Center uses 1981 as the first birth year for millennials and 1996 as the last year.”² Therefore, depending on your source, the millennial generation either spans fifteen or

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *NIV Leadership Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).

² Michael Dimock, “Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins,” Pew Research Center: FactTank, January 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

eighteen years. That means “the youngest millennials are between 20 and 24, and the oldest are coming up on 40.”³

Research Limitations and Assumptions

The biblical research was limited to the Book of Acts. Practical research was limited to the pastors of eight churches in Haddonfield, New Jersey, which are a part of the following denominations: American Baptist Churches USA, Presbyterian Churches USA, United Methodist, Roman Catholic, and Episcopalian. Three of the churches identify as evangelical. Additional research participants were millennials who attend one of those churches in Haddonfield.

The population of Haddonfield is 11,500 people with a median age of 43. The median income is around \$139,000, with a poverty rate of 2.9 percent.⁴ These numbers contrast with the national medians, which are an income of \$66,000 and a poverty rate of 12.3 percent.⁵ While the median age of Haddonfield residents is slightly higher than the threshold for a millennial, some churches have an influx of millennials and others have members with a broader age range.

The researcher’s first assumption was that the Bible provides examples of how the early church was culturally relevant. The second assumption was that the literature provided by the church surveyed was accurate. The third assumption was that millennials

³ Liz Schumer, “Let’s Break Down Who Really Qualifies as a Millennial,” <https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/a30644196/what-is-millennial-generation-age-range/>.

⁴ “Haddonfield, NJ,” DataUSA, June 2020, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/haddonfield-nj/>.

⁵ Jessica Semega, Melissa Kollar, John Creamer, and Abinash Mohanty, “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2018, United States Census Bureau, June 2020, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2019/demo/p60-266.html>.

and pastors would honestly engage in the interview process and that the congregations were accepting of the millennial generation. The fourth assumption was that the millennials interviewed were actively involved in the congregation. The fifth assumption was that the pastors had a strong desire to serve millennials.

Importance of the Project

To the Researcher

The researcher has been studying this problem, both nationally and specifically within churches in Haddonfield. The pastor's role is changing rapidly to accommodate the millennial generation's acceptance of changing roles within the family, diversity both in terms of culture and of family context, and the need to reach goals that now are looked to as stepping stones to the next advancement. The pastor then has their current congregation to shepherd. The current congregation is aging and does not see the same values as listed above with the millennials, making the job of the pastor not just one that is changing rapidly with the millennials, but is also bridging generations. One would wonder if seminaries and mainline churches have not recognized that millennials are among the missing on Sundays. In contrast, millennials may not have the church on their radar. According to the Pew Research Center, during the past decade, every denomination has recorded a decline in church attendance even though there has been continued growth in the U.S. population. Despite all the surveys conducted by both Pew

Research Center⁶ and the Barna Group,⁷ it appears that the mainline churches in Haddonfield are not paying attention to the nationwide findings by both of these most respected research groups.

If there is no change in millennial church choices and in their attitude of attending church in general, the statistics will continue to spiral downward. As of 2018, the Pew Research Center and Barna Group have conducted a joint study of the absent millennials, and this study included a sample size of over 35,000 Americans. The sample size included small churches, medium-sized churches, and mega-churches, representing a very fair appraisal of the missing millennials, and more importantly, where they (the millennials) are going on Sundays. The researcher found that the number of Christians attending church is declining over the past decade by over 8 percent; there are now less than 171 million Christian adults attending church in the United States. A decade ago, there were over 179 million. There is a discernable difference over the past decade which alludes to a situation that needs to be corrected.⁸

The Importance of the Project to Ministry

The millennial generation will soon comprise the largest segment of the U.S. adult population. Millennials, compared to Generation Xers and baby boomers, are the largest

⁶ Pew Research Center, *Religion Among the Millennials: Less Religiously Active Than Older Americans, But Fairly Traditional in Other Ways*, (Washington, D.C.: Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2010), 11.

⁷ George Barna, *Revolution: Finding Vibrant Faith Beyond the Four Walls of the Sanctuary* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 5.

⁸ Pew Research, "Religion Among the Millennials," 12.

share of the American workforce and the U.S. electorate.⁹ The demographic snapshot of the millennials revealed they are the most ethnically and racially diverse generation in U.S. history.

When describing millennials, which churches in the United States desire to do, churches can look to author Tom Couser's definition, "We define the millennial generation as those born between roughly 1980 and 2000, but those numbers alone do not begin to describe them...Our experience tends to tell us they are a very different culture and generation from the baby boomers."¹⁰ This description does not include the millennial generation's traits, such as being very relational, academically sound, fast learners, and not holding fast to their grandparents' or parents' religious beliefs. Millennials have strong identity beliefs that reveal their culture.

The aging traditions of the mainline churches immediately disconnect them from the millennials, who prefer contemporary ways of worship that include participation in social justice issues, music that allows for movement, and leadership styles where relationship building is a value and where they are driven to find purpose and fulfillment.¹¹ The mainline churches interviewed are not readily accepting of Barna's findings.¹² Pew Research also agreed with Barna's conclusions that churches, especially

⁹ William Frey, "Metro Millennials: A Demographic Bridge to America's Diverse Future," https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2018-jan_brookings-metro_millennials-a-demographic-bridge-to-americas-diverse-future.pdf. (July 2020).

¹⁰ Thomas Couser, *Relevant: The Church as it Relates to Millennials* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow Publishing, 2016), 58.

¹¹ "What Does Modern Leadership Really Mean?" *business.com*, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.business.com/articles/leadership-styles-millennials/>.

¹² George Barna, *America at the Crossroads* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing, 2016), 8.

with the same demographics as many of those in Haddonfield, are in the same situation. The vanishing millennials are not flocking to their respective mainline churches either.¹³ A 2011 study revealed that only 39 percent of American millennials who do not attend church had any connection with organized religion. There is not a significant percentage shift in either direction as we investigate this dilemma.¹⁴

According to Acts, when the Father puts His will into motion, there is nothing mortal man can do except embrace the blessings that God bestowed upon them. The Holy Spirit oversees this task, and it will take both the church and millennials working together to build the necessary community. Churches, including clergy, must search deep within their hearts and minds, read Scripture, pray, have a dialogue within the church leadership, and be prepared to make necessary changes.

Among mainline church pastors, the major worry is reaching a younger audience. When paired with data about aging pastors, the growing group of the millennial generation and the mainline church's declining attendance are giving the pastors a realistic glimpse of the future dynamic whereas the pastor must connect tenuous relationships in the church.

The problem that the Haddonfield mainline churches are experiencing is not an isolated case, but one that exists all around the United States. According to a Pew Research Center survey, millennials have the perception mainline church believers of religion contradict both doctrinal and scriptural commands within the sacred boundaries of worshipping God. Millennial's expectations of religion are not based on the inclusion of

¹³ Pew Research, "Religion Among the Millennials," 12.

¹⁴ Barna, *Revolution*, 7.

politics within the sacred boundaries of worshiping God and His Son. This shows the absent millennials' view of churchgoing as a commitment of their core beliefs and again appears to explain why many millennials count among the absent in church rolls.¹⁵

Research from the Barna Group and the Pew Research Center, along with pertinent data from the eight local churches, should yield a wealth of valuable information. This researcher hopes that such information will provide opportunities for the mainline churches in Haddonfield to make the necessary changes that will lead to a resurgence of millennials joining local church congregations.

Personal mentoring enables members of the millennial generation to develop as Christ's followers. Church leaders must engage this vital demographic and invest significant effort into making disciples among them. This relational means of passing on principles for spiritual growth finds precedent throughout the Book of Acts. The doctrinal commitment provides the necessary guidance for believers to grow in their relationship with Christ continually, while impacting the world around them through demonstrations of faith and acts of service. The religious sphere of mentoring motivates the new believer toward continued Christlikeness from a heart of sincere love of God and others.¹⁶ Unfortunately, no studies have been conducted to discover the percentage of millennials within the church who are engaged in discipleship or the effects of this type of mentoring relationship.

¹⁵ Pew Research, "Religion Among the Millennials," 10.

¹⁶ Marty Terrell. "Assessing the Impact of Personal Mentoring to Develop Members of the Millennial Generation" (DMin diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, 2016), 2.

As the Book of Acts discusses the ‘outpouring of the Spirit,’ the researcher points out the following from Darrell Bock: “So Jesus had to remind the disciples by the Spirit about their commission (Acts 1:2). The community has a job to do. So, God sent the Spirit to enable them to do it. The Spirit also is a part of the revelatory process of the promise of Scripture.”¹⁷ The church's job today is the same as it was then: to reach out to people and bring them into the love of Christ. For many churches, the people outside are millennials.

Overview

The first step the researcher took was to explore the book of Acts to better understand how churches were culturally relevant. The Apostle Paul started approximately fourteen churches. Each church was in a specific geographic location with a specific audience.

The second step was to examine relevant literature on millennial characteristics and culturally-relevant churches. Writing about millennials has become a popular topic and the researcher was able to find key resources. The literature on culturally-relevant churches was often located under the theme of how to do church in a post-modern era.

The third step was to interview a minimum of five pastors, one pastor serving each of the churches in Haddonfield. Before interviewing, the researcher created an interview guide. The fourth step was to interview a minimum of eight millennials. Before the interviews, the researcher created an interview guide.

The fifth step was to analyze the data and determine the themes.

¹⁷ Darrell Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 162.

Conclusion

In an attempt to address the decreased attendance of millennials in church, the researcher defined the millennial generation as having been born between 1982 and 2000, articulated delimitations and assumptions, and indicated the importance of this project. To address this problem, the research will provide a biblical foundation for the study in the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FROM THE BOOK OF ACTS

To address the problem of decreased attendance of the millennial generation in the local church, the researcher examined the Book of Acts to understand themes related to how the church was culturally relevant. An exploration of Acts revealed that the church was not perfect, but it had an identity of being a bride or body and was called to be a witness and build the kingdom of God.

The Book of Acts, according to Bock, “is formally anonymous...The traditional view is that the author was the same person who wrote the Gospel of Luke--the physician and traveling companion of Paul (Col. 4:14).”¹⁸ The Book of Acts ties the other books of the New Testament together. The gospel and the message of the kingdom of God did not end with Jesus’ ascension to heaven forty days after His resurrection but continued in the lives of His followers. As early as the second century AD, church leaders such as Irenaeus wrote that the author of Acts was indeed Luke. Irenaeus based his view on the ‘we’ passages in Acts. Irenaeus and many scholars since his time have interpreted these passages to mean that the author of Acts was one of the eyewitness companions of Paul. Luke fits this description better than any other candidate.

¹⁸ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 137.

The date of composition is, to no small extent, directly tied to the issue of authorship. Several scholars have argued that Acts should be dated to the early 60s AD (at the time of Paul's imprisonment). Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome (Acts 28:30-31).

Luke's theological story does not connect unless one can see Jesus and the community that He was responsible for launching. The key actor in this theology is God Himself. It is His plan that Jesus carried out. It is His promise, long revealed and now actualized, that Jesus brings.¹⁹ The Book of Acts and the apostle Paul reveal a crucial addition to God's earthly plan and the advent of the Holy Spirit. This story outlines a Trinitarian activity that surfaces on earth for the first time in Acts. The Spirit is a conduit of preaching and missionary work of the new community of churches that began through Paul's evangelical mission. Martin Luther said, "I have had only one aim in view. May I bring it about that, through my effort those who have heard me interpreting the letters of the apostle may find Paul clearer and happily surpass me. But if I have not achieved this, well, I shall still have wasted this labor gladly; it remains an attempt by which I have wanted to kindle the interest of others in Paul's theology, and this no good man will charge against me as a fault."²⁰

Paul is the most influential Christian author of not just the apostles, but of all of history, concerning the transition from Mosaic Law to grace. Scholar F.F. Bruce commented that, "Paul has secured his place among the great letter-writers in world

¹⁹ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 126.

²⁰ Erik Herrmann, "Luther's Journey with Paul," *The Lutheran Witness*, June 5, 2008, 6.

literature” and “made his mark on world history.”²¹ These writings showed how God’s plan of salvation is for everyone, not just the Jews. Paul wrote thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and played a vital role in the church’s growth in the interpretation and application of God’s grace in Christ.

One can follow along with Paul through the Epistles, as he presented himself as an apostle to the Gentiles. “For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human source, and I was not taught it, but it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12 NRSV).

Paul had a radical life transformation on the road to Damascus. Although he had never met Christ in the flesh, his mystical experience encountering Christ changed Paul from one who persecuted Christians to one who became the most prolific author of Scripture.

As he journeyed, he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Furthermore, he said, “Who are you, Lord?” Then the Lord said, “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads.” So, he, trembling and astonished, said, “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Acts 9:3-6).

