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Building on the Foundation of the Future: The Millennial Church

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BAKKE GRADUATE UNIVERSITY

BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE FUTURE:
THE MILLENNIAL CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN TRANSFORMATATIONAL LEADERSHIP

BY

DEBORAH KOEHN LOYD

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

JULY 2011

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the New International Version unless otherwise noted.
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To Ken, my husband

You have been number one in my fan club since I started this journey twelve years ago.

You have supported me emotionally, financially and spiritually and cheered me on when

I didn't think I could finish. You have been my processing partner as we discovered

many of the understandings presented in this project in our ministry at The Bridge

Church of Portland, Oregon. For this support and love, I thank you and dedicate this work

to you.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to help church leaders find ways of inspiring commitment to the church among the Millennial Generation. The Millennial Generation has been abandoning traditional churches at a rate of nearly 80 percent once they leave high school, many of them never to return. My goal was to discover solutions, new ways of thinking, and possibly a new design for faith community. For this I chose to research a community where Millennials thrive, The Bridge Church of Portland, Oregon.

My chapters include: The Problem in chapter 1, Literary Reviews in chapter 2, The Context of Ministry in chapter 3, Theological Basis in chapter 4, Research Methodology in chapter 5, Research: Presentation of Analysis in chapter 6, and Conclusions and Recommendations in chapter 7.

I studied the tension between the practices of the traditional faith communities and Millennials in light of the Christian Jewish and Christian Gentile church conflict in Acts 15 to determine what the response of those who hold the power should be. I further discovered successful elements of the Millennial church practice at The Bridge, which is unique to their community and always changing. Their ideals, however, what I call the DNA, remain constant and seem to be universal among the generation as a whole. I fleshed out the findings and concluded with a suggested response for the traditional or modern church to help them understand the Millennial Generation and build a church for the future that will make sense to them.

Research was conducted through a qualitative research method called narrative research. I gathered stories from twelve subjects and grouped the data according to

grounded theory. My conclusions fell easily into six categories: positive deviance, hospitality, inclusion, transparency and authenticity, power, and integration and incarnation.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM

“You put your hands in the dirt of my graveyard...”
--Aaron Strumpel, Work It Out

Missional Metaphor - The Bleeder

How must leaders lead the Millennial generation so that they will be inspired to turn their passion and creativity towards the church rather than away from it? I am introducing my study with a true story about an experience that deeply impacted my life. This event occurred just three years ago and still vividly lives in my mind. It created in me an urgency to affect the church towards a more useful praxis in missional efforts among its young. This story serves as a metaphor for the problem that the church currently experiences.

It started out to be an idyllic day. The streets were teeming with people window-shopping, getting coffee or lunch, taking in one of the first offerings of sunshine for the year in the Pacific Northwest. It was the first day off that my husband and I had enjoyed in months, and it couldn't have been more pleasant... until we noticed him.

He was about thirty-five, looking like any Portland hipster with a bit of facial hair, some tattoos on his arms, and clothing that evoked an “I don't shop at the mall” ethos. He came reeling down the sidewalk towards us. Huge pools of red liquid collected on the ground. “Someone must be shooting a movie,” I mumbled.

A crowd was gathering. As he turned toward us we noticed blood gushing from his forearm like a rhythmic Old Faithful. This drama was no movie set. It was horrifyingly real. As he staggered down the sidewalk, swerving to the left and then to the right, people jumped back so as not to get splattered with blood. He was shouting unintelligibly like a drunken man. One brave soul approached him to offer help, but the bleeder pushed him away, as he tottered and fell to the ground. Struggling back to his feet, he continued his rant, all the while life-sustaining blood spewed violently from his severed artery.

A few quick thinkers dialed 911, but most of us on the street that day stood in frozen horror. People were invoking the name of God. It became impossible to take our eyes off of the unfolding drama. I prayed, yet no one seemed to be able to figure out how to help him. His future was bleeding out onto the sidewalk, and if someone didn't do something quickly, he was going to die right there. The feeling of helplessness in the crowd was palpable.

And then a granola looking couple emerged from nearby a restaurant. He was pulling latex gloves out of his back pocket and she was wadding up her sweater as they ran towards the crisis. They followed the bleeder until he finally collapsed motionless on the ground. She pressed the sweater tightly over his gash. He quickly surveyed the man for other injuries, raised his head off the ground with his sweatshirt and checked his vital signs. These heroes tended to the now unconscious bleeder until an aid car arrived and took him away; then I heard a still, small voice in my soul: "Much like this situation, the church is bleeding to death, and no one knows what to do."

The purpose of this study is to help church leaders find ways of inspiring commitment to the church among the millennial generation. Those who should be leading the church into the future are jumping ship at alarming rates. The church is in imminent danger of dying. Where are the heroes? Where are the sages who can help the church survive and live out its destiny? Surely there are those among the faithful who have the wisdom and experience to guide the church to new life as the world enters the global era. In research from the Barna Institute one senses the urgency:

The most potent data regarding disengagement is that a majority of twenty somethings—61 percent of today’s young adults—had been churched at one point during their teen years but they are now spiritually disengaged (i.e., not actively attending church, reading the Bible, or praying). Only one-fifth of twenty somethings (20 percent) have maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their high school experiences.¹

Any business interested in surviving would consider this lack of success a critical problem. According to Kinnaman, a Barna Researcher,

Much of the ministry to teenagers in America needs an overhaul—not because churches fail to attract significant numbers of young people, but because so much of those efforts are not creating a sustainable faith beyond high school. There are certainly effective youth ministries across the country, but the levels of disengagement among twenty somethings suggest that youth ministry fails too often at discipleship and faith formation. A new standard for viable youth ministry should be - not the number of attenders, the sophistication of the events, or the “cool” factor of the youth group—but whether teens have the commitment, passion and resources to pursue Christ intentionally and whole-heartedly after they leave the youth ministry nest.²

The assumption that lack of faith formation and discipleship lead to this exodus seems like a leap in logic. For instance, Kinnaman, et al. note in their research that 78 percent

¹ George Barna. “Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teen Years.” [www. barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years](http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years), (accessed Jan. 15, 2010).

² Ibid.

remain Christian into their twenties.³ The problem does not look like either lack of faith formation or lack of discipleship. In fact, the findings point to something entirely different.

Maintaining Christian faith without the support of a church community is not easy, yet the twenty somethings have not given up on Jesus. Could it be that grandmother's or father's church do not work for them anymore? Could it be that they are looking for a church community that more deeply reflects their experience of faith and what they think it should look like in everyday life? Parents most often expect their children to reflect their values and tastes once they grow to maturity. If recent history is any indicator, this assumption is fallacious. Rather than a faith crisis as Barna suggests, their response could very well be a cultural crisis. The church needs to pay attention to its potential congregation of the future. Wise young women and men know the signs of the times and must be given a voice. Their voice is God's prescription to those in the church who will listen and discover how to stop the bleeding.

Research Question/Focusing Statement

I am studying how leaders might lead the millennial generation to inspire their participation and imagination towards the church of the future. What will capture the hearts of the next generations and inspire their high functioning involvement in faith and praxis? Is there a way to convey faith to the younger generations that will ignite their curiosity towards God, engage their concern for the salvation of their peers? What do leaders need to know to be effective stewards of the next generation? How does the

³ Ibid.

church create a tenable atmosphere for Millennials? How does the younger generation want and need to be led?

Courage for the Future

Years ago Francis Schaffer noted that the church world has been experiencing diminishing returns for their efforts towards the younger generations.⁴ Taken together, the research of Schaffer and Barna demonstrate a forty-year trend of the church's inability to engage where the battle rages. Most congregations have fiercely protected their traditions and thinking patterns about the transference and practice of faith. In his book *Good To Great*, Jim Collins describes the most successful leaders as those who were humble enough to "look out the window to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well. At the same time, they look in the mirror to apportion responsibility, never blaming bad luck when things go poorly."⁵ If the church were to follow suit it would practice the same healthy self-examination. On the edges of the traditional and evangelical churches a few courageous leaders have developed a habit of self-examination. They have recognized that much of tradition has lost its force and meaning for today's culture rendering it impotent for the purpose of conveying a lasting and practical faith. These leaders have moved towards a more relevant expression of faith for their communities, whether the pathway forward means finding ways to revitalize dead tradition or the reinvention of new rituals, but mostly these peripheral leaders are thinking different thoughts about design of faith community and church life. They are

⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 32.

⁵ Jim Collins, *Good To Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 35.

looking to change not the theological foundations, but rather the building blocks of church infrastructure and practice.

Questions of Relevance

Millennials ask, “Is church worth my time and effort? Will I be spiritually enriched? Can I bring my friends and have it make sense to them?” Frank Viola and George Barna in their book *Pagan Christianity* tell about hallowed traditions that have been set in stone, having obscure beginnings and no relevance to today’s culture. For example, John Wesley discovered a captive audience every Sunday evening when the newly installed incandescent gas lamps were lit. He wisely used the opportunity to preach the gospel to the crowds. Though that opportunity is long past, the church maintains an opposite approach—the tradition of Sunday night service despite poor attendance.⁶ As one pastor bluntly put it, “Sunday evening service balances the budget!”⁷ Generation Y asks for a spiritual community where their seeking friends will find spiritual sustenance. For themselves they want a spiritual connection that helps to answer the bigger questions in their lives. This implies relevance and an understandable experience for the visitor and believer alike. Life is fast and proves demanding for the young, many of whom must juggle more than one job to balance their budgets. Is the church acting as a good steward of the time and energy of those it is seeking to attract? Millennials would likely say no.

Millennials also ask, “Can my friends and I really belong despite our differences of belief? How many hoops must we jump through?” The sinner’s prayer is a guiding tradition that limits our understanding of what Jesus was all about. The tradition says that in order to become a believer a seeker must first recite a specific prayer of repentance for sin and then ask Jesus to come into his/her heart. This is to be done with another believer to verify the transaction so that the seeker could then officially be invited into the

⁶ Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 64.

⁷ This contributor wishes to remain anonymous.

community of faith; however, when Jesus sat with sinners he never required them to repent as a show of spirituality before they were allowed to be a part of his circle. Common people were allowed to be a part without a prerequisite religious ritual or professed belief. Jesus' actions encouraged belonging whether or not a person believed in Christ's divine nature. His good graces and even his miracles extended to those who would traditionally be on the outside of Jewish society, the leper, the woman with the issue of blood, the Roman soldier, and the Samaritan woman to name a few. Jesus created a sense of mystery, discovery, and then levels of belonging around himself. The sinners prayer can be found nowhere in the scripture, yet it has become another admission fee for belonging. Within traditional faith circles the sense of mystery and discovery is jettisoned in favor of the emphasis on the prescribed salvation experience. Does the church encourage the joy of discovery, the journey aspect of coming to faith, and levels belonging before believing? Millennials would likely say no.

Millennials ask, "What if I make a mistake? Will I still belong?" Many churches have a tradition of public confession of sexual sin. An offending couple, one of which may be pregnant, is required to stand and confess their sin to the congregation, bringing further shame on themselves and their unborn child. It leaves onlookers wondering what the price of failure might be: humiliation, excommunication, or mere rejection? When faced with the issue of sexual sin, Jesus forced the finger-pointing Pharisees to admit their own culpability.⁸ Jesus offered grace for sinners who came his way.⁹ He never rebuked a sinner or made a public spectacle of him or her. Corrections were saved for the

⁸ John 8:7

⁹ John 4:1-26; Luke 7:1-10; Luke 22:47-51.

religious folks. Millennials would likely assess that the risk of bringing alienation and shame on themselves when they fail is just too high at church.

Jesus' practices model a healthy spiritual way of life for the younger generation. Tradition does not necessarily do the job. Rather than blaming the young for their indifference toward once alive but now irrelevant practices, the church would benefit by admitting culpability for the failure to capture the hearts of the younger generations. They must dare to abandon dead ritual in favor of new approaches. Francis Schaeffer wrote, "The Christian must understand what confronts him antagonistically in his own moment in history. Otherwise he simply becomes a useless museum piece and not a living warrior for Jesus Christ."¹⁰ In this perspective one can see how personal this challenge must be. Each Christian is responsible to steward his or her own growth towards relevance. In describing his servant, God said through the voice of the prophet, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice."¹¹ A true servant of the Lord will cautiously and lovingly care for these most vulnerable ones, searching for signs of life. Once that life is discovered he or she will then coax it back to wholeness. The creative genius for the future is embodied in the next generations, and the church needs leaders who have eyes to see the embers of that genius.

Audience

This study is directed to leaders in denominational and evangelical faith communities who have a desire to reach beyond their own experiences and their own lifetimes with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They realize that the methodology used to impart faith to their generation and the generations of those who came before them will

¹⁰ Schaefer, 32.

¹¹ Isaiah 42:3.

likely no longer work for their children and grandchildren. They are open to the challenge to think differently and they are willing to look outside of their own wisdom and the successes of the past to find the pathway to the church of the future. They are leaders who are willing to go wherever the dance leads them.

Purpose of This Study

This study focuses on how leaders must lead in order to inspire the Millennial generation to invest in the church of the future.

The Background of the Project

Many leaders of Generation X and now the Millennial generation travel where there are no signposts. They work with few available tools to lead their congregations into meaningful encounters with Jesus. Many young people suffer from the lack of biblical worldview, including those who come from the homes of pastors, missionaries, and Christian schoolteachers. These emerging adults deserve to be loved and mentored in their spiritual growth. Much of the Millennial's view of life flows from their older brothers and sisters. These younger siblings seem to reflect the same foundational beliefs regarding culture as X-Gens; however, they react differently to their life experiences and manifest their faith differently than their older siblings.

The Outcome of the Project

This study will produce an understanding of how deep change might be effected within the culture of Christian faith communities nationwide. The goal is to provide practical knowledge for leaders of Millennials and to establish new ways “of being” that could aid them in building the church by engaging Millennials in the creative process of building the church of the future. X-Gen leaders who find themselves responsible for nurturing Millennials will discover how their younger pew partners differ from them and what they can do to meet their specific needs and reach the Millennial heart. By building upon what excites Millennials emotionally, intellectually and spiritually, leaders will be able to encourage their unique gifts for the benefit of the entire faith community.

The Contribution to Transformational Leadership

This work will be the essence of transformational leadership in that the goal is to change the hearts and minds and therefore the lives of the Millennial generation and those who would lead them. Leaders will be transformed by new discoveries that will broaden their worldviews and contribute to greater effectiveness in working with others. Leaders will gain knowledge of how to approach the younger pew partner. They will be encouraged to look outside of their own paradigms. They will be stretched as they synthesize praxis that is inclusive without sacrificing holiness or sound theology. They will learn new ways of being the church.

Definition of Key Terms

Key terms are identified and defined in order to clarify what is meant within the context of this study. Although the generations may be defined with different parameters, the most commonly used definitions have been utilized for the purpose of this research.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a worldview that is skeptical of the existence of ultimate truth or guiding principles of science, philosophy, or a religion that can explain everything for everybody. Postmodernists rely heavily upon empirical knowledge, believing that reality is constructed and understood by relative personal truth.

Postmodern Culture

Critics say that postmoderns do not believe in absolute truth.¹² Indeed, Postmoderns are suspicious of absolute truth claims, as well as hierarchy and rules, and choose to substantiate truth according to their own experience. Their questions would be How can you know that? Why should I believe you? They refuse the imposition of truth from above but embrace story and personal experience as avenues to substantiate truth. The culture, in general, is more relational than previous generations, more peer oriented, and more accepting of differences. They are less interested in titles and labels and consider themselves to be deeply spiritual.

The Silent Generation

¹² It has been my observation after living deeply imbedded in a postmodern community for over a decade that the issue is one of epistemology rather than absolute truth.

The silent generation was born from 1928 to 1945. This generation endured the Great Depression and World War II. As conformists, they are comfortable with the status quo.¹³

Baby Boomers

Boomers were born from 1946 through 1964. They were the first generation to purposefully detach from their parents' way of life. As a result, they resist the status quo, and their optimism drives them to press for lofty ideals. They refuse to be ignored. These and those who came before them are also known as Moderns.¹⁴

X Gen

Generation X consists of members of the population who were born between 1965 and 1979. The young adults of Generation X are the brooding older brothers and sisters of the Millennials. Many grew up as latchkey kids. With both parents working outside the home, they suffered from lack of parental attention. They lived through the fallout of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the ensuing skyrocketing divorce rate, making them the first generation to look to peers rather than parents for approval. They were the first generation to be told that they would never make as much money as their parents and that they would never receive Social Security even though they would pay for it. They tend to be filled with angst and are suspicious of elders. Many are angry that, as a

¹³ Pew Social Trends Staff, Generations Online. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1831/generations-online-2010>, (accessed June 1, 2011).

¹⁴ D'Vera Cohn and Paul Taylor, Pew Research, "Baby Boomers Approach 65 Glumly." <http://pewsocialtrends.org/2010/12/20/baby-boomers-approach-65-glumly/>, (accessed June 1, 2011).

result of Roe v. Wade, many of their peers are missing. They are entrepreneurial, artistic and savvy by nature.¹⁵ This is the first generation to garner the term Post-Modern.

Millennial Generation (also known as Y-Gen)

The Millennial Generation are those who were born between 1980 and 1988—they are the first generation to come of age in the new millennium. The Millennials are known as the children of promise. In general, these kids were tended to by at least one stay at home parent. Encouraged to pursue multiple interests, they were convinced that they could accomplish anything that they wanted to do. Doting parents drove them from soccer to gymnastics to piano lessons, though set against the backdrop of having inherited a deeply troubled world. Rather than brood about this they are convinced that they can change the world. Highly invested in social justice issues, they embrace their relationships with their parents and elders, but seem to be more peer determined than any other generation to date.¹⁶

Church

Church describes the traditional idea of denominational, non-denominational, and evangelical Christian gatherings. It describes people not buildings. The church could be a specific small or large congregation, or it could refer to a collection of believers worldwide. These gatherings come together for a common worship experience at least once a week and often boast of a plethora of services and small group meetings. Context determines its specific meaning.

¹⁵Katherine Zickuhr, Pew Research, “Generations On Line.” <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1831/generations-online-2010>, (accessed June 1, 2011).

¹⁶ Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, “Generation Y at a Glance,” www.ffos.hr/lida/datoteke/LIDA2007-Deyrup.ppt, (accessed Oct. 08, 2009).

Faith Community

Faith Community describes Christian gatherings, which could include church but also might mean monastic communities, house churches, or a collection of Christians that function as a spiritual/social hub for the community at large without official organization. They meet regularly from once a week to once a month. The distinction of Faith Communities is their determination to experience life together outside of the setting of Sunday service.

CHAPTER TWO

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Literary Reviews

The review of literature is organized into three sections suggested by the research question: How will church leaders find ways of inspiring commitment to the church among the millennial generation? The first section explores how the younger generation feels about the church and what they have to say to church leaders. The second section consists of views of those who are intimately involved with the younger generation. The last section covers the church's efforts to attract the younger generation.

The Millennial Generation Talks to the Church

Millennial leaders show frustration with the church as it is. They remain in the church in hope of bringing needed change but not without a price.

Cunningham Letters from a Disillusioned Generation

Dear Church was written to build bridges between the generations within the church. Through her own lens and those of her friends, Sarah Cunningham reveals the heartburn that her generation has with the church.¹⁷ She personifies twenty somethings as:

- redefining the word family
- being comfortable with competing schools of thought
- feeling connected to their surroundings
- not seeing money as a trustworthy indicator of success
- wanting instant gratification

¹⁷ Sarah Cunningham, *Dear Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 21-22.

- preferring human contact over technology
- less relativistic than they seem
- idealistic to a fault
- transparent
- valuing community
- wanting to help
- not pledging their allegiance lightly ¹⁸

Diversity and authenticity are important to twenty something's. They are embarrassed over the condition of the church. Although this book is written primarily to the elder keepers of the faith, at the end of each chapter key observations are made and words of wisdom given which are directed towards the younger generation.

Mid-book the author repents of her disillusionment with the church, calling it a false god. Moving toward hope for generational reconciliation, Cunningham brings her painfully transparent admissions and apologies to the table with *Fifty Things I've Learned About Forgiveness*. Keen insights include: "Only God knows the motives of a person's heart. Don't pretend you do."¹⁹ "Love those you are teamed up with more than your own pride. If you don't then what you are offering is not really love at all."²⁰ And "Remember that offering forgiveness is as much an act of furthering the kingdom as any other task on your to-do list."²¹ The book ends with a love letter, lauding the church for

¹⁸ Ibid., 33-49.

¹⁹ Ibid., 156.

²⁰ Ibid., 158.

²¹ Ibid., 159.

being brilliant, willing to take action and learn from its mistakes, tough, resilient, accessible, flexible, and never satisfied with her present state.²²

Cunningham leans heavily on anecdotal stories that are both thought provoking and fresh. She is both descriptive and prescriptive. Working both ends of the generational divide makes it an informative read for everyone. The conclusion is that for true reconciliation to take place, all must bring their adaptability and honesty to the table. One feels the push and pull between the desire for the church to do a better job for its disillusioned young, and Cunningham's guilt over the Twentysomething's criticisms towards the church that she seems to both love and hate. The tension leaves the reader feeling a bit schizophrenic in the end, which is reflective of Millennial angst with the church. Cunningham fails to develop a strategy beyond the talking stage. She assumes that if everyone can talk honestly, the problems will dissolve. By accepting the status quo of the social design of the church, she neglects to address the thinking problems that brought the church to its impasse with the younger generation in the first place.

Lyons and Kinnaman write on *The New Generation's Reaction to the Church*

The book, *unchristian*, offers a searing diagnostic of the state of Christendom, discerning what keeps outsiders from seeking the company of Christians and embracing their faith. Kinnaman and Lyons present themes that are stumbling stones for the skeptical New Generation, who they describe as Americans ages 16 to 29 both outside and inside the church. Christians are seen as, anti-homosexual, hypocritical, judgmental, out of touch, too focused on politics, old fashioned, insensitive to others, boring, not

²² Ibid., 206-208.

accepting of other faiths, and confusing.²³ With each theme the authors present the mythical thinking of Christians that leads to the Church's downfall in the eyes of the New Generation.

Each of the six discussions opens with a quote by a member of the New Generation, which lends an air of legitimacy to the arguments. In general, the New Generation flees the influence of the church because of the lack of integrity they find within the Christian community.²⁴ They see "Christianity as devoid of spiritual vibrancy, parochial, small-minded and ignorant."²⁵ This response is baffling to Christians who see Jesus as the pathway to a dynamic spirituality that goes beyond the five senses. When the church does not live out what it professes, it creates a crisis of faith for those observing and problems for itself.²⁶ How do leaders reach into that crisis of faith and inspire belief? This question must be answered for the well-being of the future church, claims Kinnaman and Lyons. The text explores "why the perceptions exist and how to reverse them so that Christians can positively contribute to culture."²⁷

Kinnaman and Lyon's research points them towards the conclusion that the greatest problem is that of an "insiders" mentality. The authors attempt to address the thinking that fostered this systemic problem but their solutions seem like first steps, telling what to do, respond right, be creative, and serve people, rather than how to become. This strategy falls flat for the practitioner who desires transformational change.

²³ David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *unchristian* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Back Dustcover.

Many questions remain unanswered: How does the church keep itself from ending up in the same place in another ten years with another list of unacceptable attitudes? How do leaders become observers of culture in a way that keeps the church current? How is the New Generation inspired to become loyal to the church? Although the Kinnaman and Lyons have uncovered clues as to why the younger generation is leaving, their solutions are reactionary and focused on being less bad rather than creating deep change within a broken system.

Merritt comments on Denominational Adaption to the Younger Generation

Carol Howard Merritt wrote *Tribal Church* to “dismantle the wall of stained glass that often separates mainline churches from people under forty... the missing generation.”²⁸ Merritt, a Presbyterian minister herself, speaks for those of her generation and younger who want to practice their faith in the traditions of their fathers.²⁹ She guides the reader through major sticking points for young people attending and leading in the denominational church.

Merritt notes that intergenerational connections are lacking.³⁰ She aptly points out that change comes by paying attention and seeing through the eyes of one’s fellow parishioners. This observation hints at the practices of cultural anthropology that are necessary for cross-generational understanding.

The traditional goals of getting an education, buying a house, and sending children to college are no longer as attainable as they were just one generation ago. The

²⁸ Carol Howard Merritt, *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007). Back Cover.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

church must rethink its theology surrounding money, class, and the idea of how one gets God's blessings.³¹ As older leaders seek to understand the new financial landscape young adults endure, they will discover new ways to help them flourish within community.

“Cultivating Unambiguous Inclusion” is perhaps the most well developed chapter in the book. With his famous tagline, “Won’t you be my neighbor?” Mr. Rogers taught the under-forty generation unconditional love and acceptance and their children learned it well much to the dismay of church leaders. Confusion arises with the double standard. Merritt notes, “Our denominations stand with their clipboards, negotiating who is good enough to be on our lists... I am told that the church needs to stand up against the evil of a diverse culture... it feels like the church is fighting against the very richness and difference of my generation... it perceives as somehow tainted and sinful.”³²

Rather than religious, under-forties consider themselves spiritual, meaning that they step back from the judgmental doctrines of organized religion, cherishing right practice rather than right belief.³³ This tribe is not willing to attend a church that excludes anyone.

