THE JOURNEY OF A CME MINISTER INTO THE PERSPECTIVES OF
MILLENNIALS ON CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND CHURCH INVOLVEMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

THE JOURNEY OF A CME MINISTER INTO THE PERSPECTIVES OF
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Across the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) connectional church, there

appears to be a widening gap between an ageing population of members and the youth

and young adult population. This widening gap manifests itself in millennials'

insignificant participation in church worship and church activities. As this gap continues

to grow, the denomination does not appear to have significant strategies to address it. At

the inception of this study, the millennial attendance at Sunday morning worship services

and at other church related activities at Linden-Shorts CME church, in Atlanta, Georgia,

was very inconsistent and at times almost non-existent.

This study is important in that it adds to the body of research which addresses

attendance patterns of millennials in mainline denominations, with an emphasis on

African American church attendance and participation in church related activities. This

task was accomplished by using the ethnography research method. During the course of

this study I met with millennials and participated in open discussions with them to gather

data about which offers their perception of church (worship, involvement etc.); and other

pertinent data that is relevant to this study. In addition to the documenting information

related to the group conversations with the CME millennials, a summary of the findings from thirty interview questionnaires that millennials completed is a part of the research findings. Additionally, I reviewed some of the most recent scholarly research which addressed religious attendance patterns of the millennial generation. This information was very important because it explained the impact of culture, society and competing worldviews which also influence how millennials perceive religious institutions.

The findings for this study were based on the ethnography research method. Interview questionnaires were completed by thirty millennials. Out of the thirty millennials, nineteen of the millennials belonged to the Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination, nine of the millennials belonged to other denominations and two did not specify a denomination.

Based on the results of the interview questionnaires, the millennials attend worship services and other church related activities. However, they do not attend every Sunday. Various reasons were given for the inconsistent attendance such as, resting, spending time with friends and family, and preparing for the work week ahead. Millennials are serious about spirituality, but church is not necessary for them to honor traditional practices. Millennials are seeking meaningful worship with relevant sermons and contemporary aspects of worship. The review of literature also points to intergenerational worship and congregational life as a way to re-engage the millennial generation to the church.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this labor of love first to my late grandmother, Rosa L. Samuels who believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. She is the one who, prior to her death, prophesied that I would achieve a Doctoral degree. I also dedicate this dissertation to my loving and very supportive husband, Rev. Dr. Themba Mafico, my family, and to the Linden-Shorts CME Church family for their support and great encouragement. God is truly amazing!

R. Mafico

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been a very challenging and yet fulfilling three-year journey. I could not have completed this work without the prayers, love, encouragement and support of so many people. I would like to offer special acknowledgements to some of the people who pushed me and encouraged me to continue when I wanted to give up.

First to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who kept lifting my spirit and sending me love notes when I was weary.

To my husband, Dr. Themba Mafico, for his love and support throughout all of my educational endeavors, and especially during this degree program.

To the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Willie G-dman, for guiding me through this dissertation process. Thanks are also due to Dr. Reginaldo Braga and Dr. Candace Allen-Staten, who read my dissertation drafts and gave me helpful feedback.

To my family: my children (Erika and Sean), my sisters: Felecia Prince for her prayers and encouraging me to press on; Tammye Layer, who opened up her home to one of my interview groups; and to my eldest sister, Dr. Myrna B. Williams, who allowed me to talk to her during some of my most difficult moments working on this project.

To Rev. Fredrick Braddock and Rev. Dr. Lavonia McIntyre, thanks so much for supporting me with my project and particularly, for inviting millennials to meet with me for interviews and completing the surveys.