Acts starts with the crucifixion of Christ through His resurrection. Acts continues with Pentecost, a supernatural event, at which point the Holy Spirit plays a significant role in the advent of the new church, as Paul will lead the way for the growth of the kingdom that God had planned. Paul’s theological foundation began in Galatia, where Paul first became an Apostle.

²¹ F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 144.

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human source, but it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former way of life in Judaism: I intensely persecuted God's church and I tried to destroy it. But when God, who from my mothers' womb set me apart and called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me, so that I could preach Him among the Gentiles (Gal. 1:11-13, 15-17).

In his letter, Paul pointed out Israel's misunderstanding of the law and its failure to see its temporary nature. Paul tries to tell us through his gospel that one does not need to be a slave to the law to gain salvation. One can attain salvation by merely having faith in Jesus Christ; this faith released people from the bondage of the law.

Paul's new Christian life began by traveling east with Barnabas to Antioch, Cyprus, and Pamphylia. Barnabas took the lead with Paul as his assistant (Acts 14:12). Then as Barnabas and Paul participated in the Council of Jerusalem, Paul is elevated to the lead teacher and has a break with Barnabas to begin traveling with Silas and Timothy through Asia, Philippi, and Thessalonica. They eventually traveled to Corinth and stayed there for eighteen months. While in Corinth, Paul and his companions wrote First and Second Thessalonians.

Paul then traveled through Asia, on to Syria, and back to Ephesus for at least 27 months, preaching and strengthening the churches that he had established. He and his associates established churches in Ephesus and Colossae.

Paul's Churches, Not Perfect but Enduring

Paul played an essential role in the development of theology in the New Testament. He dealt with many different concepts in his thirteen letters. One of those concepts was his understanding of the church.

God's call transcended human status (1 Cor 1:26), exceeded human strength (1:25) and confounded human wisdom (1:18). It is the call that reversed all human forms, for it is based not on the persuasiveness of human rhetoric but on the preaching of the cross.²²

The emphasis on the universal Church is most evident in Colossians and Ephesians. Christ is head of the universal Church. Christ demonstrated His love for the Church through His death and resurrection. He intended to preserve a pure Church, holy and blameless. Paul gave no grounds for establishing a distinction in rank or time between personal Christianity and the community's existence. He did not suggest justification as first given to the community, only as a secondary sense to the individual through the Spirit's allegiance.

When a believer began to know Christ, then the community began in earnest. Fellowship with Christ began a fellowship with the brethren. Once salvation converged, by saving others, Christianity began to take hold in the community of believers.

The Building, Bride and Body

Paul developed imagery of the Church as a building when he declared that the Corinthians were God's building (3:9). Then likening himself to a master builder (3:10), he drew attention to the sole permissible foundation, Christ Himself. Paul talked of the whole structure as being joined and growing into a holy temple in the Lord. Here the building does not mean an edifice but rather a dwelling place of God.

²² Charles R. Swindoll, *Paul: A Man of Grace and Grit* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 33.

Paul understood that the Church as the body is a symbol of church unity. In 1 Corinthians the body is identified as a church since the human body served as an illustration of the relationship between Christ and the believers. The metaphor also explained the closeness of the believers to each other. In 1 Corinthians 10:17, being presented the essential oneness of the community, Christ is seen as the source of the church's life and fullness.

The Church, also known as the kingdom of God, is seen through the Book of Acts as one of the primary callings bestowed upon the new Church and new Christians. Blessed by God, the power of the Holy Spirit led the new Church. The Church is an event that is miraculous but is also driven by the Trinity.

According to Ben Witherington, Christ has gladly accepted the Father's charge to lead the new Church through the hands-on leading of the Spirit.²³ The churches in the Book of Acts were not perfect in the beginning. Nevertheless, through the blessings of the Trinity, they were an enduring legacy to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and this legacy will continue to build His kingdom.

There is no such thing as a perfect church. Paul was disappointed with the church in Galatia because the converts were still concerned with observing Moses' law involving circumcision. In the church at Ephesus, their new converts were being taught by Paul to watch the church through Christ to become his glorious, radiant bride.²⁴ The church at

²³Ben Witherington, *A Week in the Life of Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2012), 111.

²⁴William MacDonald, *Believers Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 118.

Colossae dealt with new members who were Jews, and argued that Christians, in the same church, had to keep the ceremonial laws of food and Sabbath. The church at Philippi was sharing how Paul was supported by them when he was suffering in prison.

“None of the above, be it good or bad,” according to Steven Ger, “still shows how important it was for Paul and the above-mentioned churches of Acts, to take the important step that has led the church to today’s continued building of His kingdom.”²⁵ The churches from Acts had set the stage, through the leadership of the Holy Spirit’s witness, to take the gospel beyond the house of Israel and include others around the world.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

The expression of God’s activity in Acts began in the initial scene where Jesus was about to ascend into heaven. In Acts 1:3, Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. For Luke, the idea summarized a vital component of the gospel that had already shown signs of arriving during Jesus’ ministry. “Now all the Athenians and the foreigners residing there spent their time on nothing but telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21).

At Pentecost, when the Spirit came on Jesus’ followers, the great acts of God were declared to the audience in various languages.²⁶ The Feast of Pentecost typified the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. The sight to see was divided tongues, as of fire, resting upon each of the disciples. It did not say they were tongues of fire, but tongues as of fire.

²⁵ Steven Ger, *The Book of Acts: Witness to the World* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishing, 2004), 85.

²⁶ Richard Longenecker, “Acts” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 96.

The tongues doubtlessly refer to speech and, most likely, to the miraculous gift of speaking in other languages that the apostles were to receive. The fire may have referred to the Holy Spirit as the source of this gift and may have also described the bold, burning, enthusiastic preaching that was to follow.

The Holy Spirit continues to show guidance and driving force of mission during critical moments when non-Jewish conversion and integration into the church were part of the mission and became a foundational moment in building the kingdom.

David Bosch shows the ecclesiology in Acts magnified the sharing of meals, such as the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42) and the acceptance of hospitality from Gentiles in terms of table fellowship (Acts 10:48). According to Bosch, this fellowship is connecting to its inward nature; however, the church also had a focus on those who were outsiders. As the church grows, it is led by the apostles, who endorse and validate new manifestations of the church.²⁷ When the apostles lay hands on the Samaritans, they receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14-15). After meeting with Cornelius, Peter led the Gentiles; later, the Council of Jerusalem ratified his missions (Acts 15:7-11).

Bosch points out:

Barnabus and the Antioch church were able to maintain links with the mother church in Jerusalem. The mission made the church catholic in its orientation, and missionary in its outlook. Paul and Barnabus came back to share their stories with the mother church rather than go it alone with the Spirit's leading."²⁸

Their mission allowed the whole church to move forward in a shared and costly commitment to catholicity.

²⁷ David Bosch, *Transforming Missions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 57.

²⁸ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 65.

“Being Spirit-led,” says Bruce, “is having a personal relationship with the Father. Another primary key to being Spirit-led is in faith that the Spirit led the new Christians.”²⁹ While the Holy Spirit gave power to, prompted, and directed Jesus in carrying out God’s plan, so the Holy Spirit gave power to and directed the disciples of Jesus, enabling them also to carry out God’s plan. The sustained participation of the Holy Spirit in Acts bore witness to the continued fulfillment of God’s plan and assured humanity of the eschatological reality of the Acts narrative. The presence of the Spirit in Acts also establishes the reliability of the author Luke’s narrative. An apocalyptic reading of the book of Acts advocated that where one found the Holy Spirit at work, there was a church. Close at hand, they may have found expressions of love, life and power.

When examining the Scriptures for this paper, one sees that the Holy Spirit runs throughout Acts 2. A closer look at Acts reveals that Peter, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, explained what the disciples received from the Father’s long-awaited promise of the fulfillment of new covenant hope. The realization of this hope comes to fruition when the Jews and the Gentiles come together. This stirring biblical reality is available to the churches and the millennials just by reaching out to the Spirit in constant communal prayer.

The Call to Witness

With Saul’s conversion, the number of references to Gentiles accelerates. Peter declares that people from every nation who fear God and live righteously are acceptable to Him, and Barnabas and Paul retell the story of the conversion of the Gentiles.

²⁹ Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 81.

Bock contends:

As we learn through Scripture, the book of Acts describes how the gospel went out to the Gentiles and the Jews who both needed salvation because of their past devotion to idolatry. This inclusion did not take place at the expense of the call to witness and to the missionary aspect to Israel, but came alongside of that call.”³⁰

Whether in the synagogue or the marketplace, Paul exemplified the mission to witness to all. Part of Israel’s story was the inclusion of Gentiles with the promises to Abraham and commitments discussed by prophets like Isaiah and Amos. The Spirit’s coming showed the community that God had cleansed the Gentiles and called out a people for His name.

Richard Longenecker pointed out:

Another key to discipleship is the believer's role is recording the church to accomplish her mission. Jesus' commission to the church is a recorded accomplishment of the church. He continues when the church was slow to take up her task to reach all nations, God then took the initiative by giving the vision to guide her.³¹

God does whatever He deems He must do to ‘shake things up’ because man is so very human and needs that humanness to be refreshed with visions, miracles, or by whatever means God needed to get man back to work.

For the book of Acts and its author Luke, the people who were highly effective disciples in the early Church looked outward. They were not cloistered; they penetrated the world and shared the gospel, even though it involved significant personal risk. The Church did not withdraw from those on the outside; instead, the Church engaged the

³⁰ Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, 61.

³¹ Longenecker, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 127.

world. As they trusted in God, believers were not afraid of what the call to witness meant. Persecution may lie ahead, but the boldness supplied by the Spirit was the ally needed.

Peter, quoting Joel the prophet in Acts 2:17 (NKJ), says, “And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams” and concludes with the words, “And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (2:21). Immediately, Christ was making no distinction regarding men and women. God had created all of us to be equal in Christ’s eyes.

Perhaps there was never an event equal in importance since the days of Christ’s resurrection and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost than Paul’s conversion which was famous as a testimony to the power and truth of the gospel. Paul, intelligent and well-instructed, violently resisted Christ’s teachings. Even so, Paul was converted to the faith of the Nazarene by the appearance of the Lord from heaven. Paul occupied high places among the defenders of the faith when the gospel had to struggle for a footing against Judaism. Being well versed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament and the traditions of the Jews, he possessed great argumentative powers. Paul became a leading apologist for the faith. In the synagogues and the schools, the doctrines of Jesus Christ were overthrown.

Spurgeon adds:

In addition to this, the conversion of the apostle Paul gave a great impetus to the missionary spirit of the Christian church. Here he shone preeminently. Ordained to be the apostle to the uncircumcised, he proclaimed in the utmost ends of the earth the name of Jesus Christ.³²

³² Charles Spurgeon, *Words of Counsel for Christian Workers* (Abbottsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2015), 43.

The Apostle, moreover, took the highest place in the Christian canon. It pleased God to select this most remarkable man as the medium of inspiration. His writings were received as the most thorough and complete exhibition of the gospel of God's grace.

Acts chapter 15 provided an example of Paul's undying faith and love for Jesus Christ and for those to whom he witnessed as well. Paul and Barnabas, along with brothers from Phoenicia and Samaria, preached and taught in Antioch. Acts 15:3 told of the success they were having during their witnessing of Christ. "When they had been sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and they brought great joy to all the brothers and sisters." Then at the Jerusalem Council, after Peter stood up and delivered his amazing witness to God and the Holy Spirit, Acts 15:12 reads:

The whole assembly became silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul describe all the signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles. Then the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, decided to select men who were among them and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas: Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, both leading men among the brothers.

The council's critical theological point proved that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised to be saved. The next step was to send an official notice of this in writing to the church at Antioch. The apostles and elders in Jerusalem, with the approval of the church, voted Paul and Barnabas to become designated leaders to go back to Antioch to share the essential doctrine with their brothers and sisters. The researcher pointed to the importance and abilities of Paul, Barnabas, Peter, and James, who taught through God's

grace and Christ's sacrifice and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit. Critical changes in the Old Testament law were made without anarchy leading the way.

Throughout the church's history, many types of councils have met to resolve church doctrine issues. Church historians recognize seven great councils; the most important were the councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon, both dealing with the person and works of Jesus Christ. The first unofficial council of the Church is the Council of Jerusalem, described in Acts 15. This council was vital as it dealt with the issue of salvation. The council put their decisions and recommendations into a letter to the church at Antioch. The letter authorized Judas and Silas to speak on behalf of the leaders in Jerusalem, showing that there was no disagreement between the church at Antioch (Paul and Barnabas) and the church in Jerusalem (Judas and Silas) (15:22, 27).