Merritt’s discussion on shared leadership makes the salient point that the church will not have young people if it does not allow them to lead. Elders hang on to power when they should acquiesce. And the church unwisely disregards the presence and resources of the young when they do show up. Merritt is paying attention to her own generation and those younger. She brings up great questions that cannot be ignored: Will leaders allow the Next-Gener’s to walk alongside them, to guide the church of the future that so desperately needs them? Will they be seen as the gift to the church?

³¹ Ibid., 55.

³² Ibid., 63.

³³ Ibid., 73.

Much like Cunningham, Merritt presents the reader with the tension of the love hate relationship that the younger generation has with the traditional church. On one hand they long to participate and have a voice. On the other, they express frustration for a system that does not value or understand them, and will not let them “play.” Tribal Church is a cry for recognition. Merritt highlights serious issues but neglects the idea that the design of her traditional church promotes cradle-to-grave thinking and neglects a regenerative process. Church leadership culture has a structural problem and a power problem that cannot be solved by doing more of the same.

A Leader’s Role in the New Millennium

Leaders who are on the ground leading millennial congregations are by nature curious and innovative. In general, they lack hard resources such as cash and buildings. They believe in the ultimate goodness and brilliance of Millennials and are looking for avenues of relationship between the church and the younger generation.

Drummond on Leading Millennials Theologically

Lewis A. Drummond’s book, *Reaching Generation Next*, wrestles with the concept of evangelism in a postmodern culture. The author asks the question, “Can the church convince postmoderns that Christianity offers the best of all worldviews?”³⁴

A great passion for the future of the church emerges as Drummond debates his way through the philosophical foray of humanism, rationalism, existentialism, nihilism, and postmodernity. He presents a plan that is capable of destroying the philosophical straw man, the false witness that stands against a biblical worldview and a Christian life.

³⁴ Lewis Drummond, *Reaching Generation Next* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 15.

Drummond argues that Christians must develop intelligent and thoughtful answers for the skeptic's questions. Chapter 3 presents solid arguments to the questions and comments that are typical to postmodern thinkers:

- How do I believe in absolute truth in a relative world?
- Since I only believe as truth that which I experience, why should your opinions matter to me?
- How can you prove the existence of a personal God?
- I am spiritual, not religious. Why should I join your organized religion?
- Why shouldn't I be completely self-sufficient? Why should I follow an outdated, dead God?

These issues reflect generative themes that are recognizable to those who are paying attention to culture. He handles them as a philosopher as well as a theologian. Christians must be intentional in crafting their responses.

Drummond walks "Postmoderns and Moderns Alike"³⁵ through a discussion of epistemology, which answers the question, "How do we know what we know?" He concludes by showing how a comprehensive worldview can be formed.³⁶

Drummond shows a deep understanding for the postmodern worldview and his willingness to risk:

Most conventional methodologies will not reach the multitude of the young postmoderns today. The church must learn to accept the new generation as they are and let them express themselves in their own way. If their music, dress, and language are strange to the older generation, it does not necessarily mean they are wrong. And young postmoderns are open to the gospel in a way some older generations were not. They are asking serious questions. They are interested in at

³⁵ Ibid., 65.

³⁶ Ibid., 65.

least some form of “spirituality.” May the church be compassionate, imaginative, and zealous in reaching them. If it requires unusual things, may God’s people be mature enough to employ methods that communicate to the new culture.³⁷

The question then becomes how will Drummond’s suggestions look when they are fleshed out? Unfortunately, Drummond offers a few suggestions that are regressive rather than progressive such as small group outreach, person-to-person ministry, and service projects. His suggestions seem hollow. Although in general his ideas are good, they lack the imagination and risk that Drummond hints will be needed for Postmoderns.

A mature relationship with Postmoderns would imply “give and take” as well as mutual respect. Drummond did not explore the positive effects that Postmoderns might have on the church nor did he suggest how to make room for their contribution. Drummond offers a cohesive argument for inclusion and risk; however, he neglects the issue of power sharing entirely, which would be a great first step in communicating value to the younger generation.

Loyd on A New Way To Lead The Younger Generation

Ken Loyd’s book, *They’re Gentiles for Christ’s Sake*, was written to help the parents of church kids understand their children.³⁸ Parents learn how they can change their relationship with their children and thus avoid alienating them. In so doing, hopefully the children of the next generation will find a God worth serving and an atmosphere benevolent enough in which to serve God.

³⁷ Ibid., 149-150.

³⁸ Ken Loyd, *They’re Gentiles For Christ’s Sake* (Portland, OR: Bridge-PDX Publishing, 2001), 3.

Loyd shows his reader inside the hearts of Generation X and Next Generation, decoding their appearance, language, and actions. When describing his first time at a Christian music show in Seattle Loyd says,

Instantly the room was filled with a roar louder than ten jet engines... a scene of extreme violence... I ran for my life... after what seemed like hours (actually it was only 35 minutes) on came the lights. What I saw before me was a youth group. Nothing more, nothing less. They had their own language, customs, costumes, and culture but they were a youth group—and they were totally foreign to me.³⁹

Loyd goes on to describe Generation X as those who long to know the God of their parents. He uses the poetry of Anna Fish, a young friend, to give the reader a peek into the Gen X heart,

As I lay my head down
On the pages of my Bible
I want to know
How do I survive you
How do I please you
When everything I do is wrong?
Not quite ready to give it my all
But God I do want to.
I don't know what to expect
from you anymore
So I want to know—
God what do you
Look like?"

While describing this tension of other worldly culture and a heart to please God, Loyd advises parents in ways that they can become reconnected to their children.

³⁹ Ibid., 6-7

- parents must not insist upon a list of do's and don'ts for their children⁴⁰
- leaders must find new pathways to present faith and create community for the younger generation⁴¹
- the younger generation will guide leaders and parents to what they need if adults will listen⁴²

Walking the reader through negative thinking patterns that would sabotage relationships with Gen X, Loyd only observes and never directly approaches the Generation X for input beyond poetry. No outside sources are used beyond The Holy Bible. He does not show leaders how their contribution might enhance the church. Perhaps Loyd never intended to be that specific. He believes in the greatness of a new generation, and he takes the reader on a delightful journey.

McNeal on How The Church Must Change to Capture the Believers of the Future

The Present Future, written by Reggie McNeal, paints a startling picture of a church that is woefully out of touch with its mission. The author addresses the unsuccessful practices of the modern church and challenges leaders to re-examine goals and methodology. Through his Six Tough Questions, the book's subtitle, McNeal points out the need for thinking leaders who are brave enough to discontinue non-productive behaviors and to find what works for the congregation of the future. The author supports the depth of the need for change with these statistics and thoughts:

The drop (in church attendance) is from the 52% of builders...and seniors to only 36% of gen Xers... Most churches are have actually just written (gen Xers) off, waiting for them to grow up and learn to like what the church has to

⁴⁰ Ibid., 34, 52-55.

⁴¹ Ibid., 64-65.

⁴² Ibid., 103-112.

offer.⁴³...They are leaving the church to preserve their faith. They contend that church no longer contributes to their spiritual development.⁴⁴

In the face of discouraging facts, McNeal brings hope when he says that God's end run around the image of a powerless God of the modern world is the postmoderns who seek spirituality and will accept divine design and divine interaction.

The Present Future is organized around six tough questions:

1. How do we de-convert from Churchianity to Christianity?⁴⁵
2. How do we transform our community?⁴⁶
3. How do we turn members into missionaries?⁴⁷
4. How do we develop followers of Jesus?⁴⁸
5. How do we prepare for the future?⁴⁹
6. How do we develop leaders for the Christian movement?⁵⁰

McNeal argues that church leaders must be continual learners. Leaders should: Go where it is happening; Get outside the box; Don't pursue privatized learning; Develop a chief learning officer (for your church); and Secure a learning coach for yourself.⁵¹

McNeal claims the responsibility of the future lies squarely on the shoulder of leaders. He adds that the church needs a different kind of leader for the future, an apostolic leader with a core value of cultural relevance. These are great suggestions that are pertinent to the question of how must leaders lead to inspire the Millennials to run towards the church instead of away from it.

⁴³ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 7-11.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 24-26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-48.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 71-73.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 93-95.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 121-129.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 117-119.

Much of this advice, however, seems directed towards larger clergy/lay oriented congregations, which makes his version of these practices unattainable for most of the churches in America who lack the resources of a mega church. Corporate language and models are used to describe the meshing of organic church with organizational community, which may or may not work. The author comes across as another leader telling the church how to do God's work better through corporate structure.⁵² Taking into consideration the sentiment that postmoderns have towards corporate entities this solution hardly sounds like a recipe for success.

Deconstruction, cynicism, and relativity, the default language of postmodernity, are not addressed at all. He fails to meet the younger generation on their ground. The specific needs of 80 percent of the church, such as house churches, non-denominational churches, and the smaller churches, are not considered. These needs would have been better served had McNeal further developed the qualifications of a transformational leader verses a traditional leader and dealt with some of the above-mentioned postmodern issues. McNeal works in corporate strategy rather than through genuine relationship. His suggestions are church-focused rather than people-focused. He has not developed an appreciation for who the Millennial is and what they bring to the table. He has not answered the question, "How do we inspire faith in the coming generations?"

Huntley on An X Gen Sociologists View of Millennials

In *The World According to Y*, sociologist Rebecca Huntley aptly describes the inner workings of Millennials. Through interviews with her own native Australians,

⁵² Ibid., 136-139.

Huntley searches out issues of friendship, gender roles, sexual ethics and marriage, employment, consumerism, politics, and spirituality. Although there are a few differences, the data is strikingly similar to that which comes from the United States, suggesting that a global youth culture has indeed emerged.

Gen Yers (Millennials) are tribal in nature. They expect that relationships will last a lifetime. Biological relationships are shuffled to the sidelines as peer friendships become most prominent. Gen Y men and women have grown up in a world where feminism is internalized so completely that they don't even consider it as an issue. Despite this, they live with the tension that the world is still deeply gendered. Although feminism has changed life for women, a new masculinity has yet to emerge, setting Y men adrift.

Masculinity has ... entered an age of profound uncertainty, from which it still hasn't emerged... alternative ways to be a man that have developed in recent times—the New Bloke, the Metrosexual, the Queer Eyed Straight Guy—haven't got a firm enough hold to displace the “Man as Schwarzenegger” view of masculinity that Generation Y still retains deep in it psyche.⁵³

To further the divide between the genders, females are more accepting of same sex lifestyles than their male counterparts. This difference is attributable to “the fact that the gender script has changed for women but not for men.”⁵⁴

Millennials are redefining the parameters of sex and marriage. Although Gen Yers are sexually active earlier than previous generations, they long for a time when sex was more significant relationally. They put off marriage often until after the age of 30. They are likely to cohabit before marriage not for disrespect of the institution of marriage

⁵³ Rebecca Huntley, *The World According to Gen Y: Inside the New Adult Generation* (Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2006), 55-56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

but out of deep respect for it; they want their marriages to have the greatest chance of success.⁵⁵ Millennials are the most highly educated generation thus far, but the job market may not produce for them. They “work to live” rather than “live to work.”⁵⁶ Coupled with their tribal nature this ethic creates a world where fun, friends and travel are preeminent.

Politically, Millennials demand an agenda that addresses “everything from urban environments to deforestation in Asia.”⁵⁷ If the political parties do not tackle these problems they will lose the interest of the young entirely. “Kidfluence” is a word that describes how Millennials have commandeered the spending habits of their entire families, rivaling the Boomer generation’s spending habits. This shift in shopping belies “a substitution of stuff for time”⁵⁸ ethic that Gen Y learned early in life. Comfort, friends and forgiveness are emotionally linked to shopping and gift giving... a marketer’s dream.

On the spiritual side, Gen Yers are a bit more skeptical. They describe themselves as spiritual, yet not religious. They shy away from religion as a judgmental institution. Although they are asking deep questions, many balk at the notion of moral and religious absolutes. They reject leaders that forbid abortion, yet have sex with little boys—⁵⁹ dichotomies that leave them spiritually cold and emotionally offended.⁶⁰

Huntley treats the generation as if they were a dispassionate entourage passing through a foreign land without connection to their roots and at the same time completely

⁵⁵ Ibid., 85.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 145.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 164.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 164.

unaware of the effect that they are having on their surroundings. She views Generation Y as having the potential for either radical transformation or terrible conformism. She leaves the reader with a “wait and see” attitude.

Although Huntley describes GenY well on some levels, she never takes a look at the church and how Generation Y might have something to contribute or fit in. She fails to develop a strategy to bring them to usefulness. Leaders get no clues on how to manage the behemoth of Generation Y. Her work is strictly descriptive not prescriptive.

Hammett on Spiritual Leadership

What forms of spiritual leadership will assist the community of faith and its leaders to build bridges and spread the gospel in an increasingly secular postmodern world? This question Edward H. Hammett addresses in his book, *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age*. The author explores ways for churches to minister to their elders while attracting those under 40 and those from the unchurched world. He looks for models of discipleship that lead to a stronger thriving church.⁶¹

From the first chapters of this book, it is obvious to the reader that the work to be done here is hands on. With each topic, the author provides discussion questions and diagnostics for church and leaders alike. The church is not to be a place of maintenance but of mission. The notion is that a church has become maintenance-minded when it begins to think of its own internal needs first rather than keeping practitioners looking outward toward the other. Mission is discovering Christ within culture and this discovery happens outside of the church. The culture must be studied and understood in order to

⁶¹ Edward H. Hammett, *Spiritual Leadership in a Secular Age* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), xiii-xiv.

create new frames for old truths, making them relevant to the non-churched. Observing their music, media, books, language, and favorite places to congregate reveals clues . The emphasis is on creating easy access points to faith community for Postmoderns who need to belong before they are able to believe.⁶²

Becoming a spiritual leader in a secular world is about empowering people rather than being a dictator. Hammett gives examples: listen first and talk later, inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness, creativity rather than conformity, discernment rather than declaring, contextualizing ministry rather than demanding conformity, and building teams and communities rather than buildings.⁶³ In order to create entry points that attract outsiders, leaders must be listening for divine appointments and teachable moments, sharing without judgment, dropping the religious language, and approaching people and conversations with a spirit of inquiry and grace.

About spiritual entry points Hammett says, “Most adults are looking for relationships and community to link them to the church rather than doctrinal purity and institutional concerns.”⁶⁴ Assimilation comes through small groups, Internet connections, conversations and community events. Discipleship of leaders is accomplished through coaching rather than meetings. The emphasis is on walking and talking together and asking powerful questions.

Hammett’s writing reveals a true learner who, much like William and Catherine Booth, founders of The Salvation Army, is willing to do “whatever it takes” to win those who are missing from the kingdom of God. He brings great content to the discussion. He

⁶² Ibid., 58.

⁶³ Ibid., 75.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 115.

is convinced that determined teachable leaders can make the difference. Hammett, however, is not concerned about creating a regenerative model of faith community. He never discusses the issue of power and seems to believe that the church should be fluid enough to make adjustments whatever they are needed. He assumes that the church has humble leaders who are willing to give up power in order to see the church grow, which is a risky assumption.

The Voice of Traditional Church Leaders

The traditional church is attempting to understand Millennials; however they lack the taste for risk that would create success. As the literature reviews demonstrate their methodology lacks imagination.

Stetzer, Stanley and Hayes on Churches that Reach The Younger Unchurched

In their book, *Lost and Found*, authors Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes explore how to reach non-attenders and help them to become participants in church community. They survey four different varieties of young not attending church individuals: the Always Un-churched, the De-churched, the Friendly Un-churched, and the Hostile Un-churched.⁶⁵ As it turns out the Un=churched are more receptive to the gospel (not church) than one would think, depending on how they are approached. How does the church find their way into the hearts of these non-attenders? Community, depth, responsibility, and connection⁶⁶ are keys that could impact evangelism in the church.

Community is a bedrock concept for 18 to 29 year olds. Authentic, reciprocal relationships that provide support and camaraderie are more important than any church

⁶⁵Stetzer, Ed, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes. *Lost and Found*. (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2009), 9-10.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

program. They desire honest and vulnerable connections that will see them through the transitions of their lives. They want to intimately journey through life together. Though the church provides support through high school, they typically drop the ball until young couples are married and having children. Community must be a place where people experience continuity evidenced by a deeper walk with Christ through all stages of life. A person who struggles will not be won over until “the love of Christ annihilates the opposing worldview upon which they depend.”⁶⁷ This change can only happen within a community where belonging comes before believing.

When it comes to preaching, depth of content pushes the soul into the mystery of God and captures the imagination of the seeker. Depth must not only direct behaviors but it should give the seeker the why behind the direction. Accepting little at face value, the younger generation brings tough questions and they want their intensity to be matched by spiritual challenges from leaders.

Having grown up in a global culture, young adults are intensely aware of their inter-connectedness to the world around them. The young embrace lifestyles that reflect their ethics such as earth-care, social justice. Their question is: why doesn't the church reflect this value, which is so obviously biblical? Believers are to serve one another, serve the church, serve the community and serve the world.⁶⁸ The church would then reflect the incarnational life that Jesus calls people to.

Stanley, Stetzer, and Hayes present mentoring as a biblical concept with great potential to connect the younger generation with the body of Christ. The younger

⁶⁷ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 115-117.

generation longs to hear the stories and learn from the mistakes of those who have gone before them. Christian and unchristian alike want spiritual mentors, elders who can walk with them and help bring deep meaning to their lives.

Stanley, Stetzer, and Hayes argue that churches that are reaching the un-churched are all functioning on various themes of these four ideals. The reference to how one dresses for church and where a church might choose to meet, however,⁶⁹ betrays the fact that the example churches are predominately traditional Bible belt churches.⁷⁰ The authors recommendations of changing the music styles in worship and a study group that rehashes the sermon shows the reader nothing new or unique about what these churches are doing to attract young people. In fact, these solutions are church centric rather than missional. When the discussion moves to what leaders must become for the younger generation, the discussion becomes relevant. Topics include self-awareness, honesty, leading from brokenness, taking time to really know people, transparency, and vulnerability. Unfortunately, these topics are covered minimally near the end of the book, and they appear to be an after thought. The last chapter is about something that the authors call Leading with a Team. Rather than a team-led collaboration, the example appears to be a senior pastor-led hierarchy,⁷¹ which again is nothing new. The pop culture storyline woven through the chapters and the examples used by the authors are trite and in my view betray how out of touch they are with the generation that they seek to attract. Outsiders/sinners are still thought of as “less than;” hierarchy is still predominant; church

⁶⁹ Ibid., 215.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 215.

⁷¹ Ibid., 222.

is still the center of operations; and, lastly, where are the women leaders in this vision of the future?

This book starts out with great momentum but lost my attention when it began to look like church as usual. It was tradition dressed up in flip-flops and a soul patch. Stanley, Stetzer, and Hayes bump up against some important concepts here but they fall short of transformational change. Rather than allowing their experience with Millennials to lead them some place new, the church shows up in the end of the book with the same old design.

Miller on The Church at the Crossroads

Rex Miller, in his book, *Millennial Matrix*, unfolds the story of how information has been collected, stored, and disseminated throughout history and where that leaves the church for the immanent future. Through understanding the church of the past, leaders will be primed to reclaim relevant faith, to find solutions to generationally motivated conflicts, and to create organizations that are responsive to our new realities. The book is organized around four eras of information gathering along with the corresponding Church eras.

“Oral Culture and the Liturgical Church” were ruled by voice and relationships. The essence of this era was the living word: God spoke, Jesus spoke, and the Covenant was a spoken promise. Wisdom came through story. “Truth is relational in oral cultures. The truth and the truth giver are intimately connected.”⁷² The oral code subjectified thinking.

⁷² Rex Miller, *The Millennium Matrix* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2004), 27.

The “Print Culture and the Reformation Church” began with the invention of the Gutenberg press. Worldview changed from “believing is seeing” to “seeing is believing.”⁷³ Philosophy and theology took on linear aspects and disunity. “The eyes signal the brain to discern (mentally separate) and analyze (break up the whole). By contrast, the ear seeks harmony and synthesis.⁷⁴ Reading objectified thinking... and took away the personalized filter of community.”⁷⁵

The “Broadcast Culture and the Celebration Church” brought a common experience through television. Print supported reflection, but broadcast encouraged emotion and reflexive thinking.⁷⁶ The locus of faith became rooted in personal conviction rather than community, and the felt presence of God became evidence of personal spirituality rather than trust in God’s words.

The “Digital Culture and the Convergence Church” lean heavily on experiences of the past and pull culture into the future. Multimedia integrates both right and left-brain experiences. Truth will be collective (oral, written, broadcast will all contribute) and it will be experienced through context (what works for me.)⁷⁷

Miller ends *The Millennial Matrix* with a concept of the future church, which he calls Convergence Church. This model will utilize collaborative leadership, creative left-brain/right-brain expression, accessible leaders, and hands-on experiences.

Most importantly the reader comes to understand that Gen X and those after them did not emerge from a void. History and culture have brought them to unique

⁷³ Ibid., 39.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 45-46.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 86-87.

circumstances that shape their experiences, making them vastly different from the previous generation. Much like Loyd, Miller is one of the few prognosticators who express excitement about what the younger generations bring to the table. He says, “The new generation is composed of thinkers⁷⁸... Next-gens instinctively want to be on front lines. They want to be where the action is.”⁷⁹ This hopeful perspective alone makes this book important.

Miller’s broad view of history is fascinating, though his predictions for Convergence Church are not revolutionary nor are they new. These concepts, collaborative leadership, creative left-brain/right-brain expression, accessible leaders, and hands-on experiences, have been demonstrated within the American church for the last twenty years and for much longer on the mission field. Not many of these concepts have been embraced by the mainstream church, which is probably why it all seems revolutionary to Miller.

Miller neglects to show readers how to get the next generation to the front lines. He does not lean into the concept of what a Millennial thinker could be or how he or she might impact the church theologically. He does not explore how the church might embrace the next generation’s native genius for interpreting culture and contextualizing it for the good of the church.

Summary of Literature Review

This review of literature reveals a church that is aware of the exodus of the younger generation and is talking about it. Still, the conversation is taking place mostly at

⁷⁸ Ibid., 178.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 180.

denominational and traditional levels, which are lacking flexibility, slow moving and least likely to take the risks necessary to engage Millennials in the church culture.

The Millennial authors are frustrated because of the lack of understanding that the church has shown them. They would like the freedom to lead and to define what faith community looks like for their generation. They want a seat at the theological table. These writers represent those who have the adaptability to stay with the church through the change process. The majority of Millennials do not have either the desire or the staying power.

The leaders of Millennials cited in the literature reviews are hopeful but frustrated. They are looking for signposts to guide their steps. As successful leaders, they study the culture and respond in non-traditional ways, finding elements of positive deviance to spur faith and belonging in the youth culture. In many ways they have managed to redesign the system. These leaders need resources and encouragement to support their forward progress and explorations.

Those who speak for the church in this literature reviewed are the least creative and the most enslaved to traditional thought patterns, all the while thinking they are innovative and cutting edge. They seem to be bent on teaching the reader to be less bad at relating to their contexts rather than exploring new thinking. Averted to risk, they miss the point that dynamic transformational change must happen in the minds and hearts of leaders in order to pass the faith on to the next generation. They do not understand that the church needs to be redesigned from the inside out. A deeper look at the youth culture demographic and a history of the problem will reveal generative themes and help readers

see how important creativity, a change of thinking, the ability to risk will be in reaching the Millennials and those who come after them.

CHAPTER THREE
THE CONTEXT OF MINISTRY

“Among democratic nations each generation is a new people.”
—Alexis de Tocqueville

The purpose of this study is to help church leaders find ways of inspiring commitment to the church among the Millennial Generation. A study of the formative issues of the Millennial Generation will give the reader a greater understanding of the findings.

Historical Context

Misunderstanding occurs when the younger and the elder generations fail to relate to the formative experiences of the other. For example, the Boomer generation grew up in the 1950s when generally fathers went to work during the week and mothers were home. Generally weekends were for church and family time. Religion and family guided the lives of young Boomers and they found their place as one of many members within the family. Plenty was wrong in the world during the 1950s and early 1960s: the Cold War, the Bay of Pigs Crisis, and the shootings at Kent State; however, the awareness of world affairs was low among children and teens. Computers, internet, and live news broadcasts and podcasts were not readily available. A child of divorce was the rare exception. The young Boomer generation was naïve in many ways compared to its successors.

Generation X had a different story. They were the informed generation; in fact, they were more informed than their parents due to their ease with information systems. This generation experienced the fallout of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s when divorce rates hit an all time high. As latchkey kids they had less parental attention

than any previous generation, which caused them to look to their peers rather than parents for guidance and support. Generation X often found themselves as an afterthought within the family.