Finally, my thanks go to the Linden-Shorts Church Family that continued to stand by me offering me its love and support even long after our short time together with me serving as pastor. As I continue in my calling, the memories and the accomplishments we made together will continue to strengthen my journey ahead.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This Doctor of Ministry project is based upon observations that I made concerning the millennial members of the church I was serving as a minister in the Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) denomination.[1] During the three years that I ministered at Linden-Shorts CME Church in Atlanta, Georgia, I witnessed a pattern of inconsistent millennial attendance at Sunday worship services; the few millennial members came to church only once or twice a month and showed a distinct lack of enthusiasm. Three of the millennials came primarily on the Sundays they were to sing with the senior adult choir. One or two of the millennials came to Bible Study once or twice a month, and one of those who frequented Bible Study was an officer in the church and so had another reason to be there.[2] This study investigates the sporadic attendance of the millennial generation in church, as well as their limited involvement in church related activities. My thesis is, "the intentional study of the congregational needs of millennials enables the CME church to develop effective ministry for this group."[3]

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[1] The church where this project originated was Linden-Shorts CME Church. The CME denomination uses the term young adult instead of millennial, but for the purpose of this study I will use the term millennial.

[2] One of the female young adults was an officer on the Steward Board. The Stewards keep an accurate account of all money spent by the church. They assist in collecting the Appointments assessed to the charge or church. They make a financial report to the Quarterly Conference so as to keep the members informed about the financial status of the church.

[3] Refined with the assistance of Dr. Willie G-dman, Dissertation advisor.

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During the first two years of my ministry in this church, only one millennial held a church office. During my last year, I invited several others to join church boards, the result of a new church initiative we introduced with an emphasis on leadership training. Nevertheless, millennials' apparent lack of interest in the church continued and became a serious concern to me. I wondered whether any of the senior members of the congregation felt this same concern. Most of the congregants sitting in the pews Sunday by Sunday were over fifty, with very few members below the age of thirty. In other words, I was witnessing a dying church, and the members and leaders of the church were operating in blind denial of this reality. This reality prompted me to do something to include younger adults among the leadership of Linden-Shorts CME Church. Moreover, I was extremely concerned by our denomination's lack of intentional training and support for the millennial generation.

During one of the leadership meetings at Linden-Shorts, I pointed out that church and school are the two institutions that have historically prepared African American youth and young adults for future roles as parents, leaders, and responsible citizens. We have a responsibility to the next generations as Christians and as church leaders to look for ways to support and encourage the millennials so that they can reach their full potential in life, a potential they can practice by assuming responsibilities, including leadership, in the church, among other organizations.

I intensified my conversation with the members of the Linden-Shorts church and with other pastors within the CME denomination concerning millennials' lack of church involvement. From these conversations, I discovered that this was not just a problem at our church; other pastors were experiencing similarly low attendance and involvement

from this demographic. Indeed, I found that this decline to this new low had been going on for some time.[4]

Shortly after these conversations with other CME pastors regarding the millennials dwindling attendance and participation in church activities, two significant incidents occurred which helped to validate a need for this study. It is important to note that millennials were expressly invited to the events reported below and their absence was pronounced and strongly felt.

The first event was the Linden-Shorts 109th Church Anniversary celebration which was held on Sunday, February 16, 2014. The members of the congregation were very excited to celebrate the church's long history as part of an African American mainline denomination. The congregation engaged in typical congregational traditions of preparing an abundance of food, decorating the church, and inviting other congregations to come with their choirs to share in the festivities. The church's moderately small building was packed with people. The researcher was amazed that the overwhelming majority of people in attendance were over forty years old. A few children had come with their parents, and approximately ten young adults attended, of whom three were on the program. Despite the elaborate preparations that the senior adults had made for this occasion, the young adults apparently were not impressed. I wondered why. Had the millennials been a part of the preparations and planning? Did those few young people

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[4] See a recent article in the *The Christian Index* (October 2015):11-12 in which Dr. Crutchfield, the General Secretary of the Department of Christian Education for the CME church, wrote an article entitled "What Have I Learned?," in which he said, "many churches don't have youth or very few youth as a part of their congregations. Many parents of youth who attend church have little interest in the Connectional Youth and Young Adult [programs]."

who attended the celebration attend out of pride for their church, or out of an obligation to their parents?