Building the Kingdom of God

Along with focusing on when Christ will return (Matt. 24:36), believers should also concentrate on witnessing to a dying world, as many non-believers believed that Jesus was going to bring a literal kingdom on earth. "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12).

The kingdom was not to be confused with the Church. Israel rejected Jesus' offering of Himself to be King. At this time, the King is absent; however, He does have an invisible kingdom on earth. All who profess allegiance to Jesus inhabit the kingdom on earth. The Holy Spirit takes hold of all new Christians and brings them into the new

community. The kingdom represented everyone who claimed to be a Christian, particularly the Jews and the Gentiles; the kingdom was everlasting.

The boundaries between the Jew and Gentiles in Acts 15 necessitated a step forward in a racially charged world. When discussing the building of God's kingdom today, a step forward must happen--like the Christians in Acts 15. The virtues of courage and humility came to the forefront on both sides of this potentially tenuous commitment. While courage was necessary, this union did not have a chance if the Holy Spirit had not led them together. With God's plan ready to be set in motion, Luke proclaimed Christ and the Spirit's role to fulfill God's promise of unity among new believers of all nations. His plan looked to the inclusion of Israel and the Gentiles.

The prologue to Acts speaks of the completion of God's plan in terms of 'times' and 'dates,' indicating a set schedule (Acts 1:6-7). Acts 3:18-22 also appealed to the time of fulfillment. It was natural for Jews who had embraced the idea of the messiah to question when Israel would be restored. What was debated in Judaism was whether Israel's centrality would be positive or negative for the Gentiles. Would it come with salvation or judgment for the nations? The disciples are not even thinking about mission terms. Rather, their question reflects a nationalistic concern for Israel's vindication and the completion of the promise. God used the Holy Spirit through His promise to tie the two cultures together. The Spirit's power was the center of the plan promised to Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms (24:44-47). Luke primarily spoke of the fulfillment of four themes predicted in the Hebrew Scriptures: Christology--the message of repentance, forgiveness of sins, Israelite rejection, and Gentile inclusion.

The people were no longer experiencing the thrill and amazement of Pentecost. It was time for the disciples to proclaim the message of God's work in Jesus and build the kingdom of God. Their faith was not just an ethical morality; it was the testimony of God's activity in history, led by the Spirit. The disciples, being charged, were now ready to step up.

The vital theme, the leading of the Holy Spirit, goes out in Jesus' name and was a major theme in Acts (2:38, 3:6, 4:7, 5:28, 8:12, and 9:14-16). In the Hebrew Scriptures, the term *Yahweh* indicates authority transferred to Jesus, the Mediator of God's promise. Baptism and other blessings came through His name (Acts 2:17). This vital theme revealed the absolute authority of the risen and glorified Jesus. His name had authority and power like that of God.

The next pivotal act before the Jews and Gentiles could unite was the act of repentance. To repent meant people must change their minds about God and about who they are. Repentance meant recognizing their sinfulness and turning to God in faith; the forgiveness of sin will come to those who stretch out a needy hand to Jesus, clinging to Him alone and recognizing that without Christ, there is no hope. As Acts 10:36 points out, "Jesus is Lord of all humanity, Jew, Greek, all of humanity. The message of the Prophets is for all who believe" (Acts 10:42-43). A significant burden for both the Jew and Gentile was that Jesus is the Messiah and Lord of the earth.

Accepting Christ's death as enough for everyone was often rejected by Jews and Gentiles alike. But this belief was the crux of unified belief for both Jews and their Gentile brothers and sisters. Acts showed how the Church came to be inclusive to

Gentiles. The Church's outreach went far into Gentile regions. The Church recognized the call to the Gentiles as a crucial part of the Great Commission found in Matthew 28.

With the dawn of Acts, the transition in Scripture from Paul in Ephesus--referring to the "mystery of God," which he purposed in Christ--was the joining of Jews and the Gentiles together in Christ (Eph. 1:9). The progression of Acts was relatively swift, moving out from the core group after Christ's ascension to touch Jews across the world, then Samaritans, and finally Gentiles. The message of Acts is hope, moving towards the inclusion of every tribe and tongue and nation. Considering that the core disciples were themselves Jews and that the apostles sent forth were an expanded set of Jews (including Paul's companion Barnabas), the story changed from the beliefs tied to covenant markers belonging to a single group to a story opened to all the children of Adam.

Peter himself needed some visionary coaxing to begin the movement toward the Gentiles, but his initial resistance seemed to be relatively slight even if his hesitance and surprise emanate from the account in Acts 10, given Old Testament laws, and Jesus' words in Matthew 15. Peter's hesitancy was understandable. After all, transformation in Christ does not usually entail the sort of radical, immediate conversion of imaginations as transpired with Saul/Paul in Acts 9.

Pharisees who claimed Jesus as Savior were welcomed into the fledgling community. They still kept the Law of Moses, especially when it came to circumcision. Gentiles were welcomed as well if they were willing to undergo circumcision. The early Christians were not only committed to Christ; they were also committed to remaining faithful Jews. The building of the kingdom had a long road to go before being completed.

Spurgeon declared, “As we travel through the book of Acts, we cannot help but be excited as we know that through the conversion of both the Jews and the Gentiles, a conversion that is still very much in progress.”³³

Conclusion

A study of the Book of Acts revealed that the early church was culturally relevant. The church was not perfect, but it has endured and continued to exist throughout the ages. The researcher identified two themes that helped the early church remain relevant. First, the early church saw its identity not in the building but in being the bride of Christ and a body of believers. Second, the early church understood both its call to be a witness and to build God’s kingdom.

³³ Spurgeon, *Words of Counsel for Christian Workers*, 105.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW RELATING TO UNDERSTANDING MILLENNIALS

The researcher attempts to establish what millennials are expecting when they look for a church. What requirements do they have for the church in terms of diversity and theology? This researcher interviewed both millennials and the pastors of mainline churches of zip code 08033 (Haddonfield, New Jersey) with the hopes of being able to show both the churches and the millennials that they can find a way to worship together through dialogue and a strong desire to bring both of them together. The goal is that the churches will have the willingness to change some of “what we have always done,” and for the millennials to recognize the church is doing their part to change, now they have to offer their passions and commitment to the church.

According to both Barna and Pew, millennials have a very soft connection with ‘formal religion.’³⁴ Formal religion would include churches such as the American Baptist Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, The United Methodist Church, The Lutheran Church, The Roman Catholic Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, better known as the Mormon Church, for starters.³⁵

³⁴ Barna. *Revolution*, 67.

³⁵ Pew Research, “Religion Among the Millennials,” 97.

It appears millennials do not hold a high priority for any of the churches mentioned above. Characteristics of the millennial generation include immersion in the most current communication technologies and a general aversion to ‘older,’ more stabilized community-driven churches. Their values include meaningful employment, collaboration, participation, freedom of choice, diversity, and fun within their age group.

Despite this apparent aversion to the institutional church, millennials have not necessarily abandoned ‘spirituality.’ Many claim to be religious in a general sense but, when questioned more deeply, they (millennials) tend not to be able to describe what religion means to them or report regular attendance at a house of worship.³⁶ The millennials believe in a higher power, cultivating loving relationships, being involved in good works in a social/civic context, and trying to be eco-friendly.³⁷ Millennials expect the church to reach out to them much as Christ did in His ministry. They are not convinced that church can be all things to all people. Millennials are not expecting a miracle, but they do expect a church to listen, learn about them, and welcome them.

While some millennials may admit to being agnostic and/or atheist, this is not typical for the average millennial. According to Ger, “Millennial Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus and all other religions alike are letting go of extremism and fundamental views, realizing the teachings are one in the same: How to live an openly connected spiritual life that will cultivate love.”³⁸ In a recent article, Bruce Horowitz

³⁶ “What Does Modern Leadership Really Mean?” business.com, accessed October 9, 2020, <https://www.business.com/articles/leadership-styles-millennials/>.

³⁷ Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2009), 47.

³⁸ Ger, *The Book of Acts*, 19.

proposed that appealing to the ideals of millennials might lead them to “patronize companies and churches alike that are willing to reflect their values by, for example, providing free food and clothing for the needy or by being eco-friendly.”³⁹

Millennials are willing to join forces with more traditional churches when the church’s mission aligns with their theological stance. However, if they are looking for a church that does not require strict attendance at Sunday services, mega-churches will be a good fit for those millennials. They want to have the flexibility to be able to go to morning activities such as soccer, dance lessons, karate, etc. and still have spiritual needs met. Can Sunday morning continue to be the time for this demographic to be in church, or are there ‘more important’ decisions that perhaps will infringe on church time? Millennials may forego their Sunday morning church tradition for recovery from the week’s work.

However, millennials see themselves as a group of action-oriented people who believe in God enough to have a church-like heart even if they are not physically in the building. Not needing a physical building is an alarming thought to the mainline churches that are actively seeking millennials to join their church congregants. The reality of the millennials’ faith is something that is being driven by culture, including careers, families, finances, social actions, and community involvement. Barna states, “They need to feel that they utilize each moment devoted to the things that their culture deems to be a priority, and that means that church, even if it is one of the priorities, must wait for the millennials to come to them.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Bruce Horowitz, “After Gen X, Millennials, what should Next Generation Be?” *USA Today*, May 12, 2012.

⁴⁰ George Barna, *Revolution*, 69.

When it comes to economics, the researcher found that many millennials support government-led wealth redistribution, combined with sinking levels of trust for government measures. Millennials are distrustful of both the government and the economy, as they face a tremendous amount of job insecurity among younger cohorts. “These factors,” Ethan Fosse says, “show that millennials have emerged as a very distinct cultural group with the potential to significantly alter the political, religious, and economic lineaments of American society.”⁴¹ Since even the youngest millennials are adults today, it is possible “to compare the millennial generation’s attitudes with those of today’s older adults, back when the ‘older generation’ was at the age that these millennials are now.”⁴²

Robert Wuthnow does not see this need for church involvement as a trend. He states, “The millennials are putting the need for church membership on hold in many cases. However, this decision appears only to be temporary as they continue to decide where church membership and when church membership will fit into the daily priorities. Many post-boomers have taken a more individualistic, improvised approach to spirituality, including internet preaching, virtual churches, and the appeal of mega-churches.”⁴³ Millennials can become members of the church once they are comfortable in their careers, have been married, started a family of their own, and are starting to settle down.

⁴¹ Ethan Fosse, “The Rise of the Millennials” *Generational Trends in Politics and Religion*, February 4, 2019, <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3HUL.INSTREPO..17463133.2018>.

⁴² Pew Research “Religion Among the Millennials,” 62.

⁴³ Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty - Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 19.

Millennials and Mainline Theology

The mainline church, for years, maintained a prominent place in the communities of the nation. Over the last several decades there has been a steady decline of attendance within these churches and therefore their prominence in the communities has somewhat diminished, and the desire to be more welcoming to millennials and even younger generations has become the focus of so many mainline churches.

Fosse interviewed millennials about religious and political affiliation and economic values and found that half of the millennials in America do not identify with a major political party, which is explained by the changing demographic conditions as well as plummeting support for mainstream political parties. “Also, about one-third of millennials did not identify with any religious group, which is accounted for partly by a more significant percentage growing up in non-traditional religious households and changing attitudes related to traditional religions and science technology.”⁴⁴

Richard Rohr states:

Millennials are not comfortable with conflicts between religious liberals and conservatives, feeling that neither group has the right to interfere with either group’s beliefs. The millennials believe that any conflict interferes with their relationship with Jesus Christ, and He is the real reason we should go to church in the first place.⁴⁵

With church attendance dropping at ten percent per year in the Haddonfield area, alarming becomes the best way to describe this genuine dilemma. While mainline churches are experiencing different rates of decline, none of the churches in the mainline category are bursting at the seams with new congregants.

⁴⁴ Barna, *Revolution*.43.

⁴⁵ Richard Rohr, *The Wisdom Pattern* (Cincinnati, OH, Franciscan Media, 2001), 2.

Mainline churches often lack diversity, which is an expected way of life for millennials. When a few millennials of different races, ages, and ethnicities come into a church service on a Sunday, they look nothing like the congregation. Often the congregation is caught off guard and is not prepared to welcome this generation, much less people of different races and ethnicities.