With the Millennial generation, the pendulum swung. Most Millennials grew up with at least one parent at home. They were dotingly ferried from soccer practice to ballet to piano lessons. In their formative years, great attention was given to child safety, “intelligent” toys, and play dates. With ample indulgent care, they couldn’t be more different than X Generation. Often being an only child or one of two children, Millennials were the princes and the princesses of the family.⁸⁰ I present these generalizations to paint a picture of a context for each group discussed. In light of the differences between generations it is easy to see how a clash of parent/child expectations would intensify the generation gap, giving rise to conflict in areas such as musical tastes, fashion, and culture. Pew Research comments, “Whatever the current understanding of the term “generation gap,” roughly equal shares of young, middle-aged and older respondents in the new survey agree that such a gap exists. The most common explanation offered by respondents of all ages has to do with differences in morality, values and work ethic.”⁸¹ Neil Howe and William Strauss, noted authors and experts on emerging generations, confirm the Pew Research findings. They describe the generation gap as “Two world views, reflecting fundamentally different visions of society and self.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Rebecca Huntley, *The World According to Gen Y: Inside the New Adult Generation* (Crows Nest, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2006), 115.

⁸¹ Pew Social Trends Staff. *Generation Next Report*. S:/Pew Projects/2006/09-06 2 GenNext/Generation Next Report.wpd, (accessed June 1, 2011).

⁸² Neil Howe and William Strauss. *Atlanta Monthly Online*. “The New Generation Gap.” <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/92dec/9212genx.htm>, (accessed June 1, 2011).

Although social historians have documented it for years in the United States, the generation gap first appeared as a phenomenon in the media in the 1960s. The Boomer generation chafed against the cultural expectations of their parents. The gap was attributable to different formative experiences of the generations. The younger could not resonate with their parent's views and neither could the parents understand their children's ways of perceiving the world. Due to its unprecedented size, the Boomer generation wielded great influence culturally. In many ways they abandoned societal norms. The angst of generationally fueled misunderstanding from the 1960s is echoing today in the Millennial Generation. Three resonant similarities exist between the generation of the 1960s and the generations of today:

- The Millennial Generation is globally connected to their peers through internet-based social networking and global cell phone connections such as Skype.⁸³ They are perceived to be more peer-oriented than any preceding generation.⁸⁴ This parallels the peer influence of Boomers, rampant in the 1960s, which occurred by sheer force of numbers. Never before had any age group become a culture unto itself.
- Millennials share common tastes and interests, creating a bulky financial influence in their purchasing power (technology, green products, internet purchasing).⁸⁵ The Boomers were the first to influence fashion and music beyond

⁸³ Eliza Krigman. Millennials Defined by Technology Use. http://nationaljournal.com/njonline/no_20100225_3691.php (accessed July 17, 2011)

⁸⁴ Loyd., 24-25.

⁸⁵ Ally Klimkoski. Everyday Citizen Blog http://everydaycitizen.com/200803/millennial_purchase_power.html (accessed July 17, 2011)

their parents' tastes. They represented unprecedented market share.⁸⁶ For the first time in history, marketing firms began to respect the younger generation as a force to be reckoned with.

- Members of the Millennial Generation are empirical in nature, insisting upon their own experience to define their belief systems.⁸⁷ The Boomers were the children of Timothy Leary's "Tune in, turn on, and drop out" ethos. They were willing to experiment and to rebel against societal norms in order to develop their own ethic.⁸⁸

History has indeed repeated itself. What can leaders learn from this?

My Story as a Boomer

I found Jesus as a teenager during the Jesus People Movement of the 1960s. The Jesus People Movement was a gathering of subculture teens and emerging adults who were seeking a deeper, more meaningful life. Emerging adults served the gods of sex, drugs and rock and roll while searching for depth but finding them to hold nothing but empty promises. We dared to believe that Jesus would become real to us if we asked. And he did. There were a few mentors who guided us from their kitchens, their patios, and their workshops. But as a generation we longed to be included in church community. Church had an entrance fee beyond salvation: it demanded that we change how we

⁸⁶ Anne Thompson. Baby Boomers Create New Marketing Frontier. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7211153/ns/nightly_news/tbaby-boomers-create-new-marketing-frontier/ (accessed July 17, 2011)

⁸⁷ Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. *Emerging Adulthood*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. 166-167.

⁸⁸ Marcia Segelstein. <http://www.onenewsnow.com/Perspectives/Default.aspx?id=129152> (accessed July 17, 2011)

looked and how we spoke. We were asked to make two cultural leaps at once: one from spiritual death to life; and another from our own subculture to church culture.⁸⁹

My strongest impression was that the leaders didn't know what to do with the youth culture—the hippies—and the hippies did not know what to do with the conventional church. The generations experienced what Thomas Friedman in *The Lexus and The Olive Tree* describes as systematic misunderstanding: “Systematic misunderstanding arises when your framework and the other person’s framework are so fundamentally different that it cannot be corrected by adding more information.”⁹⁰ The more our elders tried to explain the faith from their perspective the more confusing things became for us. The younger generation of that era simply had a different value system, thus the generations viewed life from widely divergent perspectives. Though we struggled to understand our elders, their values meant little to us. We either followed by sheer will power or went away. Our values and creativity were discounted as antithetical to the Christian experience. The generation gap was well documented in culture, politics, music, and fashion, but few considered that a different kind of spirituality, a different way of relating to God might be needed for the younger generation. Our spirituality was judged by our ability to assimilate into the dominant culture of our elders. Though there were many things wrong with this arrangement and the memories are bitter. We, the former hippies and the boomer generation, have followed in our elders’ footsteps by placing the same burden of expectation on the younger generations of today. We gave in to the prescribed pattern of behavior of our elders and expected the younger generations to assimilate.

⁸⁹ Jesus never required two leaps.

⁹⁰ Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and The Olive Tree* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999). 325.

Shifting Generational Markers

It is my observation that the church has historically seen culture as a negative rather than a neutral force. Devine defines a generation as twenty-nine,⁹¹ the common time for the reproduction cycle. A shift has occurred, however. The cultural markers that define a generation are no longer rooted in internal subjective forces such as age and common experience, but rather in external objective forces, such as how people relate to the global community, consumerism, and technology. Before 2002, Gordon Moore, the founder of Intel, determined that the processing speed of a computer chip doubles every eighteen months, accelerating the ability to disseminate information.⁹² YouTube videographers Karl Fisch, Scott McLeod, and Jeff Brenman suggest that in 2006 technical information was doubling every two years, and by 2010, it was expected to double every seventy-two hours.⁹³

Fluency in the latest technology makes people seem and function as if they were “younger.” Although not always so, the young tend to be the early adopters and elders tend to be late adopters. The technologically savvy are conversant with social networking, the online market place, and new gadgets before they hit the showroom floor. They are more likely to have friends from around the globe and more likely to travel and live trans-continently than any previous generation. It seems that the faster technology changes, the more quickly the generations develop. Significant changes in

⁹¹ Donn Devine. “How Long is a Generation.” Ancestry Magazine. Sept/Oct 2005. <http://www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=11152> (accessed May 29, 2011)

⁹² Michael Braungart and William McDonough, *Cradle to Cradle*. (New York: North Point Press, 2002), 19.

⁹³ Karl Fish, Scott McLeod, Jeff Brenman “Shift Happen: Did You Know?” Version 4.0, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ILQrUrEW8>, (accessed January 13, 2010).

generations now occur every seven to ten years within the global culture. Author, Jimmy Longs suggests that the Baby Boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964, has an age spread of eighteen years. Generation X was born between 1964 and 1984, with an age spread of twenty years. The Millennial Generation is made up of those born between 1984 and 2000, a mere fourteen-year spread.⁹⁴ How will the church keep up with this ever-quickenning pace?

Soong Chan-Rah in his book, *The Next Evangelicalism*, says:

Fifty years ago, if you were asked to describe a typical Christian in the world, you could confidently assert that person to be an upper middle-class, white male, living in an affluent and comfortable Midwest suburb. If you were to ask the same question today, that answer would more likely be a young Nigerian mother on the outskirts of Lagos, a university student in Seoul, South Korea or a teenage boy in Mexico City. European and North American Christianity continue to decline, while African, Asian and Latin-American Christianity continue to increase dramatically.⁹⁵

Chan-Rah observes that the focus needs to shift outward. The Church's demographic has changed more in the last fifty years than it has perhaps in its lifetime. As cities become microcosms of the world, once could ask wouldn't it be wise to learn how to bridge the culture gap? Shouldn't leaders become adept at anthropological observation and assessment?

To Chan-Rah's otherworldly perspective add that of a young urban artist, musician, or techno-geek. They were raised in traditional homes, they sat at the dinner table and attended Sunday school and yet the transference of faith to them has been tentative at best. Many hunger for a life that is other-centered, spirit led and significant.

⁹⁴Jimmy Long. *Millennials*.

http://books.google.com/books?id=s5sMiderycMC&pg=PA47&lpg=PA47&dq=Jimmy+Long+Millennials&source=bl&ots=1lbetS1awS&sig=GJ5D0s9dji3tR_KYQ3pfC6J8Px4&hl=en&ei=pRDMTYX8B8bTiALs3NSOBQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&sqi=2&ved=0CBoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false, (accessed May 12, 2011).

⁹⁵ Soong Chan-Rah, *Next Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 13.

They struggle for spiritual connection. Many have found Christ, but does the church know what to do with them once they have faith? Leaders cannot assume that they will assimilate. If history repeats itself most of them won't, they will just go away. The church is bleeding its life and its future out onto the sidewalk.

I believe the problem has not been fully solved. As they relate to the Millennial Generation leaders are wondering if many of the church's practices are now outdated. In order to attract the Millennial Generation the church of the twenty-first century may need to shed its dying traditionalism. The church's infrastructure is in need of a redesign. Leaders must become keen observers of other cultures as well as the younger generation in order to pass on the precious Christian faith to those who come after them. God's Word is gnomic and transcendent. The Bible holds wisdom for any culture in any time via any language. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, church leaders must adapt their communities and their systems in order to present the gospel in a way that it can be heard. How many different ways can this problem be approached? What "language" must be employed? Lewis Drummond in his book, *Reaching Generation Next*, gives Paul's pattern for reaching those not native to his culture:

The apostle was most wise to preach the Word in a fashion that would address the Gentile culture and mind-set. For example, at Athens Paul referred to their poets, not the Old Testament prophets, at least in the early stages of addressing the Athenian philosophers. This principle is what I am contending for in addressing postmoderns. We must "talk their language."⁹⁶

In referring to the postmodern generation, author Ken Loyd reminds his reader of this idea with the title of his book, *They're Gentiles for Christ Sake!* Because they are Gentiles they need a Gentile language. They are different in basic orientation than their Modern or Boomer parents and their Gen X older brothers and sisters, just as the Gentiles

⁹⁶ Drummond, 80.

stood in contrast to the Jews. All are worthy of the gospel. Will leaders respect and seek to understand the generational differences? They must find the gems of wisdom intrinsic to next generation and their culture for the benefit of the church. Millennials must be equipped to play their part in salvation history. They must be given a place at the leadership table.

Demographic Statistics

Social Issues

A Harvard University survey in 2006 the shows the most important issues to College Students ages 18-25.

- 43% War/Terrorism
- 28% Other
- 19% Social Issues
- 10% Economy⁹⁷

The Millennial Generation lives with the felt threat of global instability. Personal safety and social issues trump financial concerns, which is the opposite of previous generations.

Education

In 2006 Lopez and Marcelo noted these education trends of those 18 to 34.

- High School degree attainment is high: 87 percent of those 25-34 have diplomas.
- Enrollment in post-secondary education is increasing: (1970 –2004) School enrollment rate for 18–19 year olds jumped from 48 to 64 percent.

⁹⁷ Mark Hugo Lopez, and Karlo Barrios Marcelo. "Survey of College Students." February 2007. <http://www.clorn.com/Search/Query/civicyouth> (accessed July 22, 2010)

- Enrollment rates of adults ages 20–24 increased from 22 to 35 percent; for those ages 25–29 from 8 to 13 percent; and for those ages 30–34 from 4 to 7 percent.⁹⁸

The generations must become more educated as the competition for meaningful careers becomes more strident.⁹⁹ With the need for education escalating, many young adults are delaying marriage and child bearing until their thirties. Sexual ethics are deeply affected by these changes. This raises the bar on critical thinking skills. Leaders will need to develop greater sensitivity in presenting a practical gospel.

Racial Identification

In 2007, the U.S. Census Bureau found this breakdown of racial identification of the Millennial Generation.

- Approximately 33 percent of children under 18 are racial or ethnic minorities.
- About 20 percent of elementary and high school-age students are immigrants or children of immigrants.
- 6.8 million Americans indicate a mixed ethnic heritage (approximately 2.4 percent of the U.S. population). Nearly 46 percent of those are under age 18.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Mark Hugo Lopez and Karlo Barrios Marcelo. “Youth Demographics,” CIRCLE. November 2006. <http://www.civicyouth.org,10>, (accessed June 1, 2011).

⁹⁹ Karl Fish, Scott McLeod, Jeff Brenman “Shift Happen: Did You Know?” Version 4.0, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ILQrUrEW8>, (accessed January 13, 2010).

¹⁰⁰ “Background on the Millennial Generation.” February 2007. Young Voter Strategies. <http://www.youngvoterstrategies.org> The U.S. Census Bureau, (accessed June 1, 2011).

The Millennial Generation brings a more culturally, and thus religiously, integrated mix to the United States than any previous generation. Leaders are challenged to learn how to include other perspectives without compromising the gospel message.

Table 3:1. Outsiders Response to Christians

In the table below Kinnaman, when surveying non-Christians for his book, *unchristian*, uncovered the way in which outsiders perceive Evangelicals, Born-Agains and Christians (when N= 440, ages 16 to 29 yrs.)¹⁰¹

Categories	Christianity	Evangelicals	Born-Agains
Know of/aware of	NA	57%	86%
Bad Impression	38%	49%	35%
Neutral Impression	45%	48%	55%
Good Impression	16%	3%	10%

Source: Kinnaman, *unchristian*, 25.

The church is suffering a reputation problem with outsiders, many of whom are former attendees from their younger years.

Categories	Outsiders	Church-goers
Anti homosexual	91%	80%
Judgmental	87	52
Hypocritical	85	47
Old-fashioned	78	36
Too involved in Politics	75	50
Out of touch with reality	72	32
Insensitive to others	70	29
Boring	68	27
Not accepting of other faiths	64	39
Confusing	61	44

Table

3:2

101

Millennials Views of Christianity

In 2007 David Kinnaman asked outsiders and churchgoers, ages 16-29, which of these words they would use to describe present-day Christianity. The results are shown in the table below.

Source: Kinnaman, 34.

These telling statistics highlight the problem the church faces. Many from the Millennial Generation, according to Kinnaman, would much rather disassociate than fall into this camp.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Kinnaman, 28-29.

Table 3:3 Ethics: Young Christians Do Things Their Way

The table below shows what Kinnaman found in his research regarding how the Born-Again younger generation's stance differs from their Born-Again parents and grandparents when it came to what they believe to be morally acceptable behaviors.

Morally Acceptable Behaviors	Age 23-41	Age 42+
Cohabitation	59%	33%
Gambling	58	38
Sexual Fantasies or thoughts	57	35
Sex outside of marriage	44	23
Use of profanity	37	17
Getting drunk	35	13
Looking at nudity or sexually explicit behavior	33	19
Having an abortion	32	27
Having a sexual relationship with same sex	28	13
Using drugs not prescribed for you	16	8
Allowing the "F-word" on television	7	6

Source: Kinnaman 53.

The younger generation shows nearly twice the tolerance for these behaviors than their parents or grandparents, further evidence of a shifting morality and a broadening generation gap.

Defining Lifetime Events

Greenburg Quinlan Rosner in their 2006 research of Millennials found these to be the defining events of the Millennial generation.

- 1982-AIDS identified

- 1985-Ozone layer discovered
- 1989-Berlin Wall destroyed, Tiananmen Square demonstrations
- 1991-End to the Soviet Union and the Cold War
- 1996-Oklahoma City bombings
- 1999- Columbine shootings
- 2001- September 11th attack on the Twin Towers and Pentagon
- 2003-Iraq War
- 2005-Hurricane Katrina
- 2007-Virginia Tech shootings¹⁰³

Violence and uncertainty is a telling theme. To many Millennials it is a fact of life and may be the impetus for their action on social justice issues. Many search for spirituality and meaning in the midst of an uncertain world. Leaders are challenged to interpret these events in a way that promotes faith and a healthy response.

Personal Characteristics

In their 2006 research Greenberg Quinlan Rosner found the following characteristics to classically define Millennials

- They are products of youth safety movement
- They are heavily influenced by peers and media
- Three out of four eat dinner with family daily
- Ninety percent have a good relationship with their mothers

¹⁰³ Greenberg Quinlan Rosner “Generation Y at a Glance,” Rosner Research. www.ffos.hr/lida/datoteke/LIDA2007-Deyrup.ppt, (accessed Oct. 08, 2009).

- Sixty five percent have a good relationship with their fathers
- They identify with parents values
- They highly value education
- They are patriotic
- They expect instant gratification
- They are independent
- They believe in and practice healthy lifestyle
- They expect their income to exceed their parents
- They want a balanced relationship between work and family
- In spite of being peer oriented, Millennials appreciate many traditional values.¹⁰⁴

These statistics may send a confusing message to those who would lead them.

Learning Styles

Greenberg Quinlan Rosner in their 2006 research shows the following five learning styles to be prevalent among Millennials:

- Collaborative: comfortable working in teams
- Achievement oriented
- Believe in merit-based systems
- Impatient: tune out if not interested
- Communicate through social networks
- Non-linear: visual literacy, multi-media literacy¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Millennials present many hurdles to overcome when it comes to education, both from the perspective of the student and the teacher. Many previous methods of learning will no longer work for the younger generation, creating a methodological challenge for leaders who seek to convey a biblical world-view.

The Job Market

Shift Happens gives a view of the unprecedented challenges for Millennials in the job market of the future.

- The top ten jobs in 2010 did not exist in 2004.
- Students are currently preparing for jobs using technologies that have not been invented in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet.
- U.S. Department of Labor estimates that today's learner will have ten to fourteen jobs by the age of thirty-eight.
- Humanity is increasing the search for knowledge by fifty percent per year.
- By 2010 ninety percent of all science and technology college graduates were in Asia.
- Many of today's college majors didn't exist ten years ago. These include: New Media, Organic Agriculture, E-business, Nano Technology, and Homeland Security.
- The amount of new technical information is doubling every two years. By 2010 it is expected to double every seventy-two hours. For students starting a four-year technical degree this means that half of what they learn in their first year of study will be outdated by their third year of study.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Karl Fish, Scott McLeod and Jeff Brenman. <http://shifthappens.wikispaces.com/> 2008, Version 3.0, (accessed June 1, 2011).

Millennials face a moving target in regards to career development. Whereas previous generations could rely on company loyalty and a modicum of job stability, the younger generation must be ready to adapt for their future. Without long-term employment it is likely that many benefits that enhanced financial security will simply no longer exist. How this effects the moral decisions of the youth culture needs to be explored. It could be that praxis determines religious belief when it comes to spirituality in light of financial considerations.

Table 3:4 Religious Views of God According to Age

Statement A: God is an all-powerful, all-knowing God who monitors the earth, rewards good, and punishes evil.

Statement B: God is a loving God who created humans and, like the watchmaker, sets us in motions and lets us live our own lives and lets others live theirs.

RESULTS BY AGE	18-27	28-41	42-61	62-80	81+
Omniscient God	23	27	25	19	26
Watchmaker God	40	46	50	57	48
Neither/Other	26	22	19	17	16

Source: John Zogby, *The Way We'll Be* (New York: Random House, 2008), 133.

John Zogby's *The Way We Will Be* reveals the Millennials belief about God's presence in the affairs of their lives in contrast to other age groups. Millennials show the lowest level of belief in God. This lack of faith could be from limited life experience, no

felt need, or it could be a general disposition affected by the post Christian era. This statistic highlights the need for further research.

The Millennial generation is facing a world that no one could have predicted. The challenges are unique to their time in history. Where might they find God's wisdom for their unique experiences and pressures? Leaders must be ready and able to create a spiritual space that inspires faith, comfort, challenge, and belonging to Millennials.

Portland Stakeholders

A stakeholder is a person or organization who has a felt investment in the state or the outcome of a project, an organization or a cultural expression. Stakeholders remind leaders of the importance of what they do and why they do it. Stakeholders are support and they are accountability partners. The following individuals will function as stakeholders for this dissertation project:

- Ken Loyd pastors the young homeless population in downtown Portland. He understands that a city is only as good as the way it treats its most vulnerable citizens.
- Ernestine Celestine, an administrative Vice President at North Portland Bible College, cares about the opportunities available to the poor for higher education, especially those who are pastors of the urban poor.
- Dr. MaryKate Morse is invested in training top-notch future leaders for the local, national and international community. She mentors men and women in transformational leadership.
- Kelly Bean, my co-creator of Convergence, a women's leadership collective, is invested in creating an atmosphere locally and nationally where young women leaders can be mentored by elders to grow into spiritual leaders of the future.
- Jessica Roye, of Oregon Center for Christian Values, advocates for healthcare, the eradication of sex trafficking in Oregon, biblical earth care, and the rights

of the poor. She trains young churches and their leaders to support biblical justice and thus represent Christ to their communities.

- Todd and Angie Fadel are Christian singer/songwriters who have a long history among the secular creative community in the City of Portland. They care passionately about how Christianity, and therefore God, is portrayed to the subculture of the city. Angie is a pastor at The Bridge Church of Portland.

These stakeholders will be consulted for their input on this project. They will in turn benefit from the results of my research.

Other Current Issues

Other current issues are topics that have the power to affect the outcome of this research. Each of the ten topics below could stand alone as a dissertation topic. For the thoroughness of this study, these questions will be addressed as much as possible as they relate to Millennials leaders and the church.

- What part does story play in how Millennials perceive faith?
- How would inter-generational tolerance look within the church?
- What biblical model would help leaders with the Millennial Generation?
- How would evangelism look through a Millennial lens?
- What kind of theology is important to Millennials?
- Are leaders asking the right questions? Are leaders answering the relevant questions?
- What are the generative themes of Millennials?
- In what ways might Millennials be a gift to the church?
- How do Millennials want to be led?
- How does the church need to be redesigned to reflect the needs of future generations?

Geographical Descriptions

In order to delimit the geographical scope of this study the participants must be carefully determined. Online connectedness produces a global atmosphere for Millennials. It is not so for the generations that are leading them. Older leaders, especially, are often frustrated with the “new language” of the Internet and the global community and opt out of the system. This inconsistency introduces a research problem with the leaders and churches. A study that encompasses all continents would broaden the research exponentially and muddy the results. For this reason the research was limited to members of the Millennial Generation and leaders who attend The Bridge Church in Portland, Oregon, where face-to-face interviews could be conducted.

Summary

The history and demography of the generations plays a formative role in the churches relevancy like no other time in history. The clash of generational understandings and needs urge the church to change or fail it's next generation. The church must learn how to think differently for its healthy survival. Although biblical story does not deal with technology and a global culture, there were indeed pressing issues and culture clashes that the Christians navigated. God does not leave God's church without resources in any generation. Where might the church find universal truths, truths that transcend time and culture, to deal with its problems? A look at salvation history and how

the Bible dealt with cultural issue of changing demographics in mission proved beneficial in addressing these questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS

The purpose of this study is to help church leaders find ways of inspiring commitment to the church among the Millennial Generation. This theological chapter examines a biblical theory of belonging within the first century Christian faith community and takes a look at how their leaders determined the benchmarks of Christian belonging.

It is possible that the Millennial Generation's experience with church community parallels that of the first century Gentile churches experience with the converted Jewish community. Two distinctly different cultures of the church, the Jewish Christian church and Gentile Christian church, worked out a way to live together in peace. This study will analyze what the fledgling church did to effectively bridge the gap between the two. It will examine the limited expectations that the Jewish Christians required of the Gentile Christians, how growth was affected, and how similarly the church of today might apply this thinking for its generational dilemmas.

The Back-story of Acts 15

Acts 15 stands at the center of the book of Acts as its gatekeeper.¹⁰⁷ Acts chapters one through fourteen show Christianity as a subset of Judaism. Acts chapters sixteen through twenty-eight show the church as free from the Law of Moses and spreading virally across the world stage. A few contemporary scholars argue that Acts divides into three or four major sections with the decisive division after chapter 12. Pervo says that

¹⁰⁷ See Appendix 1 for a presentation of the characters in Acts 15

this organization of Acts “is more reflective of Acts’ internal parallelisms having to do with the inception of the narrative of the gentile mission.”¹⁰⁸ Pervo notes that Peter steps back, and Paul steps into a prominent roll from chapter thirteen through the end of Acts as the evangelist to the Gentiles. Pervo also notes, “The theme of Jews first remains in force.”¹⁰⁹ A cursory perusal of Acts shows that even after Paul proclaims, “We now turn to the Gentiles”¹¹⁰ Paul and Barnabus “went as usual into the Jewish synagogue”¹¹¹ and continued to do so.¹¹² Until the Council of Jerusalem in Chapter 15, Paul has established a pattern of preaching both to the Jews and the Gentiles, which was continued throughout Acts. It becomes apparent in the light of these references that it did not matter to Paul whom he was preaching to. All people were in need of Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile; all deserved equal access.