The second incident compounded my concern about the lack of participation of millennials in church events. The millenials' absence from the CME congregational and denominational gatherings was also evident at several annual meetings. The CME denomination holds several meetings a year; some are minor gatherings while others are quite significant. One of the more significant meetings is the Annual Spring Convocation. All ministers, officers, and laity are invited to attend this yearly conference. On the last day of the conference, the presiding bishop typically presents his vision for the direction of the church in relation to church growth. During his presentation at the annual meeting that was held in Albany, GA, the bishop asked all the young adults (millennials) present to stand. Approximately twelve young adults stood and a hush filled the hotel ballroom.[5] Their paltry numbers shocked me. Based on the silence in the room, the other adults in the room had a similar reaction. This low representation of millennials at conferences, meetings, and activities of the CME church mirrored what I had observed over the previous three years that I was pastor at Linden-Shorts. There was, however, one exception: activities that were explicitly organized and hosted by young adults for young adults usually showed significantly higher attendance. But even at their own self-organized events, the attendance was not overwhelmingly higher. Even the Annual Youth and Young Adult Retreat attracted little participation.[6]

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[5] Spring Convocation for the Sixth Episcopal District for the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, held in Albany, GA, April 10-11, 2015. Bishop Kenneth Carter, Presiding Prelate of the Sixth Episcopal District presided over proceedings.

[6] Youth and young adult conferences and retreats are held annually.

In order to determine whether this represented a historical pattern among young adults, I sought church attendance records for past retreats, conferences, and other district meetings. There appears to be no such statistical data in the district office of the CME church, neither in the Connectional headquarters of the Sixth episcopal district of the CME church nor in the national headquarters. Therefore, I cannot establish a baseline as to how many young adults attended each conference over the past years and when or whether their numbers began to decline. Also, to my dismay, I was unable to locate an estimate of how many millennials there are in the various congregations. So I looked for recent literature (news articles, interviews, studies, etc.) that addressed church attendance, church affiliation, and the spirituality of the millennial generation and to my surprise found a significant amount.

An ABC news article entitled, "Who Goes to Church?" written by Dalia Sussman, established the initial framework for my study. Sussman reported that "there is a widening gap between the youngest and oldest groups attending weekly church services. Among the 18-30-year-olds who were polled for this study, only 28 percent said they go to church regularly."[7] This may be the case because, according to this study, "church attendance is said to increase with age."[8] And yet I saw no evidence that the oldest millennials, now just reaching their thirty-fifth birthdays, are returning to church in greater numbers. The summary does not report at what age a particular group typically

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[7] Dalia Sussman, "Who Goes to Church?" ABC News, Accessed February 21, 2016, http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=90372&page. The biggest gap is between the oldest and youngest age groups. Sixty percent of people age 65 and older report attending religious services at least once a week; among 18 to 30-year-olds, just 28 percent go that often. Previous ABC NEWS polls, similarly, have found that religious belief and practice increase with age.

[8] Ibid.

begins to go or to return to church. In another article, *The Millennial Generation – The Future of Christianity in America*, Kerby Anderson reports quite different findings than the ABC news article. According to his data, "the millennials are the least religious generation in American history and, based on his research, millennials may say that they are spiritual, but most millennials don't think about religion at all."[9] Anderson argues that, "the millennial generation presents a significant challenge for Christians," and goes on to suggests that "if the church and Christian organizations are to be vibrant and effective in the twenty-first century, pastors and other Christian leaders need to know how to connect to the millennials; and the first step is understanding them and their beliefs."[10]

C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya in *The Black Church in the African American Experience* argue that, "Black churches do better with teenagers than with young adults. If any age group tends to be missing in many black churches, it is likely to be the young adult group (ages seventeen to thirty-five)."[11] However, "recent studies have been showing the growth of an unchurched segment of black teenagers and young adults, which is a new phenomenon with implications for black churches in the future."[12] Apparently that future is now here. The study of