Philip Rayo challenged mainline churches, especially those who have never been culturally concerned with diversity, with the following question, “Do mainline churches have the ability to identify what culturally diverse means in respect to their present church cultural make-up?”⁴⁶ Rayo warns readers that, to become a diverse church in color and culture, the mainline church may need a doctrinal change that would literally “scare the present congregation out of their pews.”⁴⁷

Wuthnow states:

Mainline churches and millennials did not appear to be seeking a church of one race, one culture, and the millennials did not expect, a church to become any more than the church that God has called. However, that church must realize that its calling is to church the unbeliever, the weak in Spirit, and the needy before it becomes the comfortable church that many mainliners have now become. Millennials are the generation that indeed can help a struggling church, especially one that needs an infusion of young believers, but the millennials also need to feel that same comfort that the mainline church congregation is experiencing.⁴⁸

Changing a theological doctrine does not need to happen overnight and, when it does start happening, the mainline church must be guided by the Holy Spirit. This is the only way to know this doctrinal change is led by the Blessed Trinity itself. If the present

⁴⁶ Philip Rayo, *La Evangelizacion y la Mission de Dios* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2019), 14.

⁴⁷ Rayo, *La Evangelizacion y la Mission de Dios*, 16.

⁴⁸ Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 24.

mainline church doctrine became too staid, the congregation would need to yearn for a renewal of the prophetic voice, led by people of varied races. Only then would a change of doctrine be an example that the Spirit was indeed on the premises.

According to Pew Research, “Millennials belong to the current growth trend, which tells us that based on the current growth trend, the U.S. will become a majority-minority country by 2044.”⁴⁹ This dramatic cultural change facing the United States contrasts greatly with the preferences and experiences of the baby boomer generation, who were used to working with, worshipping with, and living near people who looked like them. Millennial Americans are more accustomed to being around people of different ethnicities. This fact alone will open the discussion of doctrinal change at mainline churches.

Millennials require Jesus Christ to reach out to them just as He did with the disciples. Millennials interviewed by this researcher were confident that God is among them and, when they felt His presence, they would be ready to make the full-time commitment that He is calling them to make. According to Ronald Sider and Ben Lowe:

Millennials are finding ways to rationalize their sin as just being like all the rest of humanity. If we sin, we are no different from everyone else. As they (millennials) rationalize a way to explain away their sinning as an excuse, they also continue in many ways to reject the church that wants them. By rejecting the church it becomes a convenient way to avoid the commitment necessary to become a full-time church member. This also enables them to avoid confession of those sins to both God and Clergy.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Pew Research, “Religion Among the Millennials”, 43.

⁵⁰ Ronald J. Sider and Ben Lowe, *The Future of our Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016.), 22.

Millennials also pointed to the early church where the Jews and Gentiles struggled to become one with each other. The millennials pointed out that they were not ready to confront church congregations. They can worship God and Christ just as fervently at home on their couches as they could in a stuffy old building on Sunday.

The church was not called to be segregated, as exemplified by the early relationships between Jews and Gentiles. Mark DeYmaz talked about millennials and mainline churches learning from the churches in the book of Acts and becoming inclusionary to create a church that welcomed all those who needed to be close to God. DeYmaz says:

The key here is to remember that doctrine is important as long as one's relationship with God and Jesus is not compromised. Church is not called to be inherently segregated, but is called to build His kingdom, and this is where the mainline church has a wonderful opportunity to keep the call of Matthew 28 very much alive.⁵¹

Disconnect Along the Way

Jeremy Steele wrote, "There are aspects of mainline churches that Millennials have labeled a turnoff when looking for a church."⁵² Among those that Steele discovers is the "...out-of-date or nonexistent digital presence; this is another fancy term for millennials judging a church's viability by its website (or possibly the church Facebook page). Social media presence is a vehicle that millennials will rely on if they do not know

⁵¹ Mark DeYmaz, *Multiethnic Conversations: An Eight-Week Journey Toward Unity in Your Church* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing, 2016), 2.

⁵² Jeremy Steele, "5 Turnoffs for Millennials Seeking a Church," *Leading Ideas (column)*, Lewis Center for Church Leadership, June 25, 2020, <https://www.churchleadership.com/leading-ideas/5-turnoffs-for-millennials-seeking-a-church/>.

anything about your church.”⁵³ This practice of searching for a church website is as normal today as breathing, and many mainline churches are not comfortable using the technology that today’s millennials seek to feel comfortable with a church. Many church-seeking millennials will not visit the actual congregation if their website is not informative, current, and up to the standards of the more progressive megachurches in the surrounding communities.⁵⁴

The necessary information that must appear on the church website includes the church’s location and contact information, service times, and the programs that the church provides, such as young adult ministry, youth ministry, or singles ministry. Nevertheless, even when data was present and accurate, its format communicated as much about the church as the information itself. When the presentation was dated and unattractive on mobile devices like tablets and cell phones, millennials will steer clear, under the assumption that the church did not keep up with the times.

In many cases, a mainline church would have someone from the congregation who had been a member of that church for decades take on the role of technical advisor. The result was a website that reflected the age of the person writing the page’s information. Mainline churches need to put their best foot forward when working on a modern-day virtual presentation of their church’s attributes by hiring someone to update their website to be current and attractive to younger generations.

⁵³ Steele, “5 Turnoffs for Millennials Seeking a Church.”

⁵⁴ Steele, “5 Turnoffs for Millennials Seeking a Church.”

Steele states:

Millennials have grown up as part of the most diverse and technological [sic] sound generation in history... When they walk into many churches, they experience a completely different paradigm than they are used to in their everyday life. Cultural aspects of just who and what the millennials are and what they expect from a church are valid when choosing whether to attend. They are very judgmental when it comes to where and how they spend their time, and church preference fits into this choice of time allotted.⁵⁵

Mainline churches must also recognize that this millennial generation has spent their entire educational lives in the post-segregation world. Their friend groups are often as diverse as their generation, and the same goes for their work and social lives.

Millennials have grown up with friends and younger family members of different colors and cultures. Their classes at school likely include classmates of several races and ethnic backgrounds, while many mainline churches have been all white or all black throughout the church's history. But millennials make choices about churches much as they do with everything else in their lives. Those choices begin with an assumption that all spaces are open to them, regardless of their race or gender. They expect the church to act like they believe that God created us all equal.

But there is little cultural diversity at the average mainline church, which often drives away millennials seeking a church. As an example, according to Barna, "two of the largest denominations are two of the least diverse with Southern Baptists reporting 85 percent of their members are white, and the United Methodist as 94 percent white."⁵⁶

Congregations need to ask themselves what level of diversity they exhibit on a typical

⁵⁵ Steele, "5 Turnoffs for Millennials Seeking a Church."

⁵⁶ Barna, *America at the Crossroads*, 54.

Sunday morning, and what they could do to make their congregations look more like the communities they reside in.

Gender is an area that is important to millennials. Millennials expect women to have a valuable platform in the church's leadership. Millennials will also expect to be free of pessimistic sermons that, in many cases, are from a more conservative, more mature clergy.

Some of the most important witnesses in the early church were women--Jesus's mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Martha and Mary of Lazarus' family tree. There cannot be a more significant example of witnessing and commitment to God's calling than that of Mary, the mother of Christ. Mother Mary and Mary Magdalene, who witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, were the first to speak to the resurrected Jesus. They did not need to take a back seat to anyone in scriptural history when it came to being a witness to Christ. The women at the miracle during Pentecost were among those receiving the Holy Spirit's gifts. It is understood that the two Marys mentioned above were among those who witnessed the Spirit's descending.

Another area that is symbolic of today's millennials is the value of their voice. They require others to be receptive to what they have to say. Not agreeable all the time, but they expect people to listen to them. They will not join an existing church if they sense they are to join a church and essentially just be quiet and bide their time. Church doctrine can be changed as long as Christ and His Father are not challenged; rules that are age-old can be changed. The church is meant for all people to feel inclusive, and those churches who do not listen to the millennial generation will not see very many in their congregation.

The millennials also believe that mainline churches need to have a younger clergy member on staff to know who they are and what they want in a church. If this is too much of a problem, then that church was not the church they were looking to join.

According to Sider and Lowe, “The millennials are looking to grow the church with the following characteristics: to be a servant led, a humility based church, a church that loves God fervently, a church that believes whole-heartedly in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.”⁵⁷

Millennials expect and demand action and service when they join a church. Many self-centered churches of today believed they had cornered the market on the answers of the Bible. Lay leaders acted as though being at the top was more important than being Biblical and exhibiting Christ-like servanthood. For millennials to come and to stay, these attitudes need to change. For the millennial base, church should be all about Jesus Christ and His Father. The millennials are just not impressed with church clergy and lay leaders who spend hours behind closed doors in made-up board meetings, wrangling theological jargon. They want to get back to the Gospel’s heart and teach and live it just as the early Christians did. Millennials need the church to teach them and set them on their journeys to spread the Word and build His kingdom. The Bible calls everyone to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, to spread the Gospel to the ends of the Earth. Millennials are looking to have a hands-on experience of Christianity, not just getting a sore back from sitting on a wood pew. Furthermore, the millennials are looking to the church to learn more about their call to ministry; not in the sense of professional ministry, rather they are asking questions to find out how they are to serve God. They want to hear

⁵⁷ Sider and Lowe, *The Future of our Faith*, 44.

this call come from Him and millennials believe the church can help them to learn the discipline of listening for God.

Barnes proposes:

The church happens best when we as a community serves with a shared purpose. We need to identify what God is putting on our hearts as a church body and then connect with the same calling. As a group who share the same ministry, we need to plan and go out and work that ministry, and we can then make a difference.⁵⁸

Many obstacles for millennials and mainline churches need to be bridged for both to be joined as loving Christians in a church willing to embrace all who desire to worship the King.

Doing Church Differently

The older generation of baby boomers needs to be more familiar with and sympathetic to millennials if generations wanted to bridge gaps in their lives successfully. Without such bridging, the sharing of multigenerational communication and the exchange of wisdom would not occur. Paul provides a perfect path to connecting with others, “I have become all things to all men, so that I may, by all means save some.” (1 Cor. 9:22)

Before comprehending what the church needs to do to become the welcoming church that the millennials desire, the church should ask itself the following question: Does the church have the shape of a missionary church as they attempt to engage millennials? According to Spurgeon, “By the Church, the Holy Spirit ‘creates and increases sanctification’ and sustains a community where ‘God forgives us and Jesus saved us,’ and we learn to forgive and bear with and aid one another. These truths are

⁵⁸ William Barnes, *The Millennials Emerge* (Bloomington, IN: Westwood Publishing, 2015), 4.

immutable.”⁵⁹ They have motivated the church since its inception and found invigoration during the Reformation. In Acts 15, the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to discuss the basic requirements for newly converted Gentiles. Acts 15 was an example of what needs to be addressed in the mainline church as they search to practice commission as taught in Matthew 28.

The Great Commission must be preserved and carried out as an act of commitment by believers everywhere. Carrying out the Great Commission does not always happen in another country. The Great Commission is needed right in the streets surrounding the church itself. Often, the church overlooks the need for a revival within its walls. It is a blessing when local parishes generate the workforce to fulfill the Great Commission, and their efforts determine the success or failure of any attempts to minister to the millennial generation. In many Christian viewpoints, theologians believe that millennials do indeed qualify as those who desperately needed to hear God’s word.

Missionaries who travel the globe or work in their own neighborhoods must be adept at teaching the Bible to new converts. In return, they get the privilege of seeing the changed heart of the new Christian who learned from the excellent Book, perhaps for the first time. The extraordinary narrative that is Scripture needs to be taught and heard, and the church can give this generational gift to all those who aspire to join their congregation. Looking at the church’s role, one learns from the Spurgeons of the world that there is a lot a church could do, but the key is to start with the Great Commission’s call.

⁵⁹ Spurgeon, *Words of Counsel for Christian Workers*, 16.

As one looks at bridging the church's differentials between the older generations and the millennials, it is necessary to view the characteristics that contribute to millennials leaving the faith. When examining the responses, the reasons for millennials not attending church were self-image concerns, shyness, uncertainty, craving for attention, needing more love, and affirmation. These variables are standing as an albatross for this present generation of millennials. These problems were not as prevalent among previous generations, such as the baby boomers.

Gordon Fee expresses:

It's almost like they (the millennials) were carrying around a spiritual chip on their shoulder. When I encounter a group of millennials in church, I feel as though they are trying to sell me on the idea that they know and love Christ as much as I, and for me this can be an alarming thought. There seems to be an inward focus which is serving to become the basis for their (millennial) inward belief about God and His Son.⁶⁰

Largely missing among some millennial thinking was an intentional thought that they were no different from other Christian brothers and sisters regarding the understanding of God's love for all humanity. As one looks to millennials, expecting this generation to take the next step in church attendance and church growth, evaluation is needed as to how effective millennials have been in accepting church and specifically mainline churches in America, and if these churches are beginning to feel their impact. Do millennials look to engage the 'Spirit-led' churches that identify as evangelical, or is there a sudden surge in attending the mainline church that their parents and grandparents attended?