David K. Strong disagrees with Pervo. He addresses the change of church oversight as the defining event with Acts Fifteen, as “the transitional chapter between the apostolic and post-apostolic church, where Peter surrenders leadership to James, the elders, and the Pauline mission.”¹¹³ Peter is not seen in the book of Acts beyond his speech in verses seven through eleven. Strong sees the change of leaders as the defining break, which is more logical than Pervo’s more obscure perspective. Chapter fifteen marks the transition of the church into its second generation. Leaders who were not of the original twelve, James the brother of Jesus, Paul, and others were taking the reigns. These

¹⁰⁸ Richard I. Pervo, *Acts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 21.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

¹¹⁰ Acts 13:46b

¹¹¹ Acts 14:1

¹¹² Acts 18:4, 19:8

¹¹³ Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig, eds. *Mission in Acts*. (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 197.

new leaders acknowledge the necessity for a redefinition of praxis in the church.¹¹⁴ It is from this purview that the church was able to free itself up for its second incarnation, one that welcomed Jews and Gentiles as equals, freeing the church to cross cultural bounds. Hirsch points out that by A.D.100, the first century church had as few as twenty-five thousand members. By A.D. 310 up to twenty million Christians had been added to the church. This growth curve the church has not seen since,¹¹⁵ and emphasizes the effectiveness of the decision of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

Philip and the Samaritans

It is true that the influx of non-Jewish believers and the stir that it caused occurred much earlier than Acts 15. In fact, Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans as early as Acts 8:5. Samaritans were a people of mixed blood and synchronistic religious devotion. Geographically and religiously speaking, Samaria stood as a mid point between dedicated Jews and pagans.¹¹⁶ Since Jews thought of Samaritans as heretical Jews¹¹⁷ rather than Gentiles, it would not be appropriate to say that Phillip evangelized the Gentiles. It may be said, however, that Philip was the first evangelist sent to schismatic Jews and those embroiled in pagan practices, which was definitely outside of the norm for the Jewish Christian church. Jews believed that Samaritans defiled them by their mere presence and they avoided Samaritans at great personal cost.¹¹⁸ Philip's actions led evangelism to the very edge of Jewish acceptability, yet no specific norms for belonging for these converts

¹¹⁴ Acts 15:19.

¹¹⁵ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 18.

¹¹⁶ Pervo, 205.

¹¹⁷ J.D. Douglas, *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 519.

¹¹⁸ Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 253-254.

were ever established. They were simply assimilated into the Jewish Christian practice, a culture that they at least minimally understood, unlike the Gentiles.

Peter and Cornelius

In Acts 10 the story of Cornelius's conversion unfolds, bringing with it both great tension and great rejoicing among the Jewish and Gentile churches. Cornelius obediently followed an angel's command to fetch Peter from Joppa. In the meantime, Peter received his own vision from God, which seemed to contradict Jewish dietary laws. Adherence to Kosher laws made a man clean. Peter did not understand how this vision could negate the Law and still be from God. Was Peter able to comprehend this change of direction?

Robinson and Wall bring an Old Testament perspective to the story,

Peter's inability to comprehend the vision of non-kosher foods threatens his service to God. Recalling the OT story of the prophet Jonah, God calls Peter from the city of Joppa (Acts 10:8; cf. Jonah 1:3) to carry God's word to "unclean gentiles"—not those living in pagan Nineveh but the ones in the home of a Roman soldier, Cornelius (vv. 1-8, 17b-33). As with Jonah before him, Peter is converted to the Lords' way only after God has more clearly revealed God's intention to save non-kosher gentiles who repent. Peter's reluctance to eat "profane and unclean" foods illustrates this new theological problem: just as God's decision angered Jonah, so now the salvation of unclean Cornelius threatens to divide the Jewish church (11:1-18).¹¹⁹

Robinson and Wall go on to suggest that the use of Peter's Aramaic name, Simon (bar Jonah),¹²⁰ adds to the depth of the Old Testament connection by suggesting the parallel of Peter's challenges with those of Jonah's. Like Jonah, Peter was being

¹¹⁹ Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called To Be The Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2006), 150.

¹²⁰ Acts 15:14.

challenged by God to step up and allow himself to be shaped by the foreign belief that God shows no partiality to people who fear God and do right. ¹²¹

Peter did not have long to ponder his vision and its religious implications. His escorts arrived and took him to Cornelius's house, where he was met with a crowd of eager non-Jewish listeners. Observing their spiritual hunger and the Holy Spirit's response he made his proclamation: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right."¹²² God had revealed a long forgotten aspect of God's self, and Peter was compelled to respond. This lesson was about the character of God rather than Peter or the churches mission. ¹²³ As Peter preached to the assembly, a spontaneous wave of the Holy Spirit fell on his listeners who began speaking in tongues and praising God. With that, the circumcised are astonished and God has made the point: All become clean through dedication to God and doing what is right. God holds the privilege to determine what it means to do what is right. God accepted Cornelius and his friends not because they repented but because they were ones who sought God.

The Antioch Church

Persecution caused the young church to go viral. The Diaspora made their way to Antioch preaching Jesus to the Greeks as they went, and "a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."¹²⁴ The Jerusalem church sent Barnabus and Saul as apostolic oversight. The Antioch church thrived, welcoming both Jews and Gentiles. Their leaders had learned how to navigate the cultural waters between Jew and Gentile.

¹²¹ Robinson and Wall, 150.

¹²² Acts 10:34b-35.

¹²³

¹²⁴ Acts 11:21.

They exemplified the love of God and the love of neighbor. Because of demonstrated love, believers were first called Christians, literally little Christs, at Antioch.¹²⁵ The Antioch church grew in numbers and in their love of Christ and fellow believers, so much so, in fact, that they financially supported the Judean church during a time of famine.¹²⁶

Barnabas and Paul

Chapters 13 and 14 chronicle Barnabas and Paul's missionary journeys through what is now Greece and Turkey. The duo first preached in the synagogues to the Jews and Gentiles who had converted to Judaism. The Pharisees were not pleased. When they stirred up opposition,¹²⁷ Paul and Barnabas would go preach to the Gentiles.¹²⁸ Signs and wonders confirmed the veracity of their work,¹²⁹ legitimizing their efforts. When Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch they reported how God had "opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."¹³⁰

The Subset Theory

Until the council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, Christianity could be seen as a subset of Judaism. Some teachers argued that entrance into the kingdom of God came first through compliance to the Law of Moses.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Acts 11:26.

¹²⁶ Acts 11:29; Gal. 2:10.

¹²⁷ Acts 13:50; 14:2, 19.

¹²⁸ Acts 13:46.

¹²⁹ Acts 14:3.

¹³⁰ Acts 14:28.

¹³¹ Acts 15:5b.

The early church struggled with their understandings of what it meant to please God, just as the church does today. Is it law keeping or keeping a right heart that most pleases God? Jesus argued that God captures the heart through the higher law of love. One who truly loves will fulfill the law. When Jesus was asked which of the commandments of the law was the greatest he said, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”¹³² Therefore, the deepest form of obedience to the law was to love and through love all the other tenets of the faith would be accomplished.

Converted Jewish believers continued to live according to the Law even though they were no longer subject to it. Pervo observes how the majority of the Christian community viewed The Law of Moses. He says, “Soteriologically speaking, the Torah is a dead letter. Jews are free to follow it, insofar as they do not trouble others.”¹³³ Many did just that, but such a personal expression of faith was not a widely appreciated view, nor was it widely practiced. John Stott reflects a more common attitude, “So far it had been assumed that they would be absorbed into Israel by circumcision, and that by observing the law they would be acknowledged as bona fide members of the covenant people of God.”¹³⁴ Believers, it was thought, had to fulfill the Law of Moses. Gentile Christians would be required to make two leaps to attain salvation and belonging in the Kingdom of God: one to Judaism and the other to become followers of Jesus.

¹³² Matthew 22:37- 40.

¹³³ Pervo, 370.

¹³⁴ John Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 240-241.

With this ethos it was unlikely that the mission of the church would be appreciated outside of Jewish culture. The distance that needed to be traveled for belonging was just too far. If circumcision and law keeping were required, Barnabas and Paul's missionary work would be called into question at best and nullified at worst because they did not require it of the Gentiles. It was not until the influx of the Gentile population that Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37-40 would be pressed into service. The Jewish/Gentile culture clash would force the church into developing cohesive practice exemplifying the love of Jesus.

The Concerns

If Gentiles were not required to obey the Law, as Paul argued, what would happen to the standards of right living and holiness? Judaizers thought that the infusion of non-law-keeping believers might contaminate the entire congregation of Christians and its reputation. They feared that impurity would eat away at the churches covenant relationship with God.¹³⁵ They feared that Jewish culture, traditions, and influence would be lost.¹³⁶ Circumcision was odious to the Gentiles. The rituals of idol worship were odious to the Jews. This conflict became a sacramental issue, a bread and wine issue. With such cultural differences it was necessary to develop a standard of practice that would allow Gentile and Jewish Christians to enjoy table fellowship. What would that standard be? These were the dilemmas with which the Jerusalem Council struggled.

After a strong start with the Gentiles, Peter began to compromise. It would be unlikely that he would submit to the extremist Judaizers view after his experience with

¹³⁵ Robinson and Wall, 168.

¹³⁶ MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Acts 13-12* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 61.

Cornelius. Peter did believe that the uncircumcised Gentiles were indeed Christians, but the Pharisees intimidated him to the point that he broke off table fellowship¹³⁷ with Gentiles believers, even influencing Barnabas to do the same. By his actions he began to divide the church into two groups: “We who are circumcised and those who are not.”¹³⁸ The church was in danger of creating a second-class citizen status for Gentiles. Without a theological exposition from the elders, the church became afire with conflict and uncertainty. As an apostolic leader of the now struggling church, Peter had to take a stand on the issue.

The Judaizer position would insidiously declare uncircumcised Gentile Christians as unsaved. All of Paul’s hard work would be nullified. Paul alludes to this possibility when he first came to Jerusalem fifteen years earlier to inquire with the church leaders about the situation, “But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.”¹³⁹ Paul was open to correction and humbly submitted the body of his work to the church leaders for reproof and correction. Rather than a rebuke, James, Peter, and John gave him the right hand of fellowship, blessed him and sent him on his way.

The Question

Paul, with the apostolic blessing on his work, assumed that Gentiles conversion was secure, but Judaizers did not abandon their campaign. The Jewish/Gentile problem had to be heard publicly by a broader audience. Leaders were calling for a definitive answer that would forever end the conflict. Gallagher and Hertig succinctly recap the questions:

¹³⁷ Galatians 2:12.

¹³⁸ LaSor, William Sanford. *Church Alive* (Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972), 226.

¹³⁹ Galatians 2:2.

Will the Jerusalem church sanction unhindered outreach to the Gentiles? Must new converts first become Jews, embracing a foreign lifestyle, and thereby blunting the force of the gospel? Or could converts remain culturally Gentiles, in full and unfettered contact with family and friends?¹⁴⁰

The course of action that the Judaizers were proposing would make the Gentiles into Jews and thus extract the Gentiles from their own people, making it unlikely that they would evangelize their friends and families. The church was being called upon to listen for the voice of God, the unequivocal voice in this drama. Robinson and Wall make the point that wise leaders will opt for discernment over democracy.

Democracy, which honors important values, seeks the will of the majority: discernment seeks the will of God and the mind of Christ. In a gathering informed by the norms of democracy, everyone has the right to speak because everyone is entitled to his or her opinion. When engaged in discernment, we listen to others not because they have a right to their opinion but because we never know through whom the Holy Spirit may speak.¹⁴¹

A good leader would value the democratic process, validating the individual voice and the corporate voice. Democratic process is deemed to be a fair way to settle most conflicts, but not this one. As wise leaders those of the Jerusalem Council looked beyond the current day presenting problems, setting their sites strategically on the future. What did the Holy Spirit want for God's church?¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Gallagher and Hertig, 197.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 185.

¹⁴² This study focuses in on the pericope of Acts 15:1-35. The writer has bounded the story using chiasm. A chiasm is diagonally arranged prose. In literature it works as a form of punctuation as well as creating atmosphere, in this case at the beginning and the end of the story. Luke wanted the reader to feel the finality of the decision. Verses one through five are in chiastic relationship with verses 30 through 35. In verse 1-4 antagonists went to Antioch to stir up trouble. Then Paul and Barnabas went down to Jerusalem to present their case, encouraging believers with the good news of Gentile conversation along the way. In verse 5 the apostles were at the Council presenting their case. In verses 30-35 the apostles are sent from the Council with the letter ending the strife. They went back to Antioch where they encouraged the believers with the good news that they were accepted as equals. Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch. The events of Acts 15:30-35 effectively work in reverse when compared to verses 1-5, which is a perfect example of chiastic structure.

At the Council of Jerusalem, Pervo suggests that three views can be observed: 1) “One, upheld by Christian Pharisees, is that Gentile converts must keep Torah in effect, and cease to be Gentiles. 2) Peter sets forth the “left-wing” position: Gentiles are welcome without any specific conditions. 3) The moderate view is propounded by James,” Gentiles are welcome with a few qualifiers.¹⁴³ The next section takes a close look at the arguments of the leaders and how they worked through the conflict to a solution.

¹⁴³ Pervo, 379.

The Argument

The Judaizers spoke first. “Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses.”¹⁴⁴ They were looking to preserve the holy ways of Jewish life by formulaic obedience to the law. They felt that Jesus came to fulfill the law not to abolish it.¹⁴⁵ MacArthur suggests that this was “a most destructive of heresies since it damns men.”¹⁴⁶ The bar would be set so high that only those with an appetite for spurious religious activity would even be interested.

Peter addressed the Judaizers, “Why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear?”¹⁴⁷ Peter affirms that both Jews and Gentiles are saved by grace and not by works.¹⁴⁸ Any hazing beyond grace would be a step backwards. Peter argued for no restrictions, no yokes. Haenchen posits that this statement reflects Luke’s’ Gentile perspective on the Law,¹⁴⁹ since religious Jews did not consider the demands of the Law unbearable.¹⁵⁰ Witherington disagrees with Haenchen arguing that Jesus himself considered the yoke of The Law heavy “...and there is no plausible reason why a Galilean fisherman like Peter may not have found it burdensome as well.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁴ Acts 15:5b.

¹⁴⁵ For sources see Appendix Cast of Characters.

¹⁴⁶ John MacArthur, Jr. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moore Press, 1996, 62.

¹⁴⁷ Acts 15:10.

¹⁴⁸ Acts 15:11.

¹⁴⁹ Luke is considered to be the author of Acts of the Apostles. Luke wrote from a Greek background.

¹⁵⁰ Ernst Haenchen. *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*. Translated by B. Noble. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1971. 445-446.

¹⁵¹ Ben Witherington, III. *The Acts of the Apostles*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Press, 1998), 337.

The Law of Moses,¹⁵² the Torah, included 613 commands. The Mishna, all 525 chapters, was the guiding code on how to interpret the Torah. The Torah and the Mishnaic code may not have been heavy for the professionally religious but it was indeed heavy for the commoner. While a Jew may have pressed towards fulfilling the law out of love for his own native tradition, the Gentiles shared no love with the Jews for their copious laws and traditions. Peter's question was born out of a loving concern for fellow believers. In an act of absolute solidarity he refers to them as disciples, making no distinction between Jewish and Gentile disciples.

Although one doesn't hear the voice of Paul directly in Acts 15, the text shows that Paul and Barnabas silenced the crowd with their amazing stories, bearing a powerful and compelling Holy Spirit witness to the validity of the Gentile conversions.¹⁵³ Their report made it evident that God's dwelling place was no longer a temple built the hands of man, but it dwelt in human hearts sanctioned by Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁴ Faith in Jesus was no longer exclusively Jewish territory. Any human heart could give hospitality to his indwelling and transforming presence. The implied conclusion was that if God could be elastic enough so as to accept the devoted Gentile, the church must stretch itself to do the same.

¹⁵² Jewish Virtual Library. Mishna. <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>, (accessed June 1, 2011). There are 613 commandments from God in the Torah. The Mishna is composed of 523-525 chapters of code for living.

¹⁵³ Cornelius's household converted, hearts were cleansed and transformed by faith in Jesus. An evil man was struck with blindness and as a result the proconsul placed his faith in Jesus. A man lame from birth miraculously leapt up and walked. The Antioch church in the year of famine had reached out to them by sending an offering for the poor in Jerusalem. Though there was much opposition, Paul and Barnabas continued to leave a wake of Gentile believers where ever they traveled.

¹⁵⁴ Kee, Howard Clark, *To Every Nation Under Heaven* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 181.

The Proposal and the Decision

James reminds the leaders that prophecy predicts an influx of Gentiles and that it is God who has drawn them to salvation. He urges the church not to trouble¹⁵⁵ the Gentiles and not put God to the test. James understood that just as the Jewish Christians had to bend towards inclusion, so also must the Gentiles bend. James proffered a way to coexist so that diverse congregations would nurture the church rather than corrupt it:¹⁵⁶ Five stipulations were put on the table as an avenue of belonging for both factions:

- Jews will not make it difficult for Gentiles. They will not require circumcision or a strict adherence to the law.
- Gentiles will abstain from food polluted by idols.
- Gentiles will abstain from sexual immorality.
- Gentiles will abstain from the meat of strangled animals
- Gentiles will abstain from blood.¹⁵⁷

The last four of these are familiar themes in Old Testament literature. Howard Kee notes, the “Tractate Sanhedrin¹⁵⁸ lists seven commands given to Noah and his sons that are perceived to be binding to all humanity: obedience to the law, abstinence from blasphemy, idolatry, incestuous marriage, blood, robbery and meat from animal still alive.”¹⁵⁹ Although all four of the Acts 15 guidelines are included the Tractate’s list, it is not a perfect match. The Tractate includes three prohibitions that the Councils list does

¹⁵⁵ The Greek for trouble is *parenochlein* which means to pester someone against his or her will.

¹⁵⁶ Robinson and Wall, 176.

¹⁵⁷ Acts 15:20

¹⁵⁸ “Synopsis of Subjects of Tractate Sanhedrin: The Mishna VI to VII,” The Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Talmud/synsanhedrin.html>, (accessed June 1, 2011).

¹⁵⁹ Kee, 182.

not: blasphemy, robbery, and obedience to the law. Obedience to the law was the major demand of the Judaizers, thus the Tractate view would have confused the interpretation.

Kee brings a suggestion that is more in line with James, “A much clearer link is evident in Leviticus 17-18 where the rules are laid down for how Israelites as well as alien residents in the land are to behave... on precisely the subjects addressed in Acts 15:20.”¹⁶⁰

Gallagher and Hertig agree. They observe that the four suggestions have their roots in the dietary laws of Leviticus.¹⁶¹ They point out that, “The issue was not the moral law, since the Gentile Christians also were expected to live moral lives. The issue was ritual law. How could Jewish believers have table fellowship with Gentiles?”¹⁶² Although the suggestions regarding food and eating seem to comply with the dietary laws, the suggestion of sexual purity seems to be out of context, not dietary, when compared with the others.

A third view may more closely reflect the original context. Witherington has argued convincingly that the setting for all of the commands was pagan worship.¹⁶³ “Things polluted by idols” is a general term for all associations with idolatry, which involved sacrificial meals (frequently with strangled sacrifices and tasting or drinking the blood) and sacred prostitution.¹⁶⁴ These stipulations may be the guiding tenets of holy separation, a way to distinguish Jews who follow one God from the heathen practices of neighboring tribes.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 182.

¹⁶¹ Leviticus 17-18.

¹⁶² Gallagher and Hertig, 204.

¹⁶³ Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 460-465; c.f. H. Reisser, “porneia,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol.1 ed. Colin Brown. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975, 497-501.

¹⁶⁴ Gallagher and Hertig, 204.

Taking these three views into consideration a possible interpretation of the four commands to the Gentiles is offered below:

- Abstain from food polluted (sacrificed to) by idols:¹⁶⁵ Food offered to idols speaks to idolatrous practices. Leviticus 17 says that the meat was unacceptable unless it was brought to the Tent of Meeting, slaughtered by the priest, and offered to the Lord. Sacrifice was always to be an act of worship.¹⁶⁶
- Abstain from sexual immorality:¹⁶⁷ Purity may address marriage practices unique to the Gentiles or it may apply to temple prostitution.¹⁶⁸
- Abstain from the meat of strangled animals:¹⁶⁹ The meat of strangled animals quite possibly meant meat that was not fully slaughtered meaning that the blood was circulating and the animal was still alive.
- Abstain from blood.¹⁷⁰ Drinking blood was ritually practiced among non-Jews. The command to not drink blood could also refer to God's high value on life. "You must not eat the blood because the life of every creature is in its blood."¹⁷¹

James reasons, "Moses has been preached in every city from the earliest times and is read in the synagogues on every Sabbath."¹⁷² Here James uses "Moses" as a metonymy¹⁷³ for the Pentateuch. The people had been systematically taught what the Law of Moses had to say and it directed their lives. The new Gentile members of the church were called upon to give up their ritual practices out of respect for their converted Jewish neighbors religious sensibilities.

¹⁶⁵ Leviticus 17:8-9.

¹⁶⁶ Leviticus 1:3

¹⁶⁷ Leviticus 18:1-26.

¹⁶⁸ Robinson and Wall, 177.

¹⁶⁹ Kee, 182.

¹⁷⁰ Leviticus 17:10, 13; 17:14.

¹⁷¹ Leviticus 17:11.

¹⁷² Acts 15:21.

¹⁷³ A metonymy is a semantic device where the name of the part is used to describe the whole. In this case the name of Moses, the author of the Book of The Law, is used to represent the Book of the Law and all that it implies.

To James it was likely that the only good Gentile was one who feared and loved God.¹⁷⁴ It was not unreasonable that James should expect the Gentiles to obey these four restrictions if these Gentiles were indeed those people whom God has drawn according to Amos's prophecy.¹⁷⁵ God would empower them to obey. The Gentile community would be considered respectable and spiritually healthy if they consistently adhered to the Council's rules for them.¹⁷⁶

The Outcome

The Council discerned the wisdom of James's suggestions. They wrote a letter stating that the recommendations "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and us,"¹⁷⁷ declaring that apostolic opinion was unanimous among the men and in agreement with the Holy Spirit. The decree was sent out to the churches in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia via spoken and written witness so as "not to consciously or unconsciously modify the stipulations."¹⁷⁸ Judas and Silas, two leaders with the most credibility regionally, carried the good news to the Gentile community of faith.¹⁷⁹ With the sending of the letter church policy was established. The two communities could then weave their lives together without suffering offense. The result was that both communities were filled with joy and could celebrate life together.¹⁸⁰ The voices of the Judaizers were silenced. Paul and Barnabas went back to their work of preaching and the word of the Lord spread in Antioch.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁴ Robinson and Wall, 177.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 175-176.

¹⁷⁶ Kee, 183.

¹⁷⁷ Acts 15:28

¹⁷⁸ Kee, 183.

¹⁷⁹ William Sanford LaSor, Church Alive. Glendale, CA: Regal Books, 1972. 234.

¹⁸⁰ Acts 15:30-31.

Smith sees Acts 15 as a turning point for the church:

The decision of the conference might be termed, without exaggeration, the Christian's Bill of Rights. It also proclaimed the supranational character of Christianity. It breached all the walls of partition, the barriers between races, between masters and slave, between rich and poor, between the educated and the illiterate. It opened a door by which all might enter into that life of spiritual abundance which God intended for all mankind.¹⁸²

The Council of Jerusalem was a great step of maturity for the young church.

Leaders were learning how to navigate the chilly waters of controversy and come out stronger for the experience. As a result the church opened its arms to all who would enter regardless of ethnicity, religion, or cultural proclivity. As this major conflict was resolved, the bar was raised on expressions of Christian love within the community and within the world.

Conclusion

In light of scripture, how do church leaders inspire commitment to the church in the younger generation? How might the church apply the wisdom of this Council of Jerusalem to answer this question? The deepest questions are quite likely similar to those of the Council of Jerusalem: What is morally required for holiness, for peace, and for unity? Leaders must determine what is necessary for the practice of Christian faith in a time when the challenge is age and culture specific rather than ethnically specific.

The Jerusalem Council ruled that the Gentiles must refrain from the four practices in Acts 15 in trade for non-adherence to The Law requiring circumcision, a complicated

¹⁸² Smith, 120.

and burdensome practice for those not culturally attuned to it. The four prohibitions¹⁸³ mentioned were cited most likely because the Gentile church was still practicing them. Bearing in mind that the Antioch Gentile church had been a solid Christian community for approximately fifteen years, this prohibition is significant. It means that God was tolerant of a variety of cultural practices that some considered to be sinful. The Holy Spirit did not seem troubled by these behaviors; and the behaviors had no bearing on the viability of the Gentile church. In fact, the signs of revival and the blessing of God were openly being demonstrated at the Antioch church.¹⁸⁴ The Council was attempting to create an atmosphere where table fellowship could occur between Jew and Gentile. For the young church the prohibitions were not a holiness issue they were a unity issue. The four practices were abhorrent to Jews, just as circumcision was abhorrent to the Gentiles. For the sake of unity, both groups were asked to give up something. Jesus was more interested in the unity of the church¹⁸⁵ than anything that either culture had to offer or sacrifice.

