

# **10 Things Your Church Can Do Right Now to Attract Millennials**

Fox Valley Association Spring Meeting  
Sunday, April 29, 2017

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- A “generation” is a group of people born around the same time, and raised in roughly the same place.
- Today’s conversation and description is based in America. These definitions might be slightly different in other places.
- Generations exhibit similar characteristics; communication, shopping, motivations, generation-shaping trends or events. These are broad categories, and do not apply to everyone in the generation.

## **First, about the generations...**

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- There are a few of the earliest generations:
  - The Lost Generation, born between 1883 and 1900
  - The Greatest Generation, born between 1901 and 1924
  - These generations created the church as we know it now, but no longer have any real activity or influence, simply due to reduced numbers.

# **The Six Generations in the Church Today**

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- The Silent Generation, born from 1925-1941
  - Some of these folks are WWII and Korea Veterans.
  - This is the generation who greatly expanded the church during WWII and in the 1950s when they were at the peak of their social and economic power.

# **The Six Generations in the Church Today**

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- The Baby Boomers, born 1946-1964
  - This is the largest generation in the church today.
  - Two subsets, hippies, who rejected authority and were concerned with civil rights, and yuppies of the 1980s.

# **The Six Generations in the Church Today**

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- Generation X, born early to mid 1960's, to early 1980's.
  - This is my generation. (I was born in 1969).
  - We saw the social and economic declines of the 1970s, the end of the Vietnam War. Nixon impeached, the end of the Cold War, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Some of us served in the first Persian Gulf War.
  - We saw the beginning of very real declines in the church, while the church was still holding on to old models and patterns of ministry that no longer worked. Both of our parents worked, so there wasn't as much time for church.

# **The Six Generations in the Church Today**

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- The Millennials, born mid 1980s to 2001.
  - This demographic is now the largest actual demographic in the United States. There are 77 million Millennials, and 75 million Baby Boomers, a generation that is declining numerically, and the rate of decline is increasing.
  - The number one defining moment for this generation is the attacks of September 11.

# **The Six Generations in the Church Today**

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- Generation Z or the post-Millennials, born after 1996.
  - This generation will read about the attacks of 9/11 in their history books and will not be able to contextualize or understand it.
  - This generation is also called ‘the information generation’, they are digital natives, and have never known a home without cable TV, cell phones, video games, home computers (they barely remember desktop computers) or tablet computers.
  - It is not clear yet if or when there is another generation coming, but it is about time.

# **The Six Generations in the Church Today**

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- So, why concentrate on Millennials?
- They are the largest generation in the US workforce.
- They are one of the smallest generations in the mainline churches.
- They have significantly different views from previous generations about employment, sales and marketing, politics, education, parenting styles, gender roles and identities, and of course, religion and spirituality.
- They are at the height of their employment and earning (and consequently participating and giving) potential now.
- They are most in need of connection and relationship, family support and ‘adulthood’ help right now.

# More about Millennials

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# **1. Stop Trying To Attract Millenials**

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- As above, they have a different view of sales and marketing as previous generations.
- They have exquisitely, finely tuned, exceptionally accurate b.s. detectors, and can smell it from a mile away. It turns them immediately off.

# **1. Stop Trying To Attract Millenials**

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## **2. Be Authentic**

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- About their B.S. detection skills. You do not have to try to be something that you are not. If you are, it comes off as inauthentic, and is a turn-off.

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- If you're a small, family sized country church, be that. Many of them are seeking that sense of family.
- If you're a church that does 'contemporary' worship (which isn't very contemporary any more...) well, do that. But if you're doing it to attract the Millenials, it simply won't work. It isn't their music, and if it is done poorly, it will chase them away faster than almost anything.

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- If you're a church that is traditional and formal, do that. Many are seeking a transcendent experience that is outside of their daily experience.

## **2. Be Authentic**

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# **3. Be Transparent**

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- This is vital. Again, it is related to their ability to detect a sales job. Be up-front, honest, and clear about your theology, welcome, worship style, expectations for membership and opportunities for growth and service.

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# 4. Be Rigorous

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- Quite the contrary; many are seeking real depth of meaning in their interactions at church.
- This includes in sermons, as well as adult education opportunities, and Sunday School. Felt boards and craft projects for their children aren't going to cut it any more.

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# **5. Have an Outward Vision**

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- Does what happen at church energize their public service, mission, and sense of social justice?
- It does not, and should not, replace worship as the primary activity of the church; there are plenty of secular social service and justice opportunities for them; our particular way of doing things is rooted in worship, but must indicate that the doors out into the parking lot are entrances, not exits.

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# **6. Be Open & Affirming**

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- If you are not already fully, openly welcoming to LGBT persons in your community, you have likely largely lost a large percentage of your Millennials.
- It isn't too late, but as a generation, they have grown up with positive LGBT role models on TV. And the AIDS epidemic. They have largely rejected the hateful, homophobic rhetoric of some of the previous generations in the church, and in politics. The arguments in the church are pointless to them.

## **6. Be Open & Affirming**

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# **7. Boomers, Stop Running the Technology**

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- They are better at it, and have ZERO patience for fiddling with the tech. If it doesn't work seamlessly, they (and most folks) are drawn out of a sense of worship and the technology calls attention to itself. Let them do it.

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- Do use FaceBook, Twitter, Instagram and electronic giving in worship.

## **7. Boomers, Stop Running the Technology**

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# **8. Have a Real Internet Presence.**

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- Today, you must have, at a minimum,
- A well-made website.
- An up-to-date FaceBook page for the church.
- Some sort of Twitter presence.
- An Instagram presence.
- Boomers, remember the one above? Let them do it.

## **8. Have a Real Internet Presence.**

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# 9. Electronic Giving

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- Millennials in the room, do you have any cash on you right now? Where is your check book?

## **9. Electronic Giving**

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# 10. Ask Them

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- I've painted with a VERY broad brush. Why not ask people of this Millennial generation what they think?

## **10. Ask Them**

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# **11. (Bonus!) Stop Trying**

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- If we root everything we do in the simple message of loving God, and our neighbor as ourselves; doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with God, and we filter everything we do through these two ideas, preaching the Gospel, celebrating the Sacraments, and providing a structure where people of every generation can seek and find their truest selves, we will be faithful to what God asks us to do.

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