⁶⁰ Gordon Fee, *Paul, The Spirit and the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 129.

It was becoming evident to the Christian community in Haddonfield that this generation's decreasing church attendance was a problem without an end date. There was not, however, a departure of millennials from the Lord Jesus Christ or His Heavenly Father. Nevertheless, it had become essential, especially to the mainline church family, that church as they knew it be changed radically. There was not necessarily a call to change from the existing biblical canon; however, the call was to do church in a new way that may not be entirely comfortable for the existing congregational base. If one could see that Christ's worship and honoring Christ's liturgy are still essential aspects of church theology, then prayerfully, any change in the mainline church would not affect the present church from doing what they do week in and week out.

According to Keith Stuebaker,

The secret for millennial growth in mainline churches is the reconnection or connection of millennials to the individual base of the existing church. There is no better place for this connection than to introduce a plan, which exists when church wants to own the call of the Great Commission of Jesus. When Christ was near the end of His Incarnation, He gave His Apostles the task to the making and nurturing of disciples. Such a plan need not to be packaged with significant steps but must be Bible-driven within the leadership of the church body.⁶¹

When the mainline church realizes that the Great Commission's call is as alive today as when Christ first sent out the call, congregations can use this Call of Christ as the battlecry.

As millennials accept the call to Christ, they are deliberately returning to Scripture and the church community. The commission taught the apostles to 'make disciples,' as taught in evangelical churches. Jesus explained this to Peter as 'feeding'

⁶¹ Keith Stuebaker, "Saving the Sheep, Preserving the Fruit: A plan of Christian Education for Millennials" (DMin diss., Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA, 2018), 6.

and ‘tending,’ as a shepherd cares for Christ’s flock so they can thrive (John 21:12-16). This commission called the believers to make disciples of all persons regardless of race, social class, gender, age, or culture. The Holy Spirit’s baptism of those in the upper room at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) and Peter’s proclamation of the crucifixion and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus to the Jerusalem crowd (Acts 2:15-40) were the call for all Christians to join the apostles in this practice of cultivating disciples. The successes of the early church demonstrate to the mainline church and to millennials that God blesses the personal and corporate spiritual growth of those who engage in those practices.

To continue towards the path of ‘doing church differently,” the researcher learned that, by focusing on the Holy Spirit’s leading (much like the disciples did at Pentecost), millennials and the existing congregants at mainline churches enjoyed a revelation. This revelation came directly from Christ and is as important today as it was when Christ issued the call in Matthew. The revelation is that when the church is founded on biblical principles, growth will be part of the gift from the Father to enable it to succeed. Ronald Sider and David Lowe shared, “When a church, be it mainline, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, or whatever, both embodies the word of the Father, and embraces the Holy Spirit as being its earthly leader, and knows that Jesus Christ is always among them, this church theology is on the path required and needed to become both a growing and vibrant church.”⁶²

Looking for millennial inclusion within their own congregations, mainline churches have noticed millennials, in general, have left mega evangelical churches as well as mainline churches over the past fourteen years, according to both Pew and

⁶² Sider and Lowe, *The Future of our Faith*, 44.

Barna.⁶³ There are approximately eighty million millennials in the U.S. and approximately the same number of suggestions for bringing them back to church.

As discussed in this chapter, employing Christ's charge to make more disciples seems to be a fool-proof way to incorporate both millennials and mainline churches into a unified, harmonious church community. However, Matthew 28 is not the only way to bridge the gap between mainliners and millennials. When pastoral search committees search for a pastor that could fulfill the requirements that millennials seek in a pastor, they cringe at the thought of actually interviewing clergy who understood or represented the millennial's expectation of church services. It is difficult for them to think about the congregation that has been in their church for decades and doing the same thing for worship, and then interviewing a pastor who would upend everything they had done. The call for 'getting with the times to attract the younger generation' also bellows inside the church search committees' heads. Some members were calling for leadership to change Christianity or lose it completely. But choosing to be cool will not work and is not the answer when attracting millennials to a mainline church. People need to be themselves, and the church must not try to make the congregation or the church doctrine anything less than Christ-led.

Intergenerational relationships are crucial for mainline churches to continue. The most crucial factor for young Christians retaining their faith was a meaningful relationship with a Christian mentor. If the millennials did not have relationships with older Christians in the congregation, it was very likely they would not stay very long.

⁶³ Pew Research, "Religion Among the Millennials," 85; Barna, *Revolution*, 64.

Churches must find ways for the younger members to find common ground and connection with the older, more spiritually mature members of the congregation.

Millennials seem to have a dim view of the mainline church. They are, in fact, highly skeptical of religion. However, they still inwardly clamor for God and His Son and have a strong innate desire to have a place of worship on Sundays. The mainline church's responsibility is to reintroduce who God the Father is and do the same for God's Son. Only after this introduction can Christians experience the passion that comes when they know they are in the presence of God.

It is allowable to change the sometimes stodgy mainline church rules, that is, the rules in worship. If the church wants to re-establish who God the Father and His precious Son are to the congregation, and possibly the millennials who may be visiting, it is permissible to wake up the church walls with singing, praising and worshipping at a new level. There are hundreds of Spirit-led songs throughout Christianity that will get the most mature of members up on their feet and singing and clapping along. Remembering the passion or the fire that once enveloped all Christians would be a sure-fire elixir when it comes to waking up a somewhat staid and almost sleepy church. Major changes like this one should be presented to members at a corporate church meeting, but the congregation needs to realize they are praising the Lord; no other reason is needed to show up on a Sunday. They need to understand the church is all about God and not about them.

Conclusion

This researcher sought to understand millennial's opinions about church by analyzing reports from Barna, Pew, and several academic papers and journals written on the religious beliefs and preferences of millennials.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE INS AND OUTS

To address the problem of decreased attendance of the millennial generation in the local church, the researcher conducted a qualitative case study. Research instruments included a questionnaire and interviews. Participants included both pastors and millennials. Data was collected to better understand how millennials view and engage in the local church.

Research Methods

Qualitative Research

The researcher designed this project to evaluate why the millennial generation is missing in the Haddonfield churches and to discern best practices and new ministries that will attract the millennials, enable the mainline church's congregation to grow spiritually, and advance their sense of theological revival. To collect relevant information and data, research was conducted using the qualitative research approach. The researcher determined this approach would be the best way to evaluate why millennials were missing in Haddonfield churches.

Qualitative research lends itself well to case studies and discerning best practices. As John Creswell explains, "We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships

that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study.”⁶⁴ For this paper, qualitative research was done through interviews, a questionnaire for pastors, and field observations (attending each church’s weekly service).

Case Study Approach

The case study approach was used to determine how the church would address the dilemma of the absent millennial generation in their congregation and whether the church was ready to change to attract the missing millennials. Thus, case study research involves the study of an issue explored through cases or examples within a community.⁶⁵

An important step in the process of the case studies is to find people or places that will participate in the study and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide accurate data. A closely interrelated step in this process is determining which strategy will be used for the purposeful sampling of individuals and or sites.⁶⁶ Relevant Scripture, biblical scholars, and the researcher’s insights will be utilized to discern key components of necessary biblical data for this section of the case study.

Research Instruments

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were used for this research. One questionnaire was given to pastors and the other questionnaire was given to millennials. A questionnaire is a set of

⁶⁴ John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 48.

⁶⁵ Creswell, *Research Design*, 73.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 118.

standardized questions, which follow a fixed scheme to collect individual data about specific topics. The questionnaire is administered in a standardized fashion, that is, in the same way to all the respondents of the survey. The logic behind the standardization of questions and answers is that the stimulus is the same for all the respondents of a survey.⁶⁷ Therefore, when compiling the questionnaires for analysis, the answers will be more in line with one another because the questions were the same.

The pastor's questionnaire (Appendix A) was a series of six questions that focused on the present conditions of the churches in the 08033 zip code. The questions were open-ended, so the pastors could share as much or as little as they were comfortable with sharing. All five of the clergy who participated were seminary trained. Four of the five pastors were of white/Anglo-Saxon heritage. One pastor was a Black American. The youngest pastor was 32, while three of the pastors were over the age of 65. None of the pastors was originally from 08033. Four of them were not from New Jersey. None of the pastors were comfortable sharing their salary information.

The millennial questionnaire (Appendix B) was a series of five questions focused on experiences in the church versus actual demographics. The church ministry experience of the millennials helped to mold the questions. Their participation in church ministry was pertinent to answering the questions and relating to the study. The questions were open-ended, allowing the millennials to share as much or as little as they were comfortable sharing and deemed relevant to the question.

Millennial Demographics: The youngest millennial was 32 and the oldest millennial who participated was 35 years old. Five women and three men completed the

⁶⁷ David Silverman, *Focus Your Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2017), 30.

questionnaire. There were four physicians and two attorneys, and two worked in the technology industry from home. They were all above the \$155,000 per year median income of the 08033 zip code. All of the participants considered themselves Christian.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with both pastors and millennials. Sensing wrote, “The main purpose of the interview is to obtain a special kind of information.”⁶⁸ The interviews were conducted with pastors to gain information unique to their experiences with and insights into the missing millennials. It was very important that the interviews be conducted with pastors who were directly involved with the millennial generation through church activities or through millennials having grown up in the church. A semi-structured interview guide was created for this project. Sensing writes, “An interview guide lists the questions or topics that the interviewer desires to explore. It ensures that the basic information is obtained from each person...and the interviewer is free to probe and explore for more depth.”⁶⁹

The questions were designed to analyze four general key topics: music, current preaching style, youth ministry, and general age of the congregation.

⁶⁸ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Project for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 104.

⁶⁹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 107.

Data Collection and Analysis

Pastor's Questionnaire and Interviews

The pastor's questionnaires were distributed individually by the researcher, with a promise of anonymity as part of their participation in the survey. The questions on the survey were open-ended, giving the pastor the ability to freely answer without restrictions. Pastors completed the questionnaire over two weeks. At that point, the pastor and the researcher met together to discuss the answers for each question on the survey. At the end of the interview, the researcher collected the survey from the pastor to analyze and compare with the answers of the other pastors. Data analysis was conducted using the researcher's notes from the interviews and the questionnaires completed by the pastors.

The interviews ranged in time from sixty to ninety minutes, but the average interview was closer to sixty minutes. The pastors had received the questionnaire two weeks before the interview, so they knew what topics would be discussed during the meeting. After the interviews had been completed, the researcher compiled the survey answers and all of the notes taken during the interviews and placed them into a chart to easily view the answers to each question.

Millennial's Questionnaire and Interviews

The millennial questionnaires were distributed individually by the researcher. There was a promise of anonymity as part of their participation in the survey. The questions on the survey were open-ended, giving the millennial the ability to freely answer without restrictions. Millennials completed the questionnaire over two weeks. At that point, the millennial and the researcher met together to discuss the answers to the survey. At the end of the interview, the researcher collected the survey from the

millennial to analyze and compare with the answers of the other millennials. Data analysis was completed by using the questionnaires and the notes taken by the researcher during the interviews.

The interviews ranged in time from thirty to forty-five minutes, with a majority of meetings lasting close to thirty minutes. The millennial participants received the questionnaire two weeks prior to their meeting, so they knew what would be discussed when meeting with the researcher. Questionnaires were collected after the interviews, and participant responses and the researcher's notes were compiled into a chart for easy analysis.

Participants

Pastors

The next step is to study data from the five available churches in the 08033 zip code, utilizing both interviews with clergy and examination of historical documents to better comprehend how millennials view and engage with their church attendance and participation. The following churches were surveyed by the researcher: First Baptist Church, The First Presbyterian Church, Christ The King Roman Catholic Church, The First Lutheran Church, and Mt Olivet Christian Church, all of Haddonfield. Their range of service in the community spans from 65 to over 150 years. All the senior clergy have served for at least 12 years, with two of them logging over 25 years.

Millennials

Thirteen millennials were sent surveys, but only eight responded. The researcher met with each person who responded, and the following information was gained: All

eight of the millennials were white, they were 32 years old or older, all professed to be Christian and attended different denominations (Roman Catholic, American Baptist, United Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Baptist). All of them were born in the United States. All eight of the millennials were college graduates. Four were doctors, two were attorneys, and two of them work from home in the technology industry.

Conclusion

The researcher presented questionnaires to both the clergy of Haddonfield's mainline churches and to eight millennials who live in that town. The millennials are either current or past attenders of one of the five churches that were part of the survey. The case study approach used surveys to allow for the information to be easily collected, either by question or by individual respondent. Demographics were a small slice of the Haddonfield community and an even smaller slice of the American demographic.