¹⁸³ Acts 15: 28-29 “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following: You are to abstain from good sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.” Drinking blood may have been and everyday life style practice. Its origins were not noticed in scripture. It may have been part of diet or a delicacy much like our steak tartar. It may have lacked meaning or it may have been a left over ritual. To drink blood in some cultures means to emulate the character of the animal or person from whom the blood came. Jesus asks us to drink his blood and eat his flesh.

Sexual immorality might refer to something other than loose morals. The Gentile church would have been receiving the epistles along with Paul’s teaching that urged sexual purity so the rule about sexual purity must have had other meaning. It is believed to be a reference to temple cult practices.

Sacrifices to idols: The perfect and acceptable sacrifice was done only at the entrance to the ten of meeting, all others were considered sacrilegious.

¹⁸⁴ Acts 13.

¹⁸⁵ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought

James says, "Let us not pester them."¹⁸⁶ How might his suggestion be interpreted for church of the younger generation? Each Millennial faith community must have the freedom to determine what their practice will be. If the church does not give them the chance to define their own faith practice, I believe they will grow to regret it. When speaking of the coming Messiah, Isaiah described the way in which Jesus will bring justice to all peoples. He says, "A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."¹⁸⁷ The prophet is describing a Messiah who will neither test his people beyond their ability to bear it, nor will he push them away. The Messiah has compassion for the one that is broken and bruised. By the numbers of attrition it can be deduced that the Millennial church is that smoking wick and that bruised reed. Justice is not served when the suffering underdog is asked to bend for the comfort of the dominant power structure. Most Millennials will not fight for their right to individuate; they will just go away.

The Jerusalem Council declared that the Jewish Christian Church could not hold the Gentile church to the tenets of Judaism. The current day application here is clear: Millennials need not be expected to conform to cultural American Christianity. A cursory review of Acts 15 reveals that The Council of Jerusalem wanted the Gentiles to adjust these behaviors:

- The Gentile church must pay homage to the right God by giving up their cultic practices of worship: abstain from food sacrificed to idols.
- The Gentile church must live a non-destructive lifestyle by conforming to a lifestyle of sexual purity: abstain from sexual immorality.

to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." John 17:20-23

¹⁸⁶ Acts 15:19

¹⁸⁷ Isaiah 42:3.

- The Gentile church must become socially acceptable to the greater body of Christ by not continuing in distasteful table practices: abstain from blood and strangled animals.

It would be difficult to argue against monotheism, sexual purity, and socially sensitivity for the Millennial Church today. Beyond these stipulations there should be utter freedom to create Christ honoring community just as there was for the Antioch church.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to help church leaders find ways of inspiring commitment to the church among the Millennial Generation. The research question has been further focused on the correlation of Acts 15 with the ministry of The Bridge Church in Portland, Oregon. This deeper focus on the Bridge Church was chosen because of my firsthand knowledge of and access to the people of The Bridge Church as research subjects. It was also chosen because of the unique phenomenon that The Bridge Church represents as a community that has managed to attract and engage youth culture when the efforts of many others have failed. Acts 15 was chosen because the Council of Jerusalem stood uniquely positioned between the apostolic and post-apostolic eras. The first century church was an example of ecclesial growth in cross-cultural settings. The decisions of the Jerusalem Council were counterintuitive to both the Jewish and the Gentile cultures, yet the church grew exponentially in response to the decisions of the Council.

To say that The Bridge has navigated a clash of cultures would be an understatement. Congregants struggled to know the God of their parents and grandparents in their own way and within their own culture. Since its inception in 1998 The Bridge has, without cessation, attracted and engaged youth in a deep commitment to spiritual growth. Positive deviance is at work within in this community. Positive deviance is a phenomenon whereby certain people or organizations who, through the use of non-conventional wisdom, are able to accomplish remarkable results, and thus solutions to problems that far surpass the efforts of their peers even though they work with the same

resources and knowledge. Although it is impossible to determine whether or not the Jerusalem Council functioned as positive deviants, it can be surmised that their decisions were counter cultural yet satisfying enough to both the Jews and the Gentiles, uniting the two segments of the church that previously did not seem able to get along. The people of The Bridge correlate with the Gentiles of Acts 15 and similarly their parents, the older generations, correlate with the Jews of Acts 15. The Bridge represents a community of Millennials that seek a way of belonging within their own Christian community as well as the church at large. The burden of discovery for their belonging in the larger context rests on the shoulders of those who hold the power, established church leaders, just as it did with the Jerusalem Council and the Gentiles.

Research and Design Method

The method chosen for this study was qualitative research. Qualitative research does not use measurements or numerical values to express its results as quantitative research does. Rather, it is value free and asks ‘What is going on here?’ The research was drawn from a small sample group. It was exploratory in nature, and I functioned as a participant-observer. My results were expressed as journalistic narrative, using the words of the informants to describe my study of leadership and youth culture at The Bridge.¹⁸⁸ I have further chosen a branch of qualitative inquiry called narrative research. Narrative research “is any study that uses or analyzes narrative materials. The data can be collected

¹⁸⁸ David Royse, *Research Methods in Social Work* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole-Thomas Learning, 2004), 237.

as a story... or in a different manner... It may be used for comparison among groups, to learn about a social phenomenon or historical periods, or to explore a personality.”¹⁸⁹

This design allowed me to study my subjects, both leaders and congregants, through the stories that define the community. In order to establish which elements of positive deviance occurred, the community must be studied as a phenomenon, that is, as a unique occurrence, which it has proven to be.

The research project started with a list of questions that I test marketed within The Bridge community. I found that I was not able to gain the understandings that I desired except on an extremely superficial level. I sought to discover the thoughts and hearts of leaders that produced successful spiritual community among the young. Instead, I was getting a list of do's and don'ts for church. The research that would be most beneficial would describe rather than prescribe. This is what moved the project to narrative research. I found that as I set aside the questionnaire, my subjects began to talk about their experiences, and I realized that conversation was where the gold lay for this study. As I asked open questions, stories began to emerge. These stories provided the fertile ground for discovering values that formed this community both from the perspective of leaders and congregants.

Data

The primary data for this study comes from interviews. For subjects I chose one church planter/pastor from the builder generation; two leaders who are baby boomers; three Gen X participants, who have been members of The Bridge since its inception and

¹⁸⁹ Amia Lieblich, Rivka Tubal-Mashiach and Tamar Zilber, *Narrative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 2-3.

are now serving as the pastoral staff; and six Millennial congregants. I also included my own observations as a church planter/pastor.

It was important to my study that the persons interviewed were multi-generational and functioning at all levels of belonging. I wanted to collect data from an equal number of Millennials and non-Millennials. It was also important to me that at least half of those studied would not be leaders at The Bridge but were still involved with The Bridge in some way. The Bridge has only three levels of hierarchy: pastors, leaders, and congregants. Four of my subjects have served as pastors; two were leaders; and six were non-leader congregants. All subjects have been involved for at least four years and as long as thirteen years. Additionally, they were chosen for their ability to articulate and to synthesize their experiences as they relate to the research question. Half of those interviewed were men, and half were women.

Interviewees were chosen specifically for their unique experience and their history with The Bridge. Most subjects were committed participants in the weekly flow of the community, both within the church and outside of the church. The Bridge has never owned a building. It has rented a space for its Sunday meeting. All other activities happen either in music clubs, pubs, public forums, coffee shops, in the park, or in homes. To be a Bridge participant means that the person is equally engaged in the community outside of the four walls of the church. My subjects have been involved with the Bridge long enough to understand its essence and to explain the ethos to outsiders. They are deeply connected to the art, music, social justice, and activist communities in Portland, Oregon.

Interviews and observations were documented via recordings and hand written notes. Additional data was collected from personal archives, The Bridge website, journals, blogs, and emails were accessed for an insider's view of The Bridge. Academic essays newspaper and magazine articles were used to capture an outsider's perspective of The Bridge.

Data Collection

Data was collected predominately via personal interviews conducted over coffee. I took hand-written notes and recorded interviews via Livescribe, an inconspicuous recording device that doubles as a pen. I utilized the fluid inquiry method, "a way of thinking in which an inquiry is not clearly governed by theories, methodological tactics, and strategies,"¹⁹⁰ but rather allows the conversation to flow freely. I scheduled appointments with interviewees that were open ended with regard to time. I asked no more than six open questions¹⁹¹ and allowed the conversation to run its course. Clarifying questions were interjected only as needed. Because the research question dealt with memories and assessment of experience, it occurred to me that the interviewees may want to ruminate on their experiences and then add comments and stories at a later time. I gave my subjects the option to schedule a second meeting to further discuss the topic, to send me their thoughts via email, or to send me any written or recorded material that would further inform my research question. Three of them responded with further information, and two called to talk over the phone. The second interview was conducted similar to the first.

¹⁹⁰ Jean D. Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 121.

¹⁹¹ See Appendix 2 for the Interview Questions.

Data was also collected through observation of the three Sunday meetings of The Bridge Church. I took an approach of naturalism, which “proposes that, as far as possible, the social world should be studied in its ‘natural state,’ undisturbed by the researcher.”¹⁹² Naturalism argues that, “As participant observers we can learn the culture or subculture of the people we are studying. We can come to interpret the world in the same way as they do.”¹⁹³ It might be assumed that being a longstanding leader in this social group I would see the world as they do; however, The Bridge is a dynamic group that is always changing, as social groups do. I did not assume knowledge but sought to observe with objectivity and sensitivity to nuanced values within the community.

Data Analysis

The data was codified using the grounded theory method of analysis. In grounded theory “the collection of data is guided strategically by the developing theory,”¹⁹⁴ allowing the data to speak for itself during the process of research. It guides the researcher. This method of analysis is inductive in nature, meaning that the data presents the researcher with bits of experiences from which a picture emerges. The researcher’s analysis is interpreted into story. Grounded theory is ideal for sociological research because it fits the situation that has been researched, and it is recognizably “suited to its supposed uses.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography Principles and Practice* (New York: Tavistock Publications, 1983), 6.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁹⁵ B.G. Glazer and A.L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1967), 3.

The interviews and field notes were transcribed and codified according to commonly used words, concepts, and stories. I noted patterns and narrative threads. I teased out tensions and themes that seemed to be contradictory. The interview data and field notes were then compared and contrasted with the written documents.

Once the analysis was done and the data was reconstructed, I submitted the text to the participants for approval. Clandinin and Connelly refer to this stage as “checking for participant signature”:

Signature is commonly thought of as attached to the researcher but may as well be thought to refer to participants. When narrative inquirers return to participants with text, their question is not so much, Have I got it right? Is this what you said? ...Rather it is something much more global and human: Is this you? Do you see yourself here?¹⁹⁶

Unless the story can be ratified by the participants, the researcher does not tell a true story. Input from the subjects was collected, and revisions were made where necessary. In the end each participant felt that he or she was represented well.

Methodological Assumptions and Researcher Bias

Although I have used research methods that claim objectivity, it would be impossible to receive data from another source, whether from a person, a written document, or some other means of delivery, without my own experience affecting my means of perception. At some point in narrative inquiry the researcher says, “That’s interesting, tell me more.” There is no research without curiosity, but that curiosity in itself is a subjective bias.

When it comes to interpretation of data, grounded theory seeks discovery of patterns and threads of thought. The human mind formulates sensitivity to such patterns

¹⁹⁶ Clandinin and Connelly, 148.

and threads of thought through personal experience. What one researcher might notice as a thread may be entirely invisible to another researcher. Leiblich, Tuval-Mashiak, and Zibler draw attention to the notion of “levels of interpretation (which is) the theory of listening to and explaining an account”:

Is the interviewer a naive listener attuned only to the phenomenological world of the narrator as presented? Or does she constantly question, doubt, and look for gaps, contradictions, silences and the unsaid? Can one take a middle course between these two ends? Can one do both at the same time?¹⁹⁷

What makes the former approach a better choice than the latter? If seasoned researchers struggle to answer these questions of theory, where does that leave an amateur observer such as me?

I do not assume to be objective in my view of the leadership questions associated with my research. Certainly I have wrestled with generational misunderstandings for many years, both as a member of an emerging generation and as a leader of emerging generations. That fact alone carries emotional baggage enough to bias the outcome of this project. I have exerted my deepest efforts to remain objective when faced with new ideas, concepts, and ways experiencing the world. At times of confusion or doubt over what the data has suggested, I have asked for outside opinions in an effort to keep some semblance of neutrality in regards to the data.

My personal bias towards the outcomes of this project can be assimilated into these five points:

- Brilliance dwells within the Millennial generation and those following.
- The pathway to the future of the Christian church will be forged by understandings that come to leaders of the church from the Millennial Generation.

¹⁹⁷ Amia Lieblich, Rica Tuval-Mashiach and Tamar Zilber, *Narrative Research*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 166.

- Unless older leaders are willing to give power to the younger generation, the church risks losing many great potential leaders who have understandings that are germane to its future.
- The church has hope if it follows the pathway of reconciliation of cultures forged by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.
- Time is of the essence for Christianity and the Millennial Generation.

CHAPTER SIX

RESEARCH: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

“Some want to live within the sound of church or chapel bell;
I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell.”

—C. T. Studd, 1860-1931, Missionary

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to help church leaders find ways of inspiring commitment to the church among the Millennial Generation. In a previous chapter a study of Acts 15:1-35 was presented as a text that details the journey of the first century Jewish Christian church as they learned to live with the Gentile Christian church in spite of their differences of culture and religious expression in the post-apostolic era. Likewise, this chapter explores The Bridge Church’s journey to create an atmosphere of welcome and growth for the Millennial Generation in the post-Christian era in spite of the weight of modern Christian tradition that pressured them to coalesce, similar to the social and spiritual pressures felt by the Gentile church in Acts 15. It includes a review of the data collection process, an explanation of why research participants were chosen, an introduction of the participants, and the findings told through the story of The Bridge. These dominant themes are explored via stories as told by the research participants: 1) Positive Deviance and Leadership; 2) Hospitality; 3) Belonging : Inclusion; Believing: Practical Spirituality; Behaving: Authenticity; 4) Community Integration; 5) Use of Power; 6) Transparency: Passion and Creativity.

Data Collection

Twelve subjects with at least a four-year history at the Bridge were interviewed. Data was collected through one-on-one conversations at coffee shops, restaurants, over the phone, and in homes. I recorded most of the interviews with a Livescribe digital recorder that also functions as a pen. I asked six open-ended questions, and from there the conversations took their course. Five participants called back with further thoughts or data. A plethora of Bridge documents, magazine and newspaper articles, personal journals, essays, and blog postings were accessed for further information. According to the methods of grounded theory, the data was collected, codified according to key motifs, and grouped according to similar themes. From the data, broader concepts emerged that allowed for interpretation and the development of a theory of the phenomena studied, which was leader practices and belonging at The Bridge Church.

Introduction to Participants

The twelve subjects consisted of six Millennials, two non-pastoral leaders, and four who have served as co-pastors a minimum of four years at The Bridge. Two of the pastors were hired from within the congregation. Three subjects have been at The Bridge since its inception and continue to attend to the present time. All the subjects lived in Portland while they attended The Bridge. Nearly all were raised in the church. Most have had unpleasant partings with their Modern churches of origin. The age range of participants is from twenty-four to sixty-six, spanning four cultural generations: Builders, Boomers, Gen X, and Millennials. I chose this breakdown of participants because I felt it was important to the integrity of the study to show intergenerational perspectives. One-third of the participants no longer attend The Bridge, which kept this study from

becoming too rose-colored. Since women are often under-represented by Christian church systems I chose six women, half of the interview subjects, to share their perspectives, giving them the opportunity to compare The Bridge with other church or Christian college experiences.

The Millennials

The six Millennials are representative of The Bridge population, which has an average age of twenty-six. Those presented in this study are not necessarily non-leaders. There are three levels of hierarchy at The Bridge: co-pastors, leaders, and everyone else. All are expected to contribute to the common good of the community in some way and most do. Although none of the Millennials named in this study have positional power, some Millennials at The Bridge do hold non-positional power.

Eric

Eric is twenty-six year-old guitarist, songwriter, and worship leader. He has a deep love for God and the church and desires to build meaningful spiritual community. Prior to The Bridge he attended a large youth church that did not engage him creatively. Eric was a regular participant at The Bridge for almost five years and now no longer attends (although he remains connected to) The Bridge community through friendships and creative events. Eric is refreshingly honest and articulate. Of The Bridge he said, “I have never been hurt as much or loved as much.”

Garrett

Twenty-six year-old Garrett is a spoken word poet, who can be found many nights of the week performing eloquently at local open mic events.¹ He is deeply involved in the poet community in Portland. He has been involved in number of different churches

¹ Garrett asked that it be noted this interview took place in March of 2011.

around the country as a result of frequent moves due to his parents' military careers. He served as youth pastor at a mega church in Texas. Garrett is deconstructing his faith and fears the outcome. He said, "Portland is dangerous and exciting. It is like a large art college. You don't leave school until you get out of Portland."

Mary

Mary is twenty-four years old and has been attending The Bridge since she was twelve. She went away to college for four years and then returned to serve The Bridge the summer of her third year as a leadership intern. Mary is a gifted, self-possessed young woman who owns a local coffee shop. Of The Bridge community she said, "According to my internal radar I always had to be the most different in the crowd. But there was no way to do that here. Then I realized that I didn't have to live under that (pressure) anymore."

Laura

Laura was fifteen when she first started attending The Bridge and attended for almost ten years. She is a crafts woman and she just released her second CD. Laura learned how to sing and to write music at The Bridge. She says, "The Bridge is a place where people become best friends. They live together, party together and do projects together. It is a place where I can bring my friends. Church at The Bridge is more approachable in an honest way."

Jesse

Jesse was raised in a Charismatic Catholic home at the foot of Mount Hood, just outside of Portland. He is twenty-nine years old. He graduated from a conservative Bible College not long before he landed at The Bridge. During the day Jesse works at a high

school in a low-income neighborhood helping students to write and record their own music. Jesse is a talented rapper who has released two CD's. He lives his faith radically according to tenets of the Christ-archy movement (Christian Anarchy). Of his first visit to The Bridge he said, "It was raw and the pastor was vulnerable. The music was passionate. I didn't feel like I was quite hipster enough (he smiles) to make it there."

Ruby

Thirty year-old Ruby was brought up in the evangelical church, attended Christian school and one semester of Bible College. She was part of the church plant team for The Bridge, which she took very seriously. Ruby's creative energy made her excellent at both art and dance. Although she chose to leave the church after four years, she remained involved with community. Of The Bridge she said, "It was a place where many people tested the limits of what they were capable of in both positive and negative ways."

Non-pastoral Leaders

Before introducing what I am calling "non-pastoral leaders" it must be noted that all leaders function in pastoral mode, especially if they are mature or feel a sense of responsibility toward the community. The Bridge suffered from a drought of elders for its first five years. Pastors were stretched very thin, many times putting in sixteen hours a day. As a result the congregation was trained to parent and pastor each other by mutual accountability. Even though the community was "live and let live" in their convictions, they allowed their parental instincts to be stirred towards each other for the sake of healthy community. It is from this ethos that the non-pastoral leaders come. They are deeply pastoral at heart without the need of a title.

Pam

Pam is in her mid-forties, is a gifted writer and an intuitive leader. She is admired as a sage within The Bridge community because of her no-nonsense love for the underserved in Portland. Pam said, “The Bridge ruined me. I have become used to the roaring primal sound of uninhibited passion. It’s not simply a style of music or song. It is an attitude of boldness and recklessness. It’s the audacity of broken sons and daughters crashing through the gates of heaven to access Jesus.”

Todd

Todd, who is without a doubt strongest non-positional power person at The Bridge, has spent one third of his thirty-nine years at The Bridge. He and Angie were married at The Bridge and have been the worship leaders since the beginning. They have two children who have grown up in The Bridge community and are approaching their teen years. Todd is a prolific songwriter, purveyor of ideas, and a driving force behind creativity at The Bridge. He is a music producer who created and ran the Meow-Meow Club.¹⁹⁸ Todd said, “No adult (church leader, parental figures) had validated my assessment but they treated me like I was the problem. The Bridge gave us a theological framework for what was moving our hearts.”

Pastors

Crystal, Ken and I were the original church-planting pastors of The Bridge. Angie and Geoff were some of the first to embrace the vision of The Bridge when it was still theory. They rallied their friend groups and faithfully worked to build the church into a

¹⁹⁸ Meow-Meow Club was an all ages music venue that was originally sponsored by The Bridge. Meow-Meow and The Bridge shared the same space and for five years were synonymous in many ways in the larger community of Portland. They hosted music events five nights a week.

home for their community. They started out as the young ones in the congregation. Now they are the pastors. All pastors are equal and there are usually three at any given time. In order to make a triumvirate work, pastors must be honest, to the point, and willing to work toward consensus. It is also essential that they not be highly invested in their own egos and that they love each other without reservation.

Geoff

Geoff is thirty-six years old and has been with The Bridge for since 1998. He returned to Portland with a degree in Religion after attending Pepperdine University. He was being fast tracked to Princeton and the pastorate, but felt he would bring greater integrity and wisdom to the role if he lived a bit of life first. In the fifth year of The Bridge's life, Geoff went to Eureka, California to start a church. When the church failed to materialize he moved back to Portland and The Bridge. He has been a pastor at The Bridge for over five years. Geoff's hobby is performing stand-up comedy, which works to his advantage in a community that has a high value on humor. About the early days Geoff said, "There was lots of shame at the church I was attending. Then I met Ruby and her friends. She had a shaved head and a lip ring. She was fresh and without shame. I wanted to be around them."

Angie

Angie joined YWAM¹⁹⁹ when she was twenty years old. She served for seven years as a leader in YWAM discipleship training schools abroad. Angie has been at The Bridge since 1998. She is an in-your-face, no-nonsense woman who is known for her sacrilegious humor, her deep compassion and love of the poor. She is a gifted vocalist

¹⁹⁹ Youth With a Mission (YWAM) is an organization created to expedite the process of getting young adults to the foreign mission field.

and leader. Angie has her master's degree in Spiritual Formation and has served as pastor for four years. Angie said of her first days at The Bridge, "People were confusing. I could see God at work but there was smoking, drinking, swearing and disregard for each other. They were sheep without a shepherd. But I was experiencing my own transformation. And I could never have predicted where it has taken me."

Ken

Ken was fifty-three when he came to Portland. Before that time he was pastor number fifteen at a mega-church in the Seattle area. He came to the pastorate from the steel shop. Ken knows how to make steel conform to his will, and this skill was pertinent in forming The Bridge. He is tenacious, compassionate, and leads with deep vulnerability. Ken said of The Bridge idea, "It was not an epiphany, but a dawning realization that there was a group out there who could not make it in traditional church. And they were not neutral about Jesus; he wasn't a blank to them."

Crystal

Crystal was a teacher and principal until, at age thirty-six, she moved to Portland to help create The Bridge. She was raised in the Bible belt and struggled with expectations on her spirituality from her parents and the church that she could not fulfill; yet she was a strong and gifted leader who had an uncanny ability to empathize with the young people of The Bridge. After five years in Portland, Crystal moved to Eureka to start a church. Of the Bridge she said, "The power was very organic, no one wanted to be top dog. And we let a lot of messy life happen."

Story Part One: Prelude to The Bridge Church

The Bridge Church has been unusually successful in attracting participants from the Millennial generation as well as the X Generation before them. The phenomenon that is The Bridge Church has been studied as a representative case in order to discover the reasons for its successes. A strong element of positive deviance²⁰⁰ is evident and will be discussed in the analysis of the data. The following is an account, from my perspective as one of the original church planters and as one who pastored the congregation for eleven years, of how and why The Bridge Church emerged.

Crystal, Ken, and I all served in one capacity or another at a suburban mega church in Everett, Washington from 1992 until mid 1998. All three of us were happy to be serving God and community in the best way that we knew to be possible and did so for about five years before the cream began to curdle in the coffee.

On our days off Ken and I wandered our small urban neighborhood to relax, drink coffee, and listen to live music. The musicians, artists, and vendors of the city were fascinating to us. We admired their honesty, creativity and their generosity. The curiosity was mutual. They wanted to know what made us tick, which led to conversations about Jesus and our church. They were spiritually hungry and seeking a healthier lifestyle, so we invited our new friends to church.

Gary, A Representative Story

Of the few friends that showed up at church, Gary was my favorite and representative of our new friends. Gary had led a rough life in his short thirty years and it

²⁰⁰ “Positive deviance is grounded in the belief that community transformation can be realized by the discovery of innovations and wisdom that already exists within a community.” www.positivedeviance.org, (accessed March 29, 2011).

showed. His soul was searching for something fresh and pure, something of which he was in dire need. This story is about Gary's first and most likely his last time at church.

Gary's Cruella Deville type automobile could be heard inside the thousand-person sanctuary as it sputtered and surged to a stop in the church parking lot. Since I knew that he did not stand a chance of admittance on his own, I hurried out to meet him. As he leaned out his car window he whispered, "I hope you are proud of me, I dressed up for church!" His 6'4," 150-pound body emerged from the car like a spider crawling out from a crevice in the wall. His long thin legs were hugged by pink leopard stretch pants, which were tucked into his black scuffed western boots. He wore a white leather-fringed jacket over a thin screen-printed tank top. His white straw cowboy hat perched atop his wispy nearly translucent tresses, which lightly brushed his shoulders. Although Gary was proud of his appearance, it prophesied the trouble that lay in the immediate future.

When we entered the church Gary failed to remove his hat choosing instead to keep his balding head a secret. The ushers eyed him but dared not approach. If the confused and disapproving stares were not enough, the mothers that hurried their children away gave a strong message of fear and loathing. I was astonished and embarrassed. I knew these people. What were they thinking? Where was their Christian hospitality? Gary was known for his cheerful use of expletives that peppered even the most innocent of conversations. I was relieved that he kept silent.

Seemingly attentive, Gary sat politely between Ken and me for the announcements, the offering, the preaching, the altar call, and the final song. We hoped against hope that he was resonating with something spiritual, but in the end we knew he would never come back. My heart broke for Gary. I wrestled with my questions: Where

was the place of belonging for Gary and the others like him? Where could my new friends find the comfort of knowing Jesus along with the challenge of living a spirit-led life? Should we start a house church or a Bible study for our colorful friends? How would that look?

About that time, our pastor suggested we might want to start a church for “those people” because “we don’t want them here.” We could see that our dilemma found no home in the hearts of our fellow ministers. We were falling in love with the non-religious and the disenfranchised of our city and there was no turning back. Our large glossy photos were removed unceremoniously from the foyer of the church. We sold our cozy family home and set off on an adventure of unparalleled dimensions to start a church in Portland, Oregon.

Story Part Two: The Bridge

In the next three months we wrestled with contextualizing church concepts for our new “tribe.” We noticed that our tribe of choice felt safer in a tavern or at a concert than they did at church, and this observation felt important. We discussed atmosphere, lighting, art, music, buildings, chairs, altars, podiums, order of service, ways to involve performance art, all the fun, creative elements. In the end we realized that unless the church could offer a hospitable theology it would be no different than the new rash of “relevant churches” that were popping up in cities across the country, only to burn brightly for a short time and then fizzle out. Our new-found community had no taste for what they had seen of Christianity. The Bridge needed to show a new face, one that they could relate to. We were not aware of how deep this rabbit hole would go.

Story Part Three: The End of The Beginning

Within three months The Bridge celebrated its first Sunday service. Eighty-two curious young adults and teenagers came via word of mouth. The service began with eight people performing a war dance that left the many attendees in tears and stunned silence. It was dark, loud, and to the point. Ken gave the sermon and he promised them that the church would be theirs if they would stay and help form it. He promised that their handprints could be all over the church. Those who stayed never let us forget that promise.

The Bridge leadership team was profoundly challenged. There were no road signs to help us along the way. The learning curve was steep and, in fact, it never diminished much as the congregation grew to include the Millennial generation in just a few short years. Each understanding that we came to was hammered out in the crucible of everyday life along with deep biblical reflection. We listened to them, mirrored their ideas, and made the whole visible to the parts.²⁰¹ Thirteen years later as the church begins yet another incarnation,²⁰² it is strong and thriving. In the remainder of this chapter I will describe what worked and why.

Leadership

Hospitality: Many Voices

In order to allow the community to form the church themselves, leaders sought to create an atmosphere of safety where many voices and methodologies were not only discussable but plausible. No idea was a bad idea, and every person was free to throw an

²⁰¹ Richard T. Pascale, Mark Millemann, and Linda Goija, *Surfing the Edge of Chaos* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 285.

²⁰² The leadership of The Bridge facilitates a reinvention of community every three or four years. This reinvention is vital to the creative process of ownership among the attendees and reflects the generative themes of the culture in Portland.

idea on the table. Angie said, “It had to be safe to try new things. And it’s about being able to recover from an unintentional mistake. The space to recover communicates value to the people. Failures are a blip on the screen. It has to be more about people than about precision.” People need not be penalized for their explorations in their search for truth or expression even when an idea becomes a disaster.

Buddhism, New Age, and Christianity all held equal footing in spiritual discussions and, in the interest of intellectual honesty, were treated as having equal weight and wisdom. The issue was not whether the younger generation believed in absolute truth, the issue was the position of one-up-man-ship that elders assumed in discussions around issues of truth. The Millennials were simply not interested in the fortress of certainty of modern thought. Angie added, “Leaders did not lead from a one-up, one-down perspective at The Bridge.” The people deeply resented being told how to think and what to believe and wanted the dignity of finding it for themselves.

Respectfully, leaders allowed ideas to flourish whether or not they fit within the biblical paradigm as they understood it. In his book, *Hospitality The Other*, Amos Yong says about the importance of many voices:

... the many tongues of Pentecost anticipate, herald, and even paradigmatically manifest the many gifts-poiema (works)- of the spirit in, to and through the churches.” ... that the many gifts of the Spirit at work through the church for the sake of the world are part of the divinely appointed means of grace through which the world is drawn into the saving work of God in Christ.” (63)”... insofar as Christian conversion is a multidimensional work (poiesis) of the Holy Spirit, Christian praxis intended to bear witness to the God of Jesus Christ to a post-Christendom and postmodern world needs to take many forms, and this multiplicity of forms is manifest in the diversity of tongues and gifts of the Spirit.²⁰³

²⁰³ Amos Yong, *Hospitality & the Other* (New York: Orbis Books, 2008), 64.

Leaders started with the hypothesis that poiesis, the multi-dimensional work of the Spirit, came through the divergent voices of The Bridge community. Bridge theology and practice had to be conversant and welcoming to those conversations. God's invitation as perceived by leaders was to refrain from "scripturizing,"²⁰⁴ to stand back, see where it went. Ken said, "We did not lead them to do this or that; we let them do almost anything they wanted and then stood back and observed them and slowly developed a response." Most often the community developed a theology that worked according to Scripture without too much intervention. Interestingly, the majority of mistakes were self-correcting, which became a theme at The Bridge, and a good lesson in trust from the Holy Spirit.

Leaders were important as witnesses and coaches from behind rather than leading from the front. For us, it was a new definition of leadership. Yong further states, "Christian mission is the embodiment of divine hospitality that loves strangers (philoxenia), to the point of giving up our lives on behalf of others as to be reconciled to them, that they might in turn be reconciled to God."²⁰⁵ The giving up the power of our "rightness" was at times brutal on the ego; however, being witness to the birth of something so creative and so fresh was worth the pains of labor. Leaders stood in proxy as affirming parents for the congregants and became "the bridge" to the God of whom they had almost let go.

Positive Deviance: Leadership Under the Radar

²⁰⁴ Scripturizing is Bridge shoptalk. It means simplistically supplying a scripture that is meant to direct behavior or thought but really does nothing more than end conversation. It is an exercise in self-comfort rather than an offer of help to the other.

²⁰⁵ Yong, 131.

Perhaps the strongest component of leadership praxis at The Bridge was that of positive deviance. Although leaders were unfamiliar with this social model, the principles were instinctively applied. Positive deviance is a living systems model developed at Tufts University in 1990. The essence of positive deviance dictates that instead of coming as experts with answers, leaders should think of themselves as catalysts with questions. They will be determined to use the wisdom that is already resident in each community.²⁰⁶

Many onlookers and neighboring pastors judged The Bridge community to be non-Christian.²⁰⁷ Leaders, however, could see the drive to know God in the people and their interesting brand of holiness²⁰⁸. It all looked different for sure, but it was their theology. Ken pointed out,

No one had ever asked the questions: Who are you? What do you like? What do you want? What do you need? What can we do for you? We expected them to assimilate into traditional faith systems and practice. Many of our young adults were casualties of the Christian school movement. The falling away from faith was widespread. Their parents assumed they were mini versions of themselves. When they proved not to be parents and leaders became angry and disappointed in them.

Leaders worked to mend those bridges and create a different story around their faith journey. Ken said, “So, we asked, “Can we be you?” And they vowed to teach us.” Leaders became students of the first Gen X first and then the Millennials. They listened to find where God was already working. They endeavored to leave a very soft footprint on the culture.²⁰⁹ Pascale describes the process of positive deviance as studied in his research, “They tapped knowledge that was already present and made it visible and

²⁰⁶ Pascale, Milleman, and Goija, 176.

²⁰⁷ Neighboring pastors suggested that anyone who used that much “foul language” and sinned so openly had to be demon possessed.

²⁰⁸ See Appendix C for Bridge Core Values. The values centered on authenticity, integration, equality, kindness, and a deep love for each other. They were not in the habit of gossiping, alienating the unlovely, or judging one another’s behaviors.

²⁰⁹ Pascale, Milleman, and Goija, 178.

socially acceptable. Such an inquiry entailed authentic learning... a crucial underpinning of harnessing Positive Deviance.”²¹⁰ The following comment by Todd exemplifies this thinking:

I treat the people like I have a lot to learn from them, they are the true experts not me. I tell them, “I will leave before you leave, because you have the voice that needs to be heard. You are the trustworthy voice for the future.”

Leaders discovered that as they submitted to the community, the collective confidence in their leadership grew. The locus of responsibility for theology, community life, and the maintenance of Christian behavior began to shift from leaders to the members of the congregation. They began to transform into adults. It was messy but rewarding.

Belong, Believe, Behave

Inclusion: You Belong to Yourself and You Belong to Us

In the lives of most Millennials spirituality is not negotiable, it is a given. The question becomes How will they live it out? Peer involvement is higher among Millennials than any other generation to date. In fact, Millennials are shaped more by peers than their families of origin. Although Bridge people boast that they have no end game, there actually was an end game called “your will belongs to you.” If those outside of the faith wanted Christian spirituality, help was offered, but the will of the individual was considered to be sacrosanct.

In traditional church circles, belief is required before belonging. Once a person has professed belief in Jesus they are invited to join the membership ranks of the church.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 179.

In contrast, Bridge leaders built the church on a strong ethos of belonging before belief. There was no traditional form of church membership. One could belong based on personal relationships within the faith community and a personal commitment to belong. Eventually, some of these people outside of the faith desired to know more about Jesus as the beliefs of their new-found community began to make sense to them. All who called The Bridge their home were welcomed to be involved in mission, social justice issues, art presentations, and music. As a result people became closely enmeshed in the fiber of the community where positive peer pressure did its work. By Jesse's second visit to The Bridge he felt what he called "hyper inclusiveness. I felt valued right away and was given an opportunity to be involved. I was invited to freestyle (rap) for worship." Jesse was a Christian when he came to The Bridge, but Justin was not. Justin, a young man who lived outdoors, came into Bridge community after being befriended by Ken when his girlfriend died tragically. After six years of life with The Bridge community, Justin committed his life to following Jesus. Two years later he joined AA to face his demons. The community supported Justin financially, emotionally, and spiritually during those years and continued to do so through his struggles to legitimize himself and get healthy.

Food Church was one of the attractions that caused Justin to stay with the community. The church had its own food bank that fed about ninety people per week. Trader Joes and New Seasons groceries were gourmet by food bank standards, so word spread quickly among the young anarchist and living outdoors crowd. They named it Food Church.²¹¹ On Sundays it was not uncommon to have a line that snaked halfway around the block in anticipation of the handouts. The Bridge did not require attendance at the service in order to receive food. Many of those standing in line, including Justin, had

²¹¹ Food Church was named Portland's best church by People's Choice in 2010.

a sense of reciprocity that provoked them to volunteer. Before long, Abbi, the benevolence pastor, was the only Christian involved in the process of food distribution, even though it was a ministry of the church. Angie said, “They meet each other in the food line. Everything happens (in community) at parks, pubs, coffee shops and after school programs. They share gardens, bands, bike workshops, and spoken word shows.” And through friendship, the hard line anarchists developed a softer attitude towards Christians. They stayed around each Sunday long enough to learn the worship songs, join in on instruments and even ask for prayer. Angie added,

Eighty percent of them (Bridge people) ride their bikes to church. It’s a strong connection point between the two communities, a non-threatening way to know each other. Christianity should be challenging when you know God. If you don’t know God it should be inviting. Our community has a very strong emphasis on no-agenda relationships.

This ethos is rooted deeply in the hospitality of theology. Leaders engage in spiritual conversations with non-believers by invitation only, and so it was with Justin. Eight years later Justin had the community support to make his salvation work even in light of his severe alcoholism.

Spiritual Formation: Believe

There was uncertainty over when a person has actually decided to follow Jesus. Considered to be emotionally manipulative, altar calls²¹² did not happen, except for the rare instance. Salvation was considered to be a work in progress, grown in everyday activities with the loving care of friends. Baptisms were usually surprising, because it was then that it became evident who had decided to follow Jesus.

²¹² Altar Call: An invitation to come forward and pray or receive or renew one’s commitment to Christ. Keith Drury, *The Wonders of Worship: Why We Worship The Way We Do* (Marion IN: Triangle Publishing, 2002), 285.

A person did not have to be settled into a belief system to belong. The invitation was there to experiment and discover what worked theologically. Mary contrasts her spiritual growth at The Bridge to her college experience in this comment:

It (Christian college) was a place where you were not allowed to be creative with your theology. At The Bridge I have found ways to be creative. I can test my theology and see what holds up. And then it can shift and change. School was not supportive of me as a student leader. I was student chaplain and should have been preaching but was not given the opportunity. My creativity was called into question. I did not have the freedom to connect with God in the way I needed to without being noticed. The Bridge is a place where rejects go (she laughs) and women actually have a voice.

The women's voice was strong at The Bridge. Many women who were not given opportunities elsewhere seemed at home there.

Because of the freedom to express divergent beliefs, Jesse and Garrett did not really understand the style of preaching at The Bridge at first. They felt that it was detrimental to spiritual growth. Garrett mistook the frequent mention of alcohol as license for its misuse, but then he realized that people "were just being vulnerable." Jesse struggled with the borderline irreverence at The Bridge, but he felt that it was offset by the deep friendships in which character was developed. Jesse said, "If a person wants good teaching there is so much available on the web. I can see an outsider saying this sucks (about the sermons) but when you know people, you want to hear what Garrett has to say or what Mary has to say, it's important."²¹³

Spiritual growth was forged in the everyday challenges of life. Leaders believed that all positive growth was spiritual growth. Todd cited the emphasis on emotional

²¹³ Most regular attendees who are known to the pastors and who routinely volunteer in some capacity at The Bridge may preach a Sunday sermon. They must first attend a preaching class, then be mentored through the process of sermon development and delivery by a pastor and, lastly, be willing to take constructive feedback. This process does not guarantee an excellent product, but it does mean that their voices will be heard. About one-fourth of the congregation has taken advantage of this class.

health as one aspect that attracted him to the community and observed that it continues today. Angie remembered, “Life skills classes were offered: how to keep boundaries, getting free from abuse, communication, how to forgive, how to buy a house, how to tend to the environment.” After facilitating a spontaneous group confessional at a women’s retreat, Crystal said, “Spirituality was learned in stepping stone moments. It was very dangerous opening up things inside of people but it was also a time of healing. At that moment it was okay to let it all out. The group healed. It was intense and scary.” Leaders found that as the people gained social and emotional skills their spiritual growth accelerated proportionately. Angie noted that The Bridge was the first church in her experience that encouraged people to seek out professional counseling. Admitting the need for help was a sign of wisdom not weakness.

Jesse cited the intensive journaling workshops²¹⁴ as one of the community’s avenues for deep work of the soul. He also mentioned that the transformation groups had been helpful as discipleship.²¹⁵ Mary says, “The community is encouraged to push the boundaries of who God is and God is always bigger than my understanding!” Leaders discovered that spiritual growth did not happen in a vacuum. The needs of everyday life created the urgency for practical faith and a new view of God.

Authenticity: Behave

“We can’t be perfect but we can be honest.” Todd was encouraging the congregation about the spiritual practice that held the community together. Community members needed to experience God in a substantial way in order for behavioral

²¹⁴ These workshops are three-day intensives structured around the work of Ira Prokoff. All Bridge people are encouraged to attend. See *At a Journal Workshop*. (New York: Penguin, 1992).

²¹⁵ The Bridge did most of its creative, emotional health and Bible study work in small groups during the week. They met at varying venues depending upon the goals of the group, which reflected The Bridge values of building relationships in broader community.

transformation to occur. The quickest and most effective route was the shortest, which required honesty and authenticity. The people were struggling with sex addictions, alcohol, hard drugs, prostitution, mental-illness, and poverty. Most of the leadership team had experienced some of these same struggles, which helped quite a bit. Angie said, “Leading at The Bridge is like AA sponsorship. Church is supposed to be about re-parenting ourselves and developing life skills so that we can live God-honoring lives.” Leaders had to be comfortable with the darker issues of life and able to walk people through them. A space was created where peripheral issues, symptoms,²¹⁶ had no bearing. Through small groups, transformation groups, or professional counseling²¹⁷ the deeper issues were addressed.

Many Bridge people were already believers. About 30 percent at any given time were not. The strategy for both groups was the same: to disciple them into a lifestyle of authentically following Jesus. Pam shared this story:

I was talking to my husband Jerry about finding a church and he said, “I just want to go to a church where I can say fuck.” And The Bridge became that place. It’s not about the “F” word, it’s about honesty. There are drunks in every church across America. The difference between them and this church is that you can be honest about it here. There was rawness and honesty coming from everyone up front; it was clearly not church theater.

Even though most churches would diligently labor to include the hurting and wounded, it was difficult for people like Jerry, Gary, single moms with unruly children, the chemically dependent, the mentally ill, and the homeless to find access to healthy community. They are expected to look right and behave well first. It can be messy the

²¹⁶ Symptoms were addictions and acting out behaviors such as cutting, eating disorders, suicide attempts, drug addiction, smoking, alcoholism, and sex addictions.

²¹⁷ A George Fox counseling intern received a grant to create Evergreen Counseling, a place where low to no income people could receive help at a price that they could afford. The Bridge was the main benefactor of this service for the first few years.

other way around. What do leaders do when a person comes to church drunk, or nearly naked,²¹⁸ or displays a violent streak, or lights up a cigarette in the foyer, or uses four letter words at testimony time, or shouts out uninvited questions during the sermon? Incidents like these were not uncommon at The Bridge. Leaders quickly learned that the mess was necessary if the fruit was desired. As leaders handled these very public situations, the community looked on to see if the leaders were authentic in their claims and actions. Garret makes this profound yet simple observation, “If you want the ill, you must be willing to have them present.” If you want the broken, the spiritual atmosphere must make sense to the broken and welcome them.

Pam grew to deeply admire the authenticity that she observed at The Bridge. She told this story about her first visits on a Sunday morning:

I prayed, “God are you in this chaos?” I was frightened by the chaos at the Bridge at first. As I sunk deeper beneath the surface I came to the realization that I thought I was free but my religious bones got rattled and then broken. I was trying to decipher the cultural code²¹⁹ of the community. It took me a little while to figure out that promiscuity and drunkenness were not affirmed here or even tolerated, but rather that people who were being self-destructive were loved and listened to. I discovered that the culture code here was Authenticity, it was not just a sermon topic. If you wanted to belong nothing less than truth and authenticity was allowed.

Pam came to realize that they were the same people on Tuesday as they were on Sunday. She saw through the multiple layers of what she thought to be chaos to the deeper issue of belonging. Pam told the story of her encounter with authenticity:

²¹⁸ One of the very few rules needed at The Bridge was that bathing suit areas had to be covered.

²¹⁹ The term culture code is explained in Clotilde Rapaille’s book, *Culture Code*. Rapaille says, “A culture code is the unconscious meaning we apply to any given thing—a car, a type of food, a relationship, even a country—via the culture in which we are raised” He further describes, “It brings us to one of our most fundamental questions: Why do we act the way we do? Understanding the Culture Code provides us with a remarkable new tool—a new set of glasses, if you will, with which to view ourselves and our behaviors. What’s more, it confirms what we have always suspected is true—that, despite our common humanity, people around the world really are different.” Clotilde Rapaille, *Culture Code* (New York: Broadway Books, 2006), 5, 11.

I attended a prayer meeting and everyone was spilling their bloody guts out on the floor for prayer. When it was my turn I gave surface requests, pray for my writing, etc. And it hung there in the air in absolute silence. Nobody said anything, just vacant silence. And then I realized that I wasn't going to be able to get away with that. Once I spilled my guts on the floor, I could see the dawning recognition of the women, "Oh, there you are, Pam!" and then they stormed heaven on my behalf.

Behaviors were consistently vulnerable, and Pam needed to match their authenticity with some of her own if she was to be trusted as a contributing member of the community.

Authenticity allowed admitting, or some would say confession, of sin; and confession is necessary for forgiveness.

Community: Belonging

Spiritual community served many purposes at The Bridge. It was family of choice; it was a playground; it was the reason for and the working out of spirituality; it was the facilitator of relationships, and it was the foundation of the future. Community was the seedbed for nearly everything that happened. In fact, salvation and following Jesus did not make much sense outside of the supportive relationships and learning found within spiritual community.

Formation

The community at The Bridge had a very distinctive personality. For many from abusive backgrounds it became their family of choice, but it was not for everyone.

Churched individuals would have to give it a six-month or more trial before it would begin to make sense. Others understood it instinctively. The leadership team had long-range goals focused on building a church that made sense first to Gen X and then to the

Millennial Generation,²²⁰ and then to those who would come after them. This goal required a more passive role than most traditional church leaders were comfortable with.

Bridge leaders stood back, observed, and then searched the Scriptures to find a biblical construct that described what they were seeing. Ken said, “We didn’t censor anyone and they didn’t censor themselves and that created authentic community.” Good as well as unacceptable patterns bubbled to the surface. Ruby noted:

Deep bonds were being formed. Freedom was not necessarily there, but it was being fought for within community. It seemed cool at first but underneath, people were completely shattered. It didn’t suck, but it was raw. People immediately attached, everyone functioning at gut level. I don’t think anyone knew what was happening. The bonding felt like play but was very serious.”

Intense personal connections were being forged, and some of them were dysfunctional. Leaders had the task of sorting out destructive behaviors from sustainable loving behaviors, which was a difficult task to accomplish while learning the culture. Eric’s impression was that the people lacked initiative and the church was “satisfied hovering in the grey area of dysfunction.” Over the life of the church there have been times when Eric’s assessment has been true. The community, however, proved itself to be resilient and determined in spite of its rough beginnings. In Pam’s journal she wrote, “What we do best in community: Love each other, party, fashion, cuss and give. And we do it all with joy and laughter.” The general atmosphere of the community was loving, supportive, humorous, and hopeful.

Growth

²²⁰ The foremost reason that Boomers and Builders did not want to help or even attend at The Bridge was because they did not understand the leadership model. Positive deviance was a relatively new social system, which Bridge leaders embraced by instinct. At the time leaders did not have a theological framework to justify it, which was troublesome for the older generations.

Community shaping activities were strongly encouraged by the leaders. Anyone with vision and passion could create a focus group. Laura remembered the Breakfast Club that she and a few friends created. A group of teens met after church each week for breakfast at a local restaurant. Laura said, “It was a place where people became best friends. We could talk about anything. We were free to talk about God. We learned how to sing and write music together.” Laura remembered two of her favorite community activities that were irreverently joyful: Rolling Brides of Christ Party²²¹ and the Annual Christmas Day²²² dinner at Hung Far Low.

Shifting Paradigms

Many who attended The Bridge longed for a place to bring their not-yet-believing or fallen-from-grace friends. Laura expounded: “My friend is a church dropout. He came to the Bridge and liked it. It’s good to know it exists especially if you are in a rock band. Church at The Bridge is more approachable in an honest way.” Garrett added, “It is a place where I can invite people from Open Mic. I wanted a place where I could invite people where I didn’t have to translate for them, a place with less traditional practices.” An understandable and welcoming atmosphere was a primary leadership goal in creating The Bridge. Stetzer says, “The person far from God will not come to Christ until the love of Christ annihilates the opposing worldview upon which they depend.”²²³ Many young adults were deeply triggered by the hypocrisy and fundamentalism of their parent’s versions of Christianity. They needed a new way to perceive Jesus. Rather than a cultural leap to American Christianity and then a spiritual leap to following Jesus, The Bridge

²²¹ Rolling Brides of Christ was a family event where people were invited to put on a wedding dress or a prom dress, even the men, and roller skate around the esplanade in downtown Portland.

²²² The Hung Far Low Christmas Day Dinner was an orphans/family of choice celebration that was well attended for many years. Our friends without houses who could not pay were our guests.

²²³ Stetzer, Stanley, and Hayes, 76.

was a place where only one leap was necessary for salvation. The Sunday service presented a different view of Christianity. The fallen away sons and daughters could begin to reconnect to their Christian roots on their terms. It was a paradigm that annihilated the worldview built around their pain and their fear of Jesus.