Pastors and millennials find common ground when discussing faith, family, and the need for the church as a central point in our lives. Where they divide is the churches' lack of knowledge of the millennial generation's goals. Furthermore, the divide is truly a division that happens between the people of the church and the millennials. The congregations are comfortable with their way of worship; the millennials, however, view the Haddonfield churches as older congregations. They make judgments of their own and want worship services that fit their lifestyles and abilities. In conclusion, churches and millennials are on opposite sides of the bridge. They can see each other, and they can hear each other, but there is a lot of space between the two of them. The goal is for the congregation and the millennials to take steps to come together as one church.

CHAPTER FIVE: PARTICULARS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastors

Question 1

The researcher was attempting to discern if the churches took into consideration what might attract millennials to their churches. The researcher began each interview by asking this two-part question: Is your church ‘trendy’ enough to attract millennials? Did the church have a thought pattern when discussing how to attract millennials? Table 5.1 records the responses of the pastors who were interviewed.

Table 5.1: Is your church ‘trendy’ enough to attract millennials? Did the church have a thought pattern when discussing how to attract millennials?

First Baptist Church	We never worried about the word ‘trendy’ or frankly any single word that was needed to address the ‘missing millennials.’ We at Haddonfield Baptist Church always believed that if we were preaching the Word of God with the integrity of the Scriptures as our base belief, no word, be it trendy or otherwise, would prevent God from leading others to our church. There was nothing that we needed to change that would attract the millennials, and we know that as our God leads us, words are not necessary to describe who we at First Baptist Church are and where we are going in the future, whether the millennials join us or not. We have been a very relevant church in this town since 1860, and we will continue to grow with or without millennials, or Baby Boomers, or whoever is the next cultural wave that attempts to define our congregation.
First Presbyterian Church	Frankly, we had never considered being trendy enough for millennials, who are indeed among the missing within our church congregation. Perhaps this was an area that we needed to address. The key for our church is to learn how to reach the younger generation; by younger we mean the “Baby Boomers” as well as the millennials.
Lutheran Church of Our Savior	We do not feel the word ‘trendy’ is applicable when describing the culture at Lutheran Church of Our Savior. However, when it comes to our church being an attractive place for the millennial generation to call home, we believed we were right on target as far as a potential destination. We had thought that our music was contemporary; I was told by the elder board that my preaching was also more contemporary, as well as were the ministries that we are involved in. So, to answer your question regarding ‘trendy,’ if I was to answer yes or no, I would say yes, we are.

Christ The King Roman Catholic Church	That is an interesting question. Approximately 25% of our congregation are described as millennials, which I suggest is far larger than any other church in town when discussing millennials. I would like to have more; but as the overall largest congregation of all the churches in Haddonfield, I believe we are on our way.
Mt. Olivet Christian Church	We at Mt Olivet are quite happy with our congregational make-up. As clergy, we are not concerned with who is not here, but we are very concerned about who is here within our church walls. We have a firm belief that God directs whoever walks through our front door, and culture is not our worryment...

All five pastors implied that their churches did not take into consideration ‘trendy’ ways to attract millennials. One church stated it this way, “We never worried about the word *trendy* or frankly any single word that was needed to address the missing millennials.” Only two of the five pastors suggested that their churches were somewhat attractive to millennials. This is how one pastor stated it: “When it comes to our church being an attractive place for the millennial generation to call home, we believed we were right on target.”

Question 2

The researcher was trying to ask the pastors whether or not they notice the percentage of millennials in other congregations, as well as the cultures within the respective congregations that would attract the millennial age group.

Table 5.2: Did you notice other churches had a much younger population?

First Baptist Church	We are never worried about who attends what church, nor are we concerned with why a certain type of cultural base is attending anywhere but our church. 10 miles from here is a major difference in community. Compared to who we are in Haddonfield. Our town and its people have been here since the late 1800s and we and the town are still alive.
First Presbyterian Church	We are very aware of the newer ‘mega-churches’ within our surrounding communities, but we also know that there is no way for us to compete with the Evangelical churches in both theological stances, and in the financial realm that they reside.
Lutheran Church of Our Savior	I rarely have the time to consider what other churches are doing, or for that matter who it was that made up their congregation. We do not have a spy team that would go to another church to see what they were up to, so in reality, I cannot say I am that aware of the younger or older congregations in the majority of churches in our neighboring communities.

Christ The King Roman Catholic Church	As I mentioned we are blessed with over 500 members that fit into the millennial culture. I am not particularly concerned about other churches, and frankly, unless they are Roman Catholic, I do not worry about their respective congregations' cultural status.
Mt. Olivet Christian Church	Since our church may be the smallest church in Haddonfield, I am not thinking too much about rival churches in surrounding communities. In fact, we are fighting a weekly battle with the mortgage company and the electric company to stay as a house of worship in our town. We had been in town only a year before we had the fire which crippled us from a financial standpoint, and we did not recover even though it has been 9 years ago. We pray a prayer of thanksgiving that other churches in our neighboring towns are doing well. Glory be to God.

After compiling the above replies to the question, the researcher noticed that four of the five pastors did not concern themselves with the age or the culture of their churches. Most were giving an honest view of the financial status of their churches and their inability to “compete” with surrounding churches that have the resources necessary to attract the millennials who live in their town. It appears to the researcher that finances play a large role in the overall condition of several of the mainline churches in town.

Question 3

This question centered on the ages of the pastors who are leading the mainline churches in town. According to the researcher, age has proven to be an important attraction for the millennials in the study; and the answers to this question may shed light on a reason that the millennials in town, for the most part, are among the missing in these mainline churches.

Table 5.3: Do believe a younger church leader is needed?

First Baptist Church	According to Barna and Pew, in a recent survey that was taken 2 years ago, we at First Baptist have discerned that a pastors age is irrelevant. I can preach with anybody and after 25 years in the pulpit God keeps blessing me so a younger pastor would not reach our congregation as I can.
First Presbyterian Church	I do not personally believe that age of the church leadership has much to do with who attends our church. I believe everything we do at First Presbyterian is ordained by God and His Son. The people who attend our church are called to be here. That is what we believe.

Lutheran Church of Our Savior	Realizing that I am 35 years of age would serve to make it rather unusual that I would feel the need to add a younger person to our clergy team. I sensed that this question was designed for the more senior clergy in town. If, however, it was meant to include me than the answer is no.
Christ The King Roman Catholic Church	Well that was going to be a difficult question for me to answer, but after giving this some thought I guess one could always bring in a younger clergy member to join our team. The four pastors on staff are all past 50 years of age and perhaps it is time for us to consider adding a younger priest. I will get back to you in 20 years after we think about replacing one of us.
Mt. Olivet Christian Church	I and my leadership have done a lot within the community to try and attract younger members. But when it comes to bringing “life into our church,” come visit us any Sunday and you will see us raise the rafters of this building. We know we “get it” when it comes to praise our Lord and Savior.

Four of the pastors believed that age is not the problem when discussing the missing millennials in their churches. One pastor is only 35 years of age, so obviously he is not concerned with not being able to relate to millennials. Interestingly enough, his church has the largest population of millennials of the mainline churches in town.

Question 4

This question was designed to discover if the churches surveyed had ever posted their services online or considered doing so. The researcher had noticed that several of the non-mainline churches have a very comprehensive presence on social media, which obviously serves to entice or, at least interest, millennials in those churches since they are the social media generation.

Table 5.4: Did the church ever consider putting the church service online to reach millennials?

First Baptist Church	Well, I’m glad you asked that question. We tried to go on Facebook on a few Sunday mornings and the reality was, 5 people tuned in over a 3-week trial, so that was the end of our social media program.
First Presbyterian Church	To be honest, we had no one in the congregation who knows how to negotiate the social media highway, or whatever it is called, as we are not the least bit savvy; nor do we feel we need that particular vehicle to attract millennials to our church. That does not mean we are correct in our thinking, but at this point, the Facebooks of the world are not on our horizon.
Lutheran Church of Our Savior	We had previously been on both YouTube and Facebook, but our following was minimal as far as numbers go. The main people who were watching were our present members. We are not averse to technology, but this town is not focused on social media when it comes to ‘doing church.’

Christ The King Roman Catholic Church	We have had our services on Facebook and YouTube for over 2 years and I believe that we are the only church in Haddonfield that has continuously been out there on social media. We find it particularly helpful when promoting the times of our special services and of course the Holy Days of Obligation such as Christmas and Easter.
Mt. Olivet Christian Church	We cannot afford iTunes, and we are not technically very sound. If our lights go on and the microphones work without their normal static, we are happy. Social media and Mt Olivet do not work together. We have been on Facebook for the past six years with not much in the way of results, however.

Four of the pastors currently have or have used some type of social media platforms, such as Facebook or Twitter. But none of those four were able to continue with it, due to a lack of media-savvy members or the budget necessary to build a strong social media program. It appeared to the researcher that the four churches understood what an advantage social media would be to their churches. The only church with a rather large millennial base has been utilizing social media for the past two years, and their millennial population has been growing over 12% a year since the inception of the social media program.

Question 5

Four of the questioned churches in town have expressed awareness that millennials, and even the Gen-Xers, are not coming to church with any degree of regularity. Most of the pastors blame their family histories; and, in two cases, the parents of millennials are considered responsible for the missing millennials. They (the four churches) are aware that millennials who have come to visit their churches do not seem to stay very long. They view this dilemma as a nationwide problem, as opposed to a problem in just Haddonfield.

Table 5.5: Does your church have awareness that a large percentage of millennials drop out of attending church?

First Baptist Church	When I came to this church 25 years ago, I was not concerned where the 18-year-old was, and I am not concerned where they are now. Their parents should have been more concerned more than I.
First Presbyterian Church	We were concerned that the age group you referenced is not showing signs of commitment to the church, whether it be our church or another church. We tried to interest this millennial, or Gen X, or Boomer culture to join us and make the church commitment, but I believed that we as a church congregation could grow even without those age-related groups, and I now know we were wrong in our assessment. It appeared to our leadership board that the groups mentioned would eventually show up but that did not happen.
Lutheran Church of Our Savior	Well I do admit to subscribing to Pew's service and I had read those statistics. Our church problem in Haddonfield is that there are not any new ways of getting those youngsters back in church other than what we have already done. It started with their family and their respective church-going practices. Sadly, for us, many of those seniors are not very consistent regarding church attendance either.
Christ The King Roman Catholic Church	It has dawned on us over the past five years that this most alarming of statistics is prevalent in our church as well as most Christian churches in America. We try hard to have a ministry focusing on that age group and the Baby-Boomers who are parents of many of those in the category that you mentioned. It is a nationwide dilemma and one that is not easily solved. The good news is that many of them come back once they are married and children start to show up. Barna verifies this statistic as well.
Mt. Olivet Christian Church	It was evident to most churches in our country that we all tend to lose many of our younger members, some for as long as a decade before they slowly start coming back to us, assuming, of course, that they still reside in our area. This statistic has been the same for the past four decades according to our research. The difficulty, at least for our small church, is that we do not possess the resources needed to attract that particular age group."

The researcher noticed that the four churches that are struggling with the missing-millennial dilemma are essentially saying the same thing—none of them know how to keep the millennials in their church on a consistent basis. One church is very aware of the problem of millennials dropping out of church and has even hired additional clergy, all in the millennial age group, to both attract millennials and to pastor them. However, even for that church, millennials come and go. Thankfully, that congregation is blessed with a large millennial population which enables them to hold on to and build their millennial base.

Question 6

Music, according to the researcher, is always a way to attract and retain members. Choirs are the main choice of these churches, and it appears that the five churches plan to stay this way when it comes to music ministries. Adding a praise band to the church music program is a way to modernize the churches' attractiveness, especially to the millennials.

Table 5.6: Has your church considered changing the style of music to attract millennials?

First Baptist Church	I have not changed music nor have I changed the music minister since I first came to this church over 25 years ago. Our choir, although we are getting older, just does not need to change from our tried and true-blue hymnal; and our congregation would never approve of our considering a praise band of any size. If the millennials are going to join us, they are welcomed.
First Presbyterian Church	We had never considered saying goodbye to our choir, but we did consider having a small praise band once a month just to change things up. We tried this format in the past, but it was met with disappointed church members.
Lutheran Church of Our Savior	Our choir, which has been an active part of our worship service for over 75 years, is here to stay. We must make no mistake about this statement. Without our choir we cannot imagine what our church service would be as far as worshipping the Lord. Incorporating a praise band did make sense to our leadership until we tried to incorporate one into our Sunday service. The response was at best disappointing, with more than a few complaints surfacing at all levels of our church. We learned our lesson in a hurry and prayerfully stayed where we have always been-- worshipping Him with harps and lyre and song."
Christ The King Roman Catholic Church	Our choir, as blessed as they are, will be a key component in our worship as long as I am here, and hopefully as long as the church is here. We have had a praise band 3 years ago and frankly they were very good. It just takes time for the congregation to feel comfortable with different music selections. We reminded our church that we are praising God no matter how we sing. We will soon incorporate them again in our services.
Mt. Olivet Christian Church	Our church choir is a worship staple within this church. There is no one or no group of musicians that can or will replace our choir. I would not be surprised if the church would be willing to ask me to leave if we chose to eliminate the choir from our church worship team.

Of the five churches, only one has a full-time praise band. As the researcher noted multiple times throughout this question and answer session, the one church that answered affirmatively to each question is the church with the most millennials on board and is the most progressive one in town. The other four appear to be stuck in the old school choir

tradition and are not showing any ability to grow their millennial population. Music is a very key component to any church service, and one would think that the four churches that are languishing when it comes to younger people coming to church would look at all possibilities to attract the millennials, as well as older members who might enjoy a variety of music.

Millennials

Next, the researcher studied data from eight millennials, utilizing interviews to better comprehend how they view and engage with their church. The group was comprised of three men and five women, ranging from 28 to 38 years old. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide. The interviews lasted between 15 and 30 minutes. The participant's names were changed, and the words *male* and *female* replaced the actual names of the millennials who took part in the survey.

Question 1

The researcher was interested in gauging how important women's ministries were within the mainline churches of Haddonfield. The researcher, through experience as a twenty-five-year member of the mainline church community in 08033, has observed that women's ministries have always been put on the back burner of importance within most of the Haddonfield churches. Millennials have shown that women are strongly interested in learning if their voices are going to be heard when considering becoming a member of this current mainline church family. Table 5.7 records the responses of the millennials who took part in these questions.

Table 5.7: Do you find women's ministries to be valuable within the church context?

Millennial #1: Male, age: 28	Yes, women's involvement gives me hope. Women and men were created equally by God, that fact should transition into today's church ministries. Women can lead as well as men, and looking at Mary Magdelene in scripture should give an example of women in ministry.
Millennial #2: Male, age: 37	I do not think it's a big deal. Men were called to lead God's church according to the Bible. This has nothing to do against women, it's all about what Scripture says.
Millennial #3: Male, age: 37	Absolutely it's important for women and men to contribute. I need to know that the church treats us all fairly. Men and women both can and shall lead in God's church.
Millennial #4: Female, age: 38	Yes, without women the church would falter!!
Millennial #5: Female, age: 29	Women in church leadership is scriptural. There are many women in the Bible, such as Esther, Mary Magdelene, Ruth, Naomi, Martha etc. who are leaders and they are especially sighted in the New Testament.
Millennial #6 Female, age: 35	I am not sure if clergy listens to women, be it in ministries or not. I have a sense that women are portrayed in the bible as second rate and in mainline churches as well.
Millennial #7 Female, age: 38	Yes, my Mother was a church leader for 37 years in her church. My Mom led the ten of us to church every Sunday and was the spiritual leader in our church. If it was not for Mother, none of her 9 children would have made it as life-long Christians.
Millennial #8 Female, age: 34	Not necessarily, it's up to the senior pastor to lead the church.

The majority of the respondents answered that they did believe that women's ministries were important, and only two of the millennials did not believe that women's ministries were necessary. One millennial even stated that the church would falter without women playing a key role in leading ministries within the church.

Question 2

The pulpit is often filled with older white men. These men went to seminary and are formally trained. In Table 5.8, the researcher is searching for the relevance of the church leader's age, as perceived by the millennial.

Table 5.8: Is the age of the senior pastor relevant to your attendance on Sunday morning?

Millennial #1: Male, age: 28	For me it is. I am not excited about a pastor who is out of touch with me. It is not an easy task to act as though a man in his 60's can relate to our millennial culture. When I am a senior I am certain I will be out of the loop so I suspect a senior pastor must feel that way as well.
Millennial #2: Male, age: 37	Not at all.
Millennial #3: Male, age: 37	Not really, as long as they are preaching God's word!
Millennial #4: Female, age: 38	Age equates with wisdom, especially when talking about God and His Son. But wisdom although it is all over the Bible rarely comes from younger leaders. It seems to me that wisdom and age go hand- n- hand.

Millennial #5: Female, age: 29	No. The senior pastor's experience along mean a lot to the church in terms of leadership. You cannot pass up a leader who has been there.
Millennial #6 Female, age:35	The pastor must focus on God's word, I do not care how old or young a pastor is, just his message.
Millennial #7 Female, age: 38	Age means very little when it comes to God and me!
Millennial #8 Female, age:34	I have never thought about it, but now that I am, I would have to say yes. My Father and Uncle could not relate to me and my millennial friends. I cannot imagine them preaching God's word, at least to my group of friends.

The researcher was anxious to discern if the age of the senior pastor played a role in the decision of a millennial to attend church. After reviewing the answers found in table 5.8, the researcher noted that millennials were not particularly concerned with the age of the senior pastor. The most important aspect of pastoral leadership, at least as revealed in four millennials' answers, was not age; they were primarily concerned with the preaching of God's Word. Only one millennial expressed concern about the senior pastor not being in touch with this generation, and one other millennial was slightly concerned with age being a key component.

Question 3

This question focused on the merits of contemporary music versus the consistent use of the hymnal as the main style of worship. There have been debates among the congregations in the mainline church arena as to becoming too contemporary in terms of their music ministry or continuing to use the same music that has been echoing through the halls for the past six decades, which has been accepted as the only true means of worshipping God. Music is a major factor in worship; it helps to keep people connected and involved. The preference of music, therefore, can become a hot topic for individuals, congregations, and denominations. This question was asked to ascertain the millennial's individual view of the music in worship.

Table 5.9: What are your feelings about contemporary music versus the Hymnal during worship?

Millennial #1: Male, age: 28	Bringing in the Sheaves would make me walk out the door. Praise hymns are what we come to church for. I need to wake up on Sunday mornings, not go back to sleep. No offence to the hymnals of old. But I am not of that generation.
Millennial #2: Male, age: 37	I need to stand and sing out to Him for all His glory.
Millennial #3: Male, age:37	I do not care. I know how to worship Him. Music is nice but the word is the key ingredient to worship for me.
Millennial #4: Female, age: 38	I have none, I cannot sing but I sure can pray!! However, if I wanted to sing, my voice needs to be motivated, understanding that I am singing to God and His Son.
Millennial #5: Female, age:29	The Blue Book is archaic. It's boring and puts me to sleep. I want to jump out of my seat and praise Him, worship Him, thank Him with all the gusto I have. Its all for His glory.
Millennial #6 Female, age: 35	I love contemporary church, both music and message! I want to be awake, and listening to the pastor and praising God is the best way for me to feel I am into the service.
Millennial #7 Female, age: 38	I am happy to be singing to the God I love, but contemporary really wakes me up.
Millennial #8 Female, age: 34	NO OLD Hymnal!!!! It is not the time for us to be singing songs that my Mom and Granny sang. We are a new generation, we need to let it go!!!

The majority of millennials professed to prefer contemporary music as five of the answers landed in that direction. Two millennials did not necessarily care what type of music was playing, as long as they were free to take part in the most important aspects of a church service--hearing the Word and prayer.

Question 4

Age, gender, and diversity are topics in the news on a regular basis. Our nation, the melting pot of the world, continues to see the significance of the three above categories within the millennial communities. The researcher was most interested to find out if the millennials found it important to have a congregation that reflects their interest in a church that represents the world today.

Table 5.10: Describe the importance of age, gender, and diversity for you.

Millennial #1: Male, age: 28	On a scale of 1 to 10 it's a 10 in importance. Age is not meaningful if there are no younger people in the building. I could not belong to a church without diversity in age and culture.
Millennial #2: Male, age: 37	I do not care. But diversity in congregational make up is important to our generation.
Millennial #3: Male, age: 37	I need more of me in church. My grandmother is awesome, but she worships much different than I. Diversity is important to me and my family.
Millennial #4:	Diversity is a key factor in all I do.

Female, age: 38	
Millennial #5: Female, age: 29	We must not be all alike. We must be like Jesus chosen people.
Millennial #6 Female, age: 35	I need diversity in church. It's all about the Gospels and what Christ teaches.
Millennial #7 Female, age: 38	Gender, does not matter to me, God does.
Millennial #8 Female, age: 34	Diversity... without it, I'm not there.

In table 5.10 approximately five of those questioned answered that diversity is very important to them, much more than age or gender. It appears to the researcher that most millennials are searching for diversity within the church walls. God is calling for diversity, according to two of the millennials, and the rest did not want a church body that all looked like them.

Question 5

The researcher noted that many millennials had families and was interested in learning how many were looking for a church with a vibrant youth ministry. Therefore, the survey posed questions about youth ministry and its leadership, as this age group often has children who could attend youth ministry events and learn from its leaders.

Table 5.11: How attractive is an active youth ministry? And its leadership?

Millennial #1: Male, age: 28	I have children, VERY IMPORTANT to me and my family.
Millennial #2: Male, age:37	My kids do not come to church; maybe they would with a strong youth ministry. I would welcome that aspect of church.
Millennial #3: Male, age:37	Means nothing to me. No kids is fine!
Millennial #4: Female, age:38	The leadership is as important as the youth; they must work together to build the church going forward.
Millennial #5: Female, age:29	I care only in the sense that the church is growing.
Millennial #6 Female, age:35	I am not worried about the youth in the church. Most of them do not care.
Millennial #7 Female, age:38	I love the youth and the pastor who runs this ministry. They bring the energy that is necessary to wake up this place. Church growth is also a positive and that can come from youth ministries.
Millennial #8 Female, age: 34	Love kids love the younger ministers that work here. Need strong teachings and youth programs.

In table 5.11 five millennials answered that a growing youth ministry along with a caring youth minister was important, and three millennials felt that youth ministries lead to church growth. Two millennials surprisingly were not concerned about youth at the church, with one sharing that “no kids are fine.” What was interesting to the researcher was that the millennial who answered that question was a parent with three children of his own.

Conclusion

While interviewing both pastors and millennials, the researcher found that one of the most important aspects for the mainline church and for the millennials is for God to be the central driving force of all communication, action and ministry. Furthermore, the pastors seemed to have an outlook of seeing the church in which they serve to be in good status regardless of the number of millennials attending at this time. On the other hand, millennials are looking for a church that will allow for their family schedules to be addressed, for their social justice issues to be brought to forefront of mission, and for equality in many aspects and areas of life.

CHAPTER SIX: WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Recommendations

Women in the Church

Women play a key role in leading ministries within the church. That leadership leads to a feeling of fellowship and community within the church, which then sparks an attitude and conviction of being servants. In 1 Corinthians, Paul expected fellowship and servitude to be essential aspects of becoming one with Christ. Churches can encourage women to start and/or lead ministries that are based on serving God and building the community. As those women learn to lead by serving God, the church congregation will continue to grow internally and externally in the community.

Millennials expect and demand action and service when they join a church. Millennials are not looking for churches that are inward focused, missing the outward focus of mission. Also, the way in which the mainline church has set up its governance system is archaic in the eyes of the millennial generation as it does not allow for the flexibility of ideas or use of people's gifts and talents given to them by God, and finally millennials are not interested in a church in which the people within the church do not have the face of Jesus, rather have their own face for their own agendas. Millennials are looking for the mainline churches to change in these areas and attitudes. As the self-centered churches of today who believed they were the only ones who had accurate mission statements, lay leaders acted as a brand of leadership, by far an example of

Christ-like servanthood more than anyone will ever see in just any church along the way, and these attitudes need to change.

Diversity in the Church

In 2021, Americans are more comfortable with and accustomed to being around people of different ethnicities.⁷⁰ According to Pew Research, this change has awakened church leadership, especially in the mainline arena, to understand that millennials are fully engaged in believing what Jesus Christ decreed when walking the earth. The millennials gladly refer to John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him, may not perish but may have eternal life.” As millennials follow Christ and His declaration that all people are equal, the door to mainline churches should swing wide open. Mainline churches and their leaders must embrace the all-inclusive church that millennials are seeking.⁷¹

Mainline churches should not only be Scripturally sound; they also need to know what millennials are looking for when searching for a church. The mainline churches are opening themselves more and more to diversity and intergenerational ministry both of which allow for millennials to identify themselves with in a particular mainline church. When diversity comes in too much of a wave, it can overwhelm the current congregation and catch them off-guard. Millennials, who recognize this as everyday practice, need to help the church prepare for diversity, such as blended families, different socio-economic levels, more women in the workplace and in positions of leadership both at the workplace, and lay-level ministries. When the mainline church does its part and the

⁷⁰ Dimrock, “Defining Generations,” <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>.

⁷¹ Pew Research, “Religion Among the Millennials,” 11.

millennials do their part, they will educate each other to be a stronger group worshipping God.

The Holy Spirit in the Church

As the Haddonfield churches long for millennials to grace their congregations, they need to implement the teachings of the Apostle Paul. The mainline churches in Haddonfield must realize that Christ called Paul and led him to achieve what Christ has called for; like Paul, they must get to work instead of sitting by and hoping for a miracle that does not appear to be happening.

The five mainline churches must have a willingness to hear the calling from God to make their communities welcoming to the millennials; those very same millennials need to show up, commit to the congregation, and say, “we are here.” One must call for individual and corporate prayer, which this researcher believes is the only way to start the trend in the right direction. A church or a town-wide revival may be one way that the theological clock starts up again in this rather sleepy Christian environment. Each church claims to know God and to know God’s Son; now they must reach out to both of them and welcome the Holy Spirit into the church and allow the Trinity to spark that much-needed revival.

Evaluation

Strengths

The first strength of the research project is using the same questions for each participant. The interviews allow participants to “provide historical information.”⁷²

⁷² Creswell, 179.

Additionally, interviews allow the researcher to maintain “control over the line of questioning.”⁷³ The researcher asked open-ended questions on the pastors’ and millennials’ questionnaires to allow the pastors and millennials to fully express themselves about the relevance of the mainline churches in Haddonfield.

Because the mainline churches were all located in Haddonfield, New Jersey, the researcher was able to study data, examine historical documents, and interview pastors. Having been a member of one of the churches for almost 20 years allowed for the researcher to understand the complexities of the lack of millennials within any of the congregations within 08033. Many of the churches have grandparents, maybe parents, and then there is a generational gap that is easy to see in the church where the researcher was a member, and the town in which the researcher lived.

Weaknesses

The weakness of the research project is the small sample size. Because each of the clergy participants lives in the same small area and leads local churches, they often give similar answers. Furthermore, the millennials have the same issue of being similar people from a very similar area, therefore the answers are going to be within a limited range. The field research and interviews with pastors and millennials yielded similar outcomes across the churches.

The researcher noted that both the Pew Research Center and the Barna Group included samplings of 35,000 Americans to establish their study on millennials and their respective church preferences,⁷⁴ whereas Haddonfield is a town of only 11,500 people

⁷³ Creswell, 179.

⁷⁴ Pew Research, “Religion Among the Millennials,” 12.

total. The responses of Haddonfield millennials may not reflect the answers of millennials as an entire group or the worldview of communities around them.

Conclusion

The bridge that needs rebuilding between the millennials and all the churches in Haddonfield may take years to finish. These churches have the same difficulties in the eyes of the millennial generation and appear to be years away from the harmony that both sides need before millennials become the valued members that the churches in Haddonfield sorely need. When the researcher walked into a mainline church in Haddonfield, all of them looked very similar.

CHAPTER SEVEN: NEEDING CHANGE

The researcher believes that God is the only way to church growth. He sent His Son Jesus to come to the earth in human form to become the supreme sacrifice for man's sins. Christians believe that all humankind has a direct one-on-one relationship with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ. Christ, the humblest man to walk the earth, died by accepting the will of the Father and set the incredible spectacle of atonement into motion. The five mainline churches in Haddonfield have lost their zeal for Christ and forgotten who Christ is. The pastors all realized that there was a problem, but none of them spoke about reaching out to God, Jesus Christ, or the incredible power of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit needs to be a focal point among these struggling churches if millennials, or any of the more contemporary generations, are to consider joining these congregations.

Suggestions for Churches

1. Have a business meeting of the church to focus the church on the commitment to attracting millennials to the congregation.
2. Have a corporate prayer service with a goal of asking God to provide what is necessary for their church to attract the millennial generation.
3. Prepare the congregation to hear God's confirming of the Holy Spirit's ministry within their own lives and the life of the church (Acts 2:3-4).

4. The congregation must fast (Matthew 6:16), pray (1 John 5:14), read the Bible individually, and worship corporately (Acts 1:8).

Suggestions for Millennials

1. The millennials are looking to the Holy Spirit as their leader, while churches use their pulpit as a political platform that rails against the millennials' belief system.
2. The Holy Spirit is the one who activates the fellowship within believers (Eph 4:4). Millennials need interaction with the existing culture, as well as its diversity is what drives millennial's fellowship outside of their families.
3. God's calling on the millennial's life will allow them to both serve and become leaders within the church body in which they join (Eph. 4:12).

Additional Research Questions

The researcher developed additional questions that he would like to have asked, had he been granted more time during the interviews. Those questions are:

- 1) Pastor, do you believe that the Holy Spirit is alive and active among your congregation, and is He being called to lead your church in their call for millennials to become part of your congregation?
- 2) Pastor, are you and your church considered a praying church?
- 3) Pastor, do you believe that church growth is what your church desires, or is your church comfortable with your present number of congregants and number of new members?
- 4) Pastor, if you wanted to start a prayer team, what would be the first goal of that team? In other words, what would you and your church pray for?

- 5) Pastor, do you have the physical and spiritual energy to lead a new members' ministry? If the answer is yes, why have you been waiting to start one?
- 6) Pastor, do you have the personnel to spiritually cultivate an influx of millennials?

The average age of the senior clergy was 56 to 60, and one of them was approaching 70 years of age. When the researcher examined the age of the congregations, the average in four of the five churches was over 62 years of age. The churches were slowly aging both at the pulpit and in the pews, so much so that none of the churches or their leaders felt that their advancing age was the reason the younger generations were not able to relate to the services. A majority of the churches did not have a dedicated youth ministry or a desire to use more modern music in worship. All of these variables were being overlooked, which contributes to not only to the problem of missing millennials, but to the lack of church growth in any generation over the past decade.

The researcher felt the need to ask a couple more probing questions of the five pastors, but none of them showed any desire to answer a question that perhaps exposed the church's lack of growth over the past ten years. As the researcher reached the final questions, it seemed that the pastors were eager to end the interview after an hour or ninety minutes.

These churches would need to take drastic action, perhaps even undergo a complete overhaul, before they would be able to attract millennials. The research indicates that the five mainline churches in Haddonfield need a significant spiritual awakening--an awakening that can move mountains and transform them from churches

going through the motions to churches that are moving towards God through the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The researcher shared his favorite Scripture passage with two of the pastors who did not feel they or their churches have any need to change, hoping that they would begin to grasp the power and truth that the Holy Spirit could bring to them and their congregations. Jesus said in John 16:5-15:

Now I am going to Him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, “Where are you going?” Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth; It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. When He comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment; in regard to sin, because men do not believe in Me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will bring glory to Me by taking what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.

The Desperate Need for Prayer

Four of the five congregations were experiencing a standstill regarding millennial members and church growth in general. The researcher suggested that these churches utilize advanced prayer in the form of a corporate prayer service, along with fasting, to ask the Holy Spirit to lead them out of their holding pattern. It was pointed out that Jesus Christ spent all night in prayer before choosing the twelve disciples. If Christ was humble enough to reach out to the Father to make the correct choices, these churches would do well to follow His example. Christ’s choices were of major importance and led to the growth necessary for His earthly ministry and, ultimately, the growth of the Kingdom.

Commitment to a time of continued prayer would be a good start for these churches to begin a Spirit-led revival and realize their need for church growth.

The disciples learned that a consistent prayer life was a vital aspect of Christ's ministry and His way to directly communicate with His Father. Christ was the perfect example to teach the disciples how to pray and show them that asking God directly for a specific thing gave God the opportunity to answer them. The researcher shared the following excerpt on prayer from MacDonald's commentary with the four pastors:

God answers prayers: Sometimes, when hearts are weak, He gives the very gifts believers seek, But often faith must learn a deeper rest, And trust God's silence when He does not speak; For he whose name is love will send the best, Stars may burn out, not mountain walls endure, But God is true, His promises are sure. He is our strength.⁷⁵

Christ and His disciples needed to pray constantly for the strength to endure. The disciples had to separate themselves from the daily experiences of life and focus on calling on the Father and the Spirit to show them the way. Likewise, the pastors interviewed for this project need to bring their congregations to prayer and seek the ways they can build a church that is welcoming to everyone, including millennials. The researcher fully believed that the four churches in most need of an influx of newer and younger members had heard the message of prayer, but they did not fully embrace the importance of implementing immediate churchwide prayer.

⁷⁵ MacDonald, *Believer's Bible Commentary*, 1412.

Personal Reflection

The researcher appreciated the amount of work that was necessary to complete the educational process of this DMin degree. It is very humbling to know that God blessed me with the ability through Him to persevere as a student. I know that God, through the Holy Spirit, has guided me countless times during this process. I have never been an excellent writer, which frustrates me to this very day. I feel confident that I know the material, but I cannot put my words on paper, at least at this academic level. This has been a daunting task for me to complete. However, God has continued to love me and stay with me, when I could have easily felt alone in this journey. Writing has been frustrating for me since my high school days, but I realized that God was teaching me that if the disciples of Jesus Christ—twelve men, most of whom were adept at fishing but little else—could join Him and contribute as He went along His public ministry, then I could at least take one day at a time and accept that Christ who led them is leading me as well.

The Blessing of Bethel

My spiritual formation is grounded in Jesus Christ and thankfully has continued to grow as I have matured into a loving and, at times, somewhat humble Christian who is called to be a servant of Christ and embrace the four-fold gospels. I am deeply thankful for the words of Scripture as I know that they represent the words of God the Father and His Son. One gift of the Doctor of Ministry program at Bethel is that I am in the Word every day of the week. As I have grown in Him, I am comprehending more of His teachings as I go forward. Interestingly, the more I appear to learn, the less I seem to know, which I believe is a reality check that God will give each of us. I am deeply

thankful for what I am learning through His inerrant Word, and my plan after graduation is to continue my academic studies at Bethel, taking a masters level program in theological studies. My career path, which includes my present job teaching Bible to grades nine through twelve at a Christian Academy, is to prayerfully seek a full-time adjunct opportunity at a Bible college teaching theology at the undergraduate level.

I also know that the more I embark on my journey to serve others, the more He has blessed me. I have learned through Dr. Irving that servanthood can be quickly learned just by following Christ and learning about His time on earth. There has never been a man like Him, and there never will be. All Jesus asks of us is to try to be like Him. I look back on all the ministries that I was involved in at the church level where my main goal was to be a human being focused on my job at church, not realizing that I was called to serve the Lord for His glory, not my own. When I started taking classes from Dr. Irving and learning what it meant to be a servant, I finally started to realize how much time I had wasted, putting me, myself, and my humanness first, and God and His Son somewhere on the back burner. I am very thankful to Dr. Irving for waking me up to know that God and His Son are all that matter when we are called to serve others. I have learned that as we die to ourselves, we can, in some way, be more like the Son of Man.

To remotely try to be like Christ would take at least a lifetime. It is something that we know we cannot fully attain, but the key is to work toward that goal. All that we do on this earth is set forth by God's plan for us, so we need to learn to listen to Him as He listens to us. When we stop whatever it is that occupies our world and are willing to let Him speak to us, we realize that He is only asking for a one-to-one relationship with Him.

Bethel has taught me to accept that the Creator of the Universe knows my name, knew me in my mother's womb, and loves me dearly. If He knows us the way no one else knows us, I cannot imagine any reality that can be greater than this. We need to embrace His love for us and own the precious understanding that His Son's incredible sacrifice for all of us is our gift of eternal life. This is the most precious of all gifts that the Son and the Father could give us. They not only gave it to all of us, but they gave it freely without demanding anything in return other than to follow the example of God's most precious Son.

APPENDIX A: PASTOR'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Pastor: Please fill out the answers to the questions as openly and honestly as possible. All questionnaires will be kept confidential.

Question #1	Is your church 'trendy' enough to attract millennials? Did the church have a thought pattern when discussing how to attract millennials?
Answer:	
Question #2	Do believe a younger church leader is needed?
Answer:	
Question #3	Did the church ever consider putting the church service online to reach millennials?
Answer:	
Question #4	Does your church have awareness that a large percentage of millennials dropout of attending church?
Answer:	
Question #5	Has your church considered changing the style of music to attract millennials?
Answer:	

APPENDIX B: MILLENNIAL'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Millennial: Please fill out the answers to the questions as openly and honestly as possible. All questionnaires will be kept confidential.

Question #1	Do you find women's ministries to be valuable within the church context?
Answer:	
Question #2	Is the age of the senior pastor relevant to your attendance on Sunday morning?
Answer:	
Question #3	What are your feelings about contemporary music versus the hymnal during worship?
Answer:	
Question #4	Describe the importance of age, gender, and diversity for you?
Answer:	
Question #5	How attractive is an active youth ministry? And its leadership?
Answer:	

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