Integration: The X and Y Factor

Integration was the key to evangelizing the Millennial Generation. Integration is the opposite of the extractational theory of church planting. Hirsch and Frost define the extractational model as “The practice of the Christendom-era church of converting unbelievers, then extracting them from their cultural setting to join the church, thereby making them ineffective as missionaries to their own people groups.”²²⁴ The Generations X and Y (the Millennials) refused to be separated off into church culture. Nor would their habits be converted into churchy behaviors. Ken observed,

They would get up right during church and walk in front of the speaker to go out for a cigarette (as if they were in a club). They lived in an Aristotelian dualism. The sacred and the profane lived side by side. They could be grinding out a nasty Stones riff on a guitar only to shift on a dime into deep worship and crying out to God with every fiber of their being.

They amused themselves as well as their leaders and probably God with their irreverence. Their insistence upon integration within the greater community was responsible for the impact that The Bridge has had on youth culture in Portland and up and down the West Coast of the United States. Because of their value on integration they spent most of their waking hours with people who did not know Jesus. The gospel was

²²⁴ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 228.

preached through their lives daily. Because of their ability to integrate, the young people who came to Christ through exposure to The Bridge community cannot be numbered.

Handprints and then Footprints

It was out of the ethos of integration that the Meow Meow Club²²⁵ was born, as well as HomePDX,²²⁶ Food Church, Ink Brethren,²²⁷ Monkanun,²²⁸ and Agents of Future.²²⁹ Bridge people started all of these ministries with the stipulation that they would be open to anyone from the greater community. I felt it was important that these groups be ministries of The Bridge if the church was to support them and if there was going to be any quality control. The young leaders argued that although they were created through The Bridge, the greater community had to have ownership. The church association would have negative connotations to those who were not ready for Christianity. They were right. Had I insisted on getting my way, the groups would not have had the viral affect in the broader culture that they had. Bridge people would not have had the voice in community that they acquired, a voice that grew day by day as they matured, found their vocations,

²²⁵ The Meow-Meow was an all ages club that had a five-year run. It gave rare stage opportunity to underage bands and allowed them to open for famous musicians. As bands did the I-5 circuit, they made Meow-Meow a well-known venue up and down the coast. It was a place where most bands could get stage time and get paid.

²²⁶ HomePDX is a church for about 200 young friends without houses, planted by Bridge people in downtown Portland. Travelers, as they call themselves, are homeless young people who continuously travel through out the United States. HomePDX is almost as well known on the east coast as it is in Portland among the traveler culture. The ranks of HomePDX have recently swollen with the addition of older homeless people as well.

²²⁷ Ink Brethren was a collaborative songwriting workshop where many young artists learned how to sing and write songs. Todd travels and teaches this technique of song writing to churches across the country.

²²⁸ Jesse described Monkanun as “a monastic movement where Portland is the monastery. We share life together not just Sunday morning. We are poets, artists and rappers.” Monkanun has deep roots in the poet/rap community in Portland.

²²⁹ Agents of Future is the churches worship band. It is a collection of whoever wants to participate at any given time. They are well known nationally and internationally. See the link bit.ly/allaboutAOF.

and affected an even greater audience. They left their footprints first up and down the West Coast, then nationally, and finally internationally.

Voice: Influence

There are many ways that the Bridge gave voice to its people. People were listened to without censure no matter how they choose to express themselves. People were given influence in the directing of church community affairs. The Bridge became the platform that gave its people a voice in the broader community.

The Voice of the Individual

Where more traditional churches valued acquiescence, The Bridge thrived on hearing the diversity of voices and affirming people. Laura has released two albums. She did not receive creative or emotional support from her Christian parents even though she lived at home. The Bridge community sustained her creative soul. They helped her work through her fears and realize that her voice was important. Garrett observed, “All have a voice. They don’t silence people like other churches do. They make sure that everyone can hear what others have to say.” Just as self-expression was important to identity, so was hearing. Community deepened by hearing and empathizing with the other.

Open mic was a common practice on Sunday mornings. People were invited to step up and say what was on their hearts. Every now and then someone would come out as gay or lesbian as Annie did one Sunday. She shouted, “I am queer and God still loves me!” Tina, a transgender woman, told the story of her emerging gender transition. Many did not know she was formerly male. She said, “I just want to be Tina. Not transgender Tina.” These times allowed Bridge people to begin to understand their church mates’

struggles. They were inspired to develop sensitivity to things that they did not understand. The Tina's and the Annie's were affirmed as the church mates cheered them on. The Bridge had no official stance for or against on matters of alternative sexuality. The Bridge was for people, and for people connecting with God. The Holy Spirit was trusted to sort out the rest.

It Doesn't Matter How it Comes Out

Leaders chose to respect the language of the culture. They observed that the words that were unmentionable in polite society, and Christian society for sure, were nothing more than punctuation for Bridge people. Young Ryan wanted to give a testimony during a Sunday morning meeting so, in spirit of inclusiveness, Ken handed him the microphone. His opening statement was "Jesus fucking Christ is awesome!" After I recovered from my near heart attack, I realized that he was telling a tender story of an encounter he had with God, a story that had driven him to a deeper knowledge of God's love for him. Tears were leaking from his eyes as he recounted his experience. The entire congregation cheered him on with four letter words of their own. It was an expression of purity of heart. They did not use these words against each other in malicious ways. The words were used for punctuation or humor and nothing more.

Legitimate self-expression was more important than maintaining comfort zones. Ken remembered his response to those testimony times when outrageous topics came up. "I thought to myself, 'My God! They actually did that!' And then, 'My God they actually said that out loud!'" To be a leader at The Bridge required an ability to listen to just about anything and not betray uneasiness or surprise. Ken's quick-witted humor was a balm with which he regularly soothed the discomfort of the other leaders.

Each person in the community was a nobody, yet at the same time each person was a rock star, everybody's voice had equal value. Ken remembered, "You didn't have to measure up first. You didn't have to be righteous to have a good idea. And that shocked some of our kids." The leaders attempted to flatten the hierarchy as much as possible so that all voices could be equal. Pam observed the solidarity that one leader had with the congregation, "She is a wise leader, and a tender mother who refuses to give way to conventional tradition of pastoral distance. She lives among us as do all our leaders. They don't hide behind the pulpit, but bleed with us." Leaders did bleed with the people. They had to be willing to be in the trenches at all times. Laura added, "It was about people speaking truth and being honest. An idea that came to someone on Sunday morning was just as valid as one that took a week of preparation." As one who spent many hours crafting sermons, it was not easy on the pastoral ego.

Eric was asked to lead worship for Easter Sunday. Holidays were a time when people would bring their parents to church with them. Pam wrote in her journal about that day, "Eric showed up with his rooster feather like hair, patches were randomly bleached out. Tattooed bible verses spiraled down and around... loved inked on his arms." On his Easter egg blue t-shirt he had crudely scribbled in large letters with a broad black felt tip marker: Stop Fucking Each Other. I was shocked at his lack of reverence. To me it couldn't have been more inappropriate. Though it lacked the subtlety of my sermon preached a few weeks previous about making the right moral choices, Eric's prophetic message was far more to the point and meaningful for our church family. It called the community to a commitment to moral action and they responded appropriately.

The Voice of the People: Many Voices, One Holy Spirit

Many voices gave the community its depth. Angie said, “At The Bridge everyone can be an influencer.” One of the pastors developed a practice called Life Savior Sunday. People were invited to step up and award a package of Lifesavers to a person who had been a “life savior.” It was like telling on each other in a good way. This practice allowed the church family to admire Christian virtues in each other. This practice was another way that leaders gained a view into the hearts of the people. Those virtues were repeated thematically in sermons (given both by pastors and by congregants) and became valued among the church family.

Evangelism

Joshua, who was the son of a prominent evangelist, proposed that the church do a cigarette outreach. He pointed out that if you give someone a cigarette or even two they will talk as long as you want, out of gratitude. It could be a unique opportunity to evangelize. My religious self couldn't justify spending church funds, which were very precious, on addictive substances, so I opposed the plan. My co-pastors out-voted me and in a spirit of consensus I gave in. Joshua's voice was more important than mine, and he was right. The cigarette outreach was one of our most successful efforts. In fact, it signaled the second incarnation of the Bridge, which occurred as a result of an influx of our friends without houses into our community.

Rites of Passage

Voice and individuality were encouraged in rites of passage. In media pieces written about The Bridge, most reporters alluded to The Bridge as a Punk Rock Church. This description was only partially true. Ruby appreciated the personal expressions that emerged at weddings. She said, “There was a biker wedding, a Goth wedding, a Punk

Rock wedding, a \$20,000 traditional wedding, a Bardic wedding, a barefoot in the park hippie wedding, and an extravagant YTK²³⁰wedding with dance lessons and a DJ.²³¹” Couples chose to celebrate their unions in a way unique to them, and the community honored their choices no matter how unconventional.

Voice was also celebrated through funerals but in a different way. Elisha was accidentally killed by her fiancé, James. She left a three-month old nursing baby behind. They were in counseling and not far from their wedding day. Todd remembered at the funeral, “We were screaming for her. We knew exactly what happened.” Literally, the congregation screamed for Elisha since she no longer had a voice. They screamed for the injustice of it all. They screamed for James, too. The press framed the incident as a domestic violence murder, but it was far more complicated than that. James is doing seventeen years for the crime. James and Elisha were just barely off the street. A person of means would have gotten off with time served. The community still cries out for this injustice. Todd continued, “James, in all the messiness, can commit crimes against humanity and there is still a God who cares for him.” And it should be added, a community of friends as well.

The Broader Community

The Bridge reached into the broader community with their habit of giving money away when the money did not exist in the church budget. Congregants were urged to dig into their pockets and sacrifice their coffee, beer, and cigarette money. A lady in the neighborhood got mugged in broad daylight, so The Bridge sent money. Two cyclists

²³⁰ This was an extravagant wedding held December 31, 1999 to celebrate the new millennium as well as the marriage.

²³¹ This listing is not exhaustive. In eleven years, more than forty weddings were performed and each was unique.

were killed in a hit and run accident. The Bridge sent money to their housemates. Gideon and Sarah were Portland coffee shop-owners that employed Bridge people. Their son committed suicide, so The Bridge sent money. Terra's neighbor's house burned down so, The Bridge donated furniture and linens for her new apartment and sent money. Michele's mom's house burned down and The Bridge took a collection. Although the amounts were small, the community became well known for giving. None of the victims of these tragedies attended the church but that didn't matter. The Bridge showed up in any way possible when people were hurting or in need in the greater community.

Generative Themes and Eras

Since Bridge people were connected to the community at large, it was not difficult to determine the generative themes of the culture. The church did it's best to address those themes. When the themes changed The Bridge reinvented itself.

This first era was that of the Meow Meow Club, sponsored by the church, owned and run by Bridge musicians. In the early days the city was teeming with bands that were signed on national recording labels, and eleven of them were represented at the church. Although being signed was the dream of musicians, the touring schedule was devastating to their wives and children. The leaders' emphasis in the first incarnation of The Bridge was to give these musicians a voice on Sunday morning, fixing in their minds and hearts that the church was a legitimate place to be. There were so many musicians that the Bridge had four completely different worship teams for a congregation of one hundred and twenty people. At times there would be two full drum sets, four guitars, keyboards, and three or more vocalists. The act of including as many musicians as possible anchored

them in community, which served as a grounding for their marriages and their families. It gave them a comfortable place to work out their difficulties.

In the middle years Portland had become a hub for street kids, affectionately called “gutter punks.” During era two of The Bridge, the cigarette outreach and many more like it were birthed. Leaders studied the homeless population, spent time on the streets with them, and discovered the best means of reaching them. This era culminated in the birth of HomePDX, The Bridge’s daughter church for “our friends without houses” in downtown Portland, which quickly grew to over two hundred participants and engaged eight other local churches in caring for the city’s poor.

In its third era, the Bridge experienced another shift. Rather than depressed and brooding Gen X musicians or desperate gutter punks, Millennials began to stream in the doors. There were many college students and graduates, who had no heartburn with the church in general and wanted to commit to social justice issues. They were happy and hopelessly hip, much like the rest of Portland. The community began to create events that would speak to Millennial concerns: Shaken and Stirred,²³² Art for Aid,²³³ and Red Letter Pub and Heresy.²³⁴

Christian Anarchist movement is the current reincarnation and is just beginning, era four in thirteen years. The reinventions happened through shifts that took place over a few months time. It was not disingenuous for the community to change this way. It was considered a function of inclusion. Risk and change had become a well-worn pathway

²³² Fund raisers for third world social justice issues: Rwanda, Sudan, India.

²³³ Art for Aid is an event where local artists donate their art or music to be sold. All proceeds go towards sending community members to African orphanages.

²³⁴ Both gatherings were Bible study groups. Red Letter Pub was a discussion of the red letter of the Gospels over beer and hamburgers. Heresy was a theological study that was facilitated by seminarians and took place in homes.

and no one was left behind. Being small kept the Bridge flexible and able to adapt easily when generative themes emerged. The unbelieving community saw The Bridge as relevant and agile. As Eric added, “The Bridge was a powerful force that shouldn’t be taken lightly.”

Transparency: The Pathway to Passion and Creativity

Passion and Creativity against Criticism and Cynicism

“Everything that felt like a closed door became a broader entrance.” Angie was describing the tension that was relieved when the people began to be healed of their cynicism and criticism. While criticism kills creativity, cynicism is the enemy of passion, and the church suffered from both of these maladies. Prior to The Bridge, fear had jettisoned the people’s appetites for risk, and cynicism had overtaken their healthy passions and their creativity.²³⁵ The combination of a bad history with authority the figures and the experience of an irrelevant religion led these young adults to become cynical, and that cynicism was causing them to devour each other with criticism. This situation created an atmosphere where the right kinds of risk were impossible. Their energy was misspent as their lives degenerated into self-medicating behaviors. It was a “life sucks and then you die” attitude. “Everybody was disappointed, so why not enjoy yourself as much as possible?” Leaders struggled to find the thread of hope that would pull these young people back from the edge of self-destruction.

²³⁵ Many Bridge people were formerly members of a failed church experiment called The Gathering. This community was mishandled by elders and leaders who did not understand the nature of the Generation X community that they were guiding. Nearly all members left wounded, cynical and critical of church and each other. This situation was negative DNA that The Bridge leaders had to heal in order to move forward.

Since the community boasted of a collection of highly creative people, leaders knew that they had to develop an atmosphere where creativity and spirituality could flourish. People needed to be healed and find worship pathways that were native to their culture.²³⁶ Todd shared his view of how the congregation got through these roadblocks,

They (leaders) asked, “What it would take to make community safe for all?” They hit cynicism head on with a ban on public put down humor. Then they presented a scenario of creativity unfettered by criticism and cynicism that was attractive to us. They didn’t just say ”don’t do this.” They presented a substitute for negative behavior that we all wanted as a trade off.

We were cynical about success. Nobody, artist or musician, wanted to “sell out.”²³⁷ But leaders taught us that success bought us options. We wanted options to travel or to help others, or to have more time and energy to create. Those options were attractive. We realized that if we didn’t go for a healthier mind set we would repeat our parents’ failures. That was a big motivator.

What the church family valued most was freedom, integrity, and creativity;²³⁸ but they had to be helped to see it before change could occur. The leaders’ job was to inspire a hunger and develop an urgency for these values within the people.

Transparency

While cynicism distrusts the motives of others, transparency trusts in the ultimate goodness of others. Vulnerable transparency had to be the norm rather than the exception. Leaders modeled transparency by revealing their bumps, bruises, and scars as well as their current struggles, which was brutally painful for them until the community caught onto the idea.

²³⁶ In Gary Thomas’s book he describes nine Sacred Pathways in which people experience God. The Enthusiast loves God with mystery and celebration. Creativity is a strong element of worship experience for the Enthusiast. Bridge people loved expressive worship. They were primarily Enthusiasts. Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

²³⁷ Selling out is when an artist taints the purity of the art form in his/her own eyes by taking money for it. In some circles art is made to please the artist, or it is art for art sake. Often, not wanting sell out is an excuse for the inability to produce a marketable product and reflects a deep fear of failure.

²³⁸ These values among others were discovered through Life Savior Sunday.

Todd commented,

It's easy to say attitudes are harmful, but it made more sense when we were shown the positive results of good choices (transparency and risk) and that had the power to restrain us from destructive behaviors. So it was never "no" for no's sake or for the sake of the rules, but acting in integrity was always the tradeoff for the greater good.

As people lived into transparency by revealing their negative behaviors, leaders were able to address the corresponding roadblocks and the community responded by making positive behavioral changes. Eventually a self-corrective culture was formed that worked to provide an atmosphere where risks were possible. Misbehavers were either pressured into accepting responsibility for themselves or they departed from the community. Todd added,

Community became self-correcting because we all had to play along to create a different atmosphere. Sexual immorality was symptomatic rather than a systemic roadblock. A heightened respect for each other is what helped us to stop using each other.

As the people saw that a future of possibilities lay in front of them, they began to feel hope and that hope eventually ate away at their cynicism and their criticism of each other. Freedom, creativity, and integrity had become options making way for greater expressions of passion.

Vulnerability: Mistakes

One story from the early days (1999), one of those monumental learning curves, came up over and over in the interview process. The story defines community values and illustrates the lengths to which leaders would stretch to demonstrate their views regarding risk, failure, and vulnerability. The story, which came to be affectionately called as "Fuck

You Father’s Day,” was the day that the pastors did the unthinkable (especially in Christian circles). They turned the asylum over to the inmates, so to speak. The community was experimenting with a concept called worship curation.²³⁹ This meant that any pastor or worship leader could create a multi-faceted worship experience that would resonate with the community and lead the congregation towards worship of God. The pastors hoped to encourage creativity at Intersections²⁴⁰ of different fields of practice in order to explore fresh expressions in worship. We were eager to see what our young creatives would do with the freedom.

It seemed like a winning combination when a professional musician who specialized in electronica and a professional ballerina signed up for the Father’s Day service. When the congregation showed up for the gathering, some with their visiting fathers and mothers in tow, there were no chairs in the church warehouse.²⁴¹ The room was completely dark except for the movie, *Run Lola, Run*²⁴², which was projected onto the back wall. The music was not only loud²⁴³ but discordant and the dancer was on the microphone repeatedly screaming “Fuck you, Dad!” between her elegant pirouettes and grand leaps. There was no way for the congregation to participate. Those who did not flee stood vulnerably in the middle of the room. It was in-your-face theater. Only the

²³⁹ “A good worship curator unpacks the elements of the service in a particular space she has thought about and deliberately arranged. She is aware of lighting levels, temperature, seating, projections, sound and every element that contributes to the worship experience.” Mark Pierson, *The Art of Curating Worship* (Minneapolis: Sparkhouse Press, 2010), 32.

²⁴⁰ “The Intersection, then, becomes a virtual Peter’s Café, a place for wildly different ideas to bump into and build upon each other.... When you step into the Intersection, you can combine concepts between multiple fields, generating ideas that leap in new directions.” Frans Johansson, *The Medici Effect* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2006), 16, 17.

²⁴¹ For the first five years *The Bridge* met in a crudely remodeled second story warehouse of 5,000 square feet. This space doubled as an all ages nightclub, which was run by the musicians of *The Bridge*.

²⁴² *Run, Lola, Run*, by Tom Tywker, Sony Pictures, 1999.

²⁴³ *The Bridge* provided earplugs for those who wanted them, but even earplugs did not help this day.

curiously macabre stayed, about thirty people at the most. Although a short sermon was given by two men on fatherhood, few remember the sermon or even knew that there was one. It was a hard act to follow.

Of this day Angie said, “It was offensive not because of the swearing, but because worship should leave the people with hope in God. Music in the church is not performance art, it is about inclusion.” Geoff added, “She offended a lot of people. But like Ken said, ‘The Bridge has one speed and its full speed ahead and oftentimes we don’t know where we are going until we hit the wall with our heads.’” That description was accurate for this day.

The prim and proper ballerina and the unsuspecting musician outdid the antics of the hipsters in the congregation who prided themselves on their ability to put a room on tilt at a moment’s notice. Crystal remembered, “We, as leaders, were really surprised that the kids were so freaked out! They were really rattled by it. People felt too exposed.” Crystal stated further, “We didn’t stop it. It was so extreme, I thought we would get in trouble, we didn’t know from who, but it seemed like given.” Community was abuzz with different versions of the event. The leaders stayed out of the conversation for the most part, except to protect the musician and the dancer.

Todd remembered, “At that point we knew we were safe with you. You put your money where your mouth was. In essence you said, ‘We don’t care about things that don’t matter.’ The dancer was working out her personal anguish, her safety is what mattered. You didn’t react or over-process. For me that sealed the deal and set the scene for the future.” Todd’s trust was inspired by the way that the leadership handled the situation with a light touch and felt that it was safe to take creativity to the edge. Geoff

also echoed a similar sentiment: “They were given the reins to express themselves. The dancer needed to be loved and accepted in her expression. The people needed to love and accept her as well.” The leadership, by not over reacting or micro-managing the fall out, set the tone for the community to respond lovingly because that is what mattered the most. Geoff added, “Fuck You Father’s Day displayed the leadership’s ability to take risks to find new ways of doing things better. It proved to the community that failure is not the end.” From that time on creativity exploded within the community as criticism faded.

Power

When I posed the question, “How have you observed power being used at The Bridge?” to the younger subjects of this study, they were confused and did not have much to say. They had a hard time locating observable power structures within the system. This response does not mean that they were not there. Angie explained their confusion, “When you come to the bridge you don’t know who has the power.” The community was a collaborative effort and this functioned at the leadership level as well. Three pastors shared the preaching, and once a month someone from the congregation spoke; none of the same people were up front over the course of four weeks. Different people, pastor and non-pastor alike, shared the responsibility of facilitating the service. Non-positional power was just as strong and necessary in the function of the church as was positional power. Pastors volunteered to do set up and tear down right alongside the people, and people preached and led right along side the pastors.

Flattened hierarchy

The Bridge has always had a strange relationship to power compared to most churches. Power was community-determined like everything else at the church. The pastors observed that three levels of hierarchy were about as flat as it could be in order to accomplish tasks and maintain order. The community wanted a “we’re all rock stars” mentality. They insisted upon a mutually supportive admiration society that was determined to value every person equally. The hierarchy worked this way: first, there were the pastors, who were responsible for the spiritual direction of the church and ultimately for the functioning of community; secondly, there were those who had responsibility for specific areas: board members, nursery, children’s church, musicians, set up and tear down, etc.; and thirdly, there was everybody else who volunteered at will but had no formal responsibilities.

This power structure worked well in most circumstances. Ken said, “We attempted at every turn to give power away, we attempted to flatten the hierarchy.” Many people loved having a voice and the freedom to affect the culture in a substantial way. Ken continued, “This made it actual community. If you wanted a piece of the pie all you had to do was show up and it was there for you.” Others were fascinated but also frightened by the easy access to power as Ruby mentions, “ Giving that much power away, objectively speaking, is fascinating but not very safe.”

Flattened to a Fault

Ken often marveled, “It is amazing how much organization it takes to look this disorganized.” At best the leadership style was laissez-faire in the early days. Decisions were only made when they had to be made. This style set the community up for trouble. Naturally if a void in leadership is perceived the opportunist will step in. Geoff

remembered, “At first those with strong personal power, but who lacked character, filled the void. They were driven by their egos and their pride and as a result we learned discernment.” This discernment came at a high price. Ruby noted, “There was a lot of experimentation with power. Democratic power was spread around. There were definitely people in positions of power but it was obtuse. It was not organized so power was co-opted (behind the leader’s backs).” Many people were confused about who held the power and whose voice should be heeded. Crystal observed, “The power was organic. No one wanted to be top dog. We all (leaders) waited to see what would emerge.” That hesitation was confusing but spoke to the leaderships desire to reflect the community ethos. Still many would have appreciated stronger direction from leaders. Eric noticed, “The use of power was dysfunctional. There was a strong protection of people to allow them to move at their own pace. Leaders didn’t draw them out when they should have. Leaders seemed afraid of the (leadership) role themselves.” Leaders eventually responded to the board of director’s suggestion to tighten up the power structure for greater clarity in the organization.

The power structure of the church did evolve over time. Jesse observes that even today, “No one wants power, but power is distributed.” Leaders now talk freely about the power structure and why The Bridge exercises power the way that it does. About what happens in Sunday services, Todd shared, “The Bridge is still democratic to a fault. We err on the side of disorganization rather than risk someone not having a voice. We are more afraid of something going unsaid than we are afraid of being disorganized.” To a visitor Sunday morning would look very disorganized. It is amazing how much organization it takes to look this disorganized.

Empowerment

Leaders believed in and practiced mentoring the younger generation into leadership. Anyone who felt ready was taught how to take initiative and work towards a common goal for the good of the church and the broader community.

Promotion from Within

When The Bridge needed to replace a pastor, part of the decision was not difficult to make; it had to be a promotion from within. Although outside mentors suggested bringing in a qualified pastor from outside the church, the other pastors could not see the wisdom in that plan. It made sense that leaders should come from within if at all possible. Since the community structure and history were extremely unique, only an insider would understand what people needed. Pastors looked within the congregation. Who was already doing the work? Who had community respect? Who had the passion for the job? Geoff; Angie; and Donna, the Bridge's newest pastor, were all hired this way.

Promotion in all other areas of the church happened the same way. People excelled in that for which they have the greatest passion. Empowering them for their passion had a synergistic effect. Pam tells this story,

When I had been at The Bridge for a bit, I really wanted to contribute. I asked Deborah how I could get involved, was there anything that I could do? She countered with this, "The Bridge does not recruit people for positions to make the "machine" run more smoothly. We want to know what you are passionate about and we want to support you in doing that. We did not have nursery for a year, and no kids programs for as much as three years at a time because there was no one passionate about doing them. It keeps us small for sure, but that's who we are." I went home thinking: It's a lousy way to run a business, but a brilliant way to run a community!

Pam eventually started a writers group with another woman in the church. They have published three booklets of writing, art, and poetry. It was a great community

builder within the church and outside of the church as well. Mary pointed out, “Promotion was from within based on passion and consistency. A great example of this was Abbi, the Food Church pastor.”²⁴⁴ By the time she was only eighteen years old she had been assisting Angie at the food bank for nearly four years. She was reliable and had a passion for the hungry families in the community. When Angie needed someone to take responsibility for Food Church, Abbi volunteered for the job.

Responsibility

Power at The Bridge, it was commonly understood, was about responsibility. Angie said, “The role of the pastor is to take responsibility, that’s all.” In a church where anyone can preach, talk, teach, sing, or start a focus group, really the only thing left for pastors to do that was unique was to take bottom line responsibility for the community. Todd added, “Power equals responsibility, not money²⁴⁵ or decisions.” Although leaders at The Bridge were not completely egoless as one may be tempted to conclude by these comments, they learned to set their own interests aside for the benefit of the greater community. Angie continued,

Power is about protection and communicating boundaries. It is about relentless protection of victims of injustice, it stands with victims, it fights for peoples’ transformation. Power is about inclusion, making sure that others are not left behind.

²⁴⁴ Abbi was called “pastor” by those who she served. She did not hold an official title of pastor at The Bridge. They called her pastor because they saw her in that light and she proved herself as a willing servant to the community. With some time and maturity Abbi may be the next person invited to join the pastoral team.

²⁴⁵ Although it has not always been so, for most of the years of The Bridge pastors have been bi-vocational.

The Bridge power structure has firmed up over the years and was based on Jesus' idea on leadership of the Kingdom of God.²⁴⁶ The greatest must become the servant. Garrett observed, "Powerful things happen at the Bridge, but there is no oppressive power."

Laying Down of Power

It became apparent that back door of the church had to be as friendly as the front door For congregants and pastors as well. Crystal left in year five of The Bridge's history to start a church in Eureka, California. When she left, Ken and I stayed, and we brought Geoff on as a pastor. Three years later Ken left to start HomePDX, leaving me as the sole senior pastor (senior in the sense of the oldest by over twenty years), and we hired Angie. I co-led with Geoff and Angie for another three years before I felt God opening new doors for me elsewhere. When it became time for me to step down, the community fell gently into the hands of the very ones that leaders had trained from the beginning, Geoff, Angie, and eventually, Donna. Each time one of the original team moved on, a leader from within the church, usually quite a bit younger, was ordained and hired. The remaining elders mentored the younger pastor into his or her new role. Mentoring insured the passing of the DNA and helped the newcomer adjust to the rigors of the job.

The laying down of power by the elders of the church in favor of the younger generation was one of the most powerful messages that can be given in a young faith community. It was a vote of love, faith, hope, and confidence in the future. It showed trust in God. In my case it was not easily done except for the fact that I knew that if I did

²⁴⁶ "Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20-26-27.
"The greatest among you will be your servant." Matthew 23:11.

not leave, the congregation would not grow, especially the younger leaders. It seemed better for me to give them the reins of power and mentor from the outside. Their voice had become more important than mine.

During the interviews of my subjects, it was clear that the expectation of people was that all departures of leaders were bad and peppered with ill-will. A surprised Mary said, “I still haven’t seen any church leadership drama at The Bridge. Our leaders have unity with and loyalty to each other. They truly like and love each other.” In a community as small as The Bridge, bad sentiment would be easily detected. Laura added, “When each pastor left there was no drama. They left gracefully and the community did not feel abandoned.” For a generation that wore its abandonment issues on its sleeve this was quite an accomplishment.

In the eyes of a seasoned leader, the younger generation is never quite ready to lead on their own. The senior pastor wonders: Did I teach them all that they need? Have I trained their hearts for service? Have I taught them to be strong leaders? Do they know how to wrestle with God and God’s people to make this place work? The leadership style at The Bridge was so unique. It was difficult for young leaders to get help at leadership conferences or from mentors that lead in more traditional ways. Ultimate faith in God empowered me to step back and let them make their mistakes and allow them to learn from them. This example lived out by the founding pastors is one that found its way through out the entire structure of the church from the small groups, to the musicians, to the teachers and other pastors of the church. As the collective wisdom grows, it becomes possible for the future eras to be stronger than the present or past eras of The Bridge. The story of The Bridge will continue on into the future because built into the ethos of The

Bridge is a taste for risk, a taste for the future, and a curiosity that drives the leaders to look for the voice of God in the younger generation.

Conclusion

The participants of this study represent a wide range of experiences with the church, leaders, and leadership experiences of The Bridge Church. I grouped the findings according to grounded theory and developed themes. I became convinced that the narrative style of inquiry was able to successfully capture the full feel and meaning of the Millennial experience at The Bridge. It presented a clear picture of how leaders can lead to engage the Millennial imagination and thus commitment towards the church.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

A young man from our local neighborhood coffee shop was a writer for the Mercury, a questionable subculture newspaper. He tried to get interviews with a few churches that threatened litigation if their names appeared in the paper; then he came to The Bridge and we embraced him. Here is what Will, a self-professed heathen, had to say in the conclusion of his article:

ARE YOU THERE GOD, IT'S ME WILL

...Leaving The Bridge, having thoroughly enjoyed my time talking to Ken and Deborah, I start thinking, who knows? Maybe there is a God. How else would you explain an unabashedly pro-church article in a jaded, twenty something newspaper filled with music reviews and sex ads? I think, yeah, there's a God, and he understands the importance of print media. Even if the messenger is a "filthy" one, He still wants to be well represented. And good representation is a church that not only preaches His message, but embodies it. If there is a God, He understands that as far as churches go, The Bridge is a much better way to get his message across.²⁴⁷

Will succinctly gives voice to the generative themes of the day. He questions, Is there a God? If there is, how would God act and who would God use to speak? Most importantly the question is, Can God reach me and how would God reach me? The following conclusions allow the church to answer these questions.

The purpose of this study is to help church leaders find ways of inspiring commitment to the church among the Millennial generation. With 80 percent of Millennials abandoning church within just a few short years of their high school

²⁴⁷ William M. Heifrich. "Jesus is a Punk Rocker, Looking for God in All the Wrong Places," The Portland Mercury, Vol. 4, No. 29, Dec. 18, 2003, 13.

graduation, leaders have wondered how the future of the church might look without a major shift in praxis. Although there have a flurry of theories on how to stop the hemorrhage of the lifeblood of the church, failures abound and successes are few.

Proposed Solutions

My research has highlighted practices useful in leading the Millennial generation in a way that captures its imagination for the church of the future, their future. The Jewish Christian church in Acts 15 was required to step back and allow a wide berth for the cross-cultural church. Likewise, the modern church of today must follow their lead and allow the Millennial church the same leeway. The practical aspects of this idea are explored in this chapter.

Positive Deviance and Community: Who are you?

How do we create churches that attract the Millennial Generation?

Using church plant models that were successful in the past is a temptation, but lacks sensitivity to the uniqueness of a community. Gojja, Millemann, and Pascale caution,

...But such an approach denies the discovery process and is antithetical to the central tenet of Positive Deviance: The wisdom to solve problems exists and needs to be discovered within each and every community. Individual communities are far more likely to accept and implement their answer.²⁴⁸

Success depends upon who is sought out to answer the question. The answers lie not in a book or in a training course on how to create churches or even with a church plant expert. Wisdom comes from the community themselves. What do they want and need? Positive deviance gives power to the people to make that decision. A wise church leader will find those strengths and build upon them.

²⁴⁸ Pascale, Millemann, and Gojja, 179. .

Hospitality: The fortress of certainty is crumbling

The Millennial generation needs the freedom to individuate from previous patterns of church. The church may miss out on viable avenues of sharing Christ with the generations of the future if they do not give creative control to Millennials, who will know how to lead those from their generation to faith. When addressing the interreligious practices of hospitality, Yong states,

First, Christian mission is not only about bringing Christ to our neighbors of other faiths, but may also serve the important purpose of meeting Christ in them. In fact the early church's hospitality to strangers was based on the realization that Christ may be present in our guests and if that is so, then our guests become our hosts through Christ.²⁴⁹

Hospitality is humble. An ideal church would embrace and learn from the other.

Inclusion: provide easy entrance points

Gathering Millennials to the community of faith is not dependent upon the typical linear aspects of "coming to faith" as the church has known it to be; that is, it is not dependent upon faith coming first. Faith makes more sense within the context of community, and nobody knows this more than the Millennials. Joseph Myers observes,

It is our charge to invite the stranger in. We do not invite strangers in for intimacy. We invite them in so that they will no longer be strangers. We give space and they find family, belonging and community. So knock gently and wait for them to invite you into that space where they are.²⁵⁰

There is a reciprocal action occurring in Myers quote. Inclusion and hospitality are walking hand in hand to enhance the experience for both the stranger and the inviter. It becomes a mutual invitation to know and be known.

Belief cannot be an end game. Nestled within the wings of inclusion is the ideal that there must be no teleological cause as an agenda. The hope of every Christian is for

²⁴⁹ Yong, 152.

²⁵⁰ Joseph R. Myers. *The Search to Belong* (Zondervan:Grand Rapids, ME, 2003), 54.

the good of the other, but the other must, by one's own will, find one's way to faith. The pressure for salvation sabotages inquiry, and in turn, the freedom to journey at one's own pace spurs inquiry on.

Transparency and Authenticity: Dirt, scars and the divine.

Millennials need leaders who are willing to live with them in the tension of their theological struggles. Anything less than complete honesty does not ring true for them. They do not pretend well. The qualities that evoke respect for the Modern generation, age, power, education, are meaningless to Millennials. Rather, Millennials value a leader that will walk nearby. They will examine the scars of the leader and learn from their stories. What is hands on and raw for the leader is potentially life changing for the young seeker.

Garrett had lost most of his absolutes. He did not have many answers about God, and no longer believed in Jesus at the time of the interview. He did not even know what to call God. He said,

It is awkward to be present. I have sought relationship with God for years and there is no exchange, no relationship. I have continued to come even though I don't know what I believe anymore. It feels ridiculous for me to even be here right now (at The Bridge). I am afraid that if I say something doubtful it might hurt someone's faith. And yet, if I steal that from The Bridge I am cheating my community. The Bridge, of all places, maybe the only place I know of, where I don't have to pull away. The Bridge ultimately chooses relationship over belief."²⁵¹

In a time when he could not feel God he clung to in his brothers and sisters of The Bridge. Cognitive conformity meant little to him. Love was the issue. The church loved Garrett and Garrett was committed to loving his community.

²⁵¹ This interview with Garrett took place in March 2011.

As a leader it was a privilege to walk through deconstruction with emerging adults at The Bridge, to be trusted with their deepest doubts and fears. Of these kinds of moments Crystal said, “Raw honesty and confession, they were the holiest moments of my life.” Holy, indeed! The Millennial version of holiness is not having all of life sorted out in a clean pristine order, but holiness is where the dirt meets the divine and the divine smiles.

Power: All we did was give it away...

When young people are given a seat at the theological table and a position as Christian culture shapers, they will be intrigued. Access to power and the freedom to create inspires their imaginations and motivates commitment. Church leaders must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit in knowing when to lay power down and pass it on to the younger generations.

Jesus at Gethsemane models the laying down of power. He said, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”²⁵² After his death and ascension, the apostles, as human and broken as they were, became the stewards of the new church. Jesus mission did not become theirs until he was gone.

As Millennials are trusted with theology, church, and people they will make it theirs just as the disciples made Jesus’ mission theirs. Wise leaders of the Millennial church will give power away at every turn. They will realize that the voice of the future is designed to become more important than theirs at some point, and then they will step out of the way.

Integration and Incarnation: To boldly go where no one has gone before.

²⁵² Matthew 26:39.

One of the most intriguing qualities that the Millennial generation brings to the church is that of integration amongst their peers. They are able to seamlessly blend into culture, making them very powerful as witnesses for the gospel.

Their ability to integrate is also the most troubling for the Modern church. In general, Millennials are live and let live, accepting to a fault, and willing to take things at face value without judgment. They have a natural empathy for the underdog, and this attitude shows up in their sympathy to victims of injustice and their willingness to do something about it. They are accepting of sexual minorities and will avoid churches that do not accept their other-gendered friends. They are sexually active at an earlier age and their sexual boundaries are fluid. Many reject consumerism. They love tattoos and piercings, at least in Portland. They are comfortable with syncretistic blends of religion such as Buddhism and Christianity. Their language is likely colorful, and they have a strong bond with the digital world. With all this integration one wonders where their spirituality and convictions show through.

The question is the same question that the Jewish Christian church had for the Gentile Christian church, yet my study of Acts reveals that many of the “detestable” habits of the Gentiles meant little to God. God accepted the Gentiles as they were, and Paul was not too concerned about the details either. The Millennial Generation did not come upon this time in history by happenstance. Rather God built them with the gift of integration in order that they would incarnate Christ in a world that their modern parents and pastors will never understand. If true, leaders must then find ways to lead them

through the minefield of culture. They must determine what is important and what is not important for Christian practice. What are “these necessary things?”²⁵³

At this point it would be tempting to write a list of do’s and don’ts for practice among the Millennial Generation that would parallel the prohibitions in Acts 15. I am going to resist that urge and suggest that leaders live in tension with integration that they do not understand and to reserve judgment even with the issues that seem to be addressed as sin in the Bible. Paul gave this grace to the Gentile church. Relationship makes more sense in the Millennial world than that of right and wrong. Alan Hirsch said, “The bar for salvation should be low and the bar for discipleship should be high in our churches rather than the opposite.”²⁵⁴ After belonging, salvation (belief) and discipleship (behaving) should be the result of relationship. Correction is allowable and even welcomed within the context of loving a relationship.

Summary: Ideas for Polity

The highlights of each key point are thus:

1. Positive deviance: Look within the community to find the wisdom to lead the community.
2. Hospitality: Live into a graceful practice of give and take; respect the many voices.
3. Inclusion: Provide friendly entrance points into community and belief.
4. Transparency: Allow the mess and mentor them through it from your own brokenness.

²⁵³ Acts 15:28 (KJV).

²⁵⁴ Alan Hirsch. “Missional Leadership Lecture,” George Fox Seminary, Portland, OR, October 13, 2011.

5. Power: Give it away as much as possible.
6. Integration: Don't judge. Live in tension with their humanity, and trust God in them.

Other Ministry Contexts

The research results from this study would be useful in any setting where cross-cultural ministry occurs. In 1997 Ray Bakke prophesied,

For the first time ever, by about the year 2000 over 50 percent of the people on the planet will live in cities. Cities have replaced the nations. Yesterday, cities were in the nations; today all the nations are in our cities.²⁵⁵

Bakke's words have now become true. The United States' medium-to-large cities hold a cultural microcosm of the world. Missionaries no longer need to go to the nations because the nations have come to them.

The research encourages a basic cultural anthropological response to new cultures: empathy, acceptance, and identification.²⁵⁶ Leaders of youth groups, house churches, and urban centers would benefit from learning these skills. The simple ideas in this research are basic to all human relationships and therefore beneficial for building bridges of relationship and faith.

Recommendations for Future for Leaders of the Millennial Generation

²⁵⁵ Ray Bakke, *A Theology as Big as a City* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 117.

²⁵⁶ Stephen A. Grunlan and Marvin K. Myers, *Cultural Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 23.

In light of the research presented and the conclusions stated above, leaders would do well to consider the following suggestions. These suggestions have been demonstrated to be successful with the Millennial Generation in the context of The Bridge Church.

Embrace deep change.

The church is not conducive to reinvention. When in trouble it tends to fall back on the two percent solution; that is, the idea that incremental change will get it where it wants to go. When faced with the hardships of forging a new paradigm, the easier route is backwards. True transformation must be a tectonic shift. Quinn describes the scope of deep change,

Deep change differs from incremental change in that it requires new ways of thinking and behaving. It is change that is major in scope, discontinuous with the past and generally irreversible. The deep change effort distorts existing patterns of action and involves taking risks. Deep change means surrendering control.²⁵⁷

Quinn goes on to say that it is nothing short of “walking naked into the land of uncertainty.”²⁵⁸ This image invokes development of a profound trust in God.

Become students of culture.

The book of Revelation gives this view of heaven,

And after this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.²⁵⁹

People are dissimilar from each other by God’s design, yet God includes all cultures. A study of basic cultural anthropology would help practitioners develop a spirit of inquiry and lay the groundwork for empathy for their constituency.

Develop a taste for risk and study creativity.

²⁵⁷ Robert E. Quinn. *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 3.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Revelations 7:9

Leaders of the Millennial Generation and those following will find settings that upset equilibrium. They will dream wildly and then live into those dreams.

Develop a healthy relationship with failure.

Nothing of substance is gained without risk. Risk is inexorably linked to both success and failure. There is no potential for success if there is not also a potential for failure. Proverbs illustrates a biblical view of failure: “for though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked are brought down by calamity.”²⁶⁰ Seven is the number of completeness. A person gets as many falls as he or she might need to reach perfection. What makes a person righteous is that he or she gets up. A person need not be brought down, permanently, by failure but uses the experience to build toward future successes.

Conclusion

In planning my interviews I had decided to predominately use the Millennial voice to tell the story. I had included the older participants in an effort to give context to my findings, but as the study progressed, I realized that the elder participants held a big piece of the story.

As I perused the research for the second time I began to notice that the very ideals that the original church leaders located and built upon in the very beginning were being repeated back to me by subjects from the second, third and fourth incarnations of The Bridge. The longstanding nature of the DNA is important in that it suggests that the model is significantly able to accommodate the generations as they change. The ideals have legs that allowed them to not only stand, but produce results that the church at large has been seeking.

²⁶⁰ Proverbs 24:16

It can be noted, at least preliminarily, that the transmission of the original DNA is successful via the peculiar leadership model of no senior pastor but that of team leadership (three co-equal pastors). Leaders come and go in layers, making the passing on of DNA a natural function of community. The ability to reshape mission in the reforming of community captured the imagination of the younger generations in such a way that they did not want to leave. In fact, they experienced something quite the opposite, they stayed and messed it up with their own handprints. Ownership keeps a church vital from one generation to the next. In the end, Gentiles need a Gentile language.

APPENDIX A

THEOLOGICAL CHAPTER: THE PLAYERS

Antagonists

Some men from Judea traveled to Antioch:

According to Miles Smith these were “Christians who attached great importance to the Mosaic law, who voiced the convictions of a large number of influential Jewish Christians whom we call the Judiaziers”²⁶¹ MacArthur takes a more insideous view of this group of men, saying they were “ False Teachers sent to destroy the churches power and corrupt it’s proclamation, a pernicious influence”²⁶² We do not know whether or not the Judeans were Pharisees. We do know that they were men who were passionate about the proper practice of faith. We do not know their motives, but we do know that they sought to decide the fate of the gentiles seemingly without their input.

Pharisees

Pharisees were the models of piety for the Jewish people, they were the theologians of Judaism and they could support their position. Jewish lifestyle was important to them and they wanted to see the law practiced according to Torah. They were the first to speak up when Jews did not live within “the prescribed social and theological bounds of Judaism.”²⁶³ They felt that Jesus had confirmed the law rather than freeing believers from practicing it.

Protagonists

²⁶¹ Smith, 116.

²⁶² MacArthur, 62.

²⁶³ Ibid. 170-171.

Paul and Barnabus and some other believers:

These are the protagonists who appear at the beginning, middle and end of story, which is built around their experience.²⁶⁴ Although they play a passive role in the decision making, their mission is accomplished. These are men who had given their lives for the gospel.

Converted Gentiles

The Gentiles in Antioch had a reputation for mystery religions and worshiped immoral Greek gods, replete with sacrifices, feasting, and sacred prostitution. Jews found all this repugnant. Now they were followers of Jesus, living in two worlds that were colliding.

Brothers in Jerusalem

In the absence of any other evidence, this was the church in Jerusalem.

Apostles

These were the men who walked and lived with Jesus. They were well-respected elders of the community, the sages of the community.

²⁶⁴ Gallagher and Hertig, 206.

Peter

Peter was highly respected as one who had been with Jesus. He had an authoritative voice and was known as the Jesus apostolic successor.²⁶⁵

James

James was probably the Lord's brother and the first bishop of Jerusalem.²⁶⁶

The whole church

These were the believers in Jerusalem.

Judas and Silas

These were leading and trustworthy men in the community known as prophets.²⁶⁷

Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia

These were the Gentile churches and the testing ground for a global religion.

God/Holy Spirit

God is the central character in the revolutionary development in the church, "God" who "had done all these things" through Paul and Barnabas."²⁶⁸ God is the subject in Peter's argument: God made a choice, God showed that he accepted the, He made no distinction,²⁶⁹ demonstrating the primary role given to God's control and development of the fledgling church.

The fact that there are so few antagonists mentioned indicates the weight of the argument for freedom and the limited influence of the Pharisees and the Judaizers in the

²⁶⁵ Gallager and Hertig, 172.

²⁶⁶ LaSor, 235.

²⁶⁷ Kee, 183.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 179.

²⁶⁹ Marion L. Soards. *Speeches in Acts*. (Louisville, KY:Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 90-92.

decision process. I have placed God on the side of the protagonists because in the end it is apparent that God sides with freedom for the Gentiles.

APPENDIX B
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How did The Bridge first get on your radar?
- 2) What was your first impression?
- 2) What attracted you to stay around?
- 4) What are some ways that drew you in below the surface and what did you find there?
- 5) What stories would you like to tell me?
- 6) How have you observed the use of power at The Bridge?

Only the leaders were asked this question:

- 7) What would you like to tell me about leading at The Bridge?

APPENDIX C

THE BRIDGE MISSION STATEMENT

“Love God, Care for People, Innovate Community”

CORE VALUES

Worship. We attribute worth to God through music, dance, art, drama, prayer and whatever else our creative souls find to do. By exploring innovative forms of expression we better communicate the message of Jesus Christ. We give ourselves back to God because He has given so much to us. Romans 6:23b “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.”

Inclusion. We welcome everyone from all backgrounds and walks of life into a community where they matter. We care and endeavor to provide a safe place for those who have slipped through the cracks of family, church, or society. Our passion is to love people simply because they exist. I John 4:10-11 “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son into the world as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Healing. We bring the broken hearted into community where true life healing happens as a result of being loved, trained, and being exposed to the Holy Spirit. The Bible gives us the pattern for this. Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Equality. We provide equal opportunities for all in any capacity, male and female alike, which brings full benefit to the kingdom of God. God is no respecter of persons, His gifts and enabling love extend to all human beings. Galatians 3:28-29 “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Giving. Every mature follower of Christ is designed by God to be both a giver of self and a giver of resources. We most readily reflect His image when we give, whether that be in worship to God, material provision, or loving inclusion of others. Matthew 10:8 “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.” II Corinthians 9:6 “Now I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

Sharing. We articulate our faith, innovations, and processes with individuals and other communities. We gratefully listen and learn from the stories of others. In the give and take it is our hope to become better followers of Jesus Christ. "The greatest gift you ever give is your honest self." ~ Fred Rogers

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Education

Bakke Graduate University, Seattle, Washington
Doctorate of Ministry in Transformational Leadership

Western Seminary, Portland, Oregon
Masters of Arts in Exegetical Theology

Excelsior College, New York
Bachelors of Science in Biblical Studies, secondary concentration in Business

North Portland Bible College, Portland Oregon
Certificates in New Testament, Old Testament, Inductive and Cultural study of the Bible

North Seattle Community College, Seattle Washington
Associate of Applied Sciences in Accounting

Professional Development

Leader of Shabbat Faith Community from 2010 to present

Co-pastor and creator of The Bridge Church of Portland Oregon from 1998 to 2009

Co-creator and Vice President of Convergence from 2006 to present

Professor at George Fox Seminary from 2009 to present

Professor at North Portland Bible College from 2004 through 2008

Business owner of Deborah Loyd Accounting from 1979 through 1998

Speaker at Off the Map Conference, Seattle, Cincinnati, Portland 2000 to 2006

Publications

An Emergent Manifesto of Hope, Tony Jones and Doug Paggit, ed. (Baker House, 2007).
Chapter 23, co-written with Ken Loyd.

Presentations

Loyd, Deborah. (September-December 2009, 2010). Missional Leadership. George Fox Seminary, Portland, Oregon.

Loyd, Deborah. (September-December 2010). Communications: The New Missional Landscape in Social Networking. George Fox Seminary, Portland Oregon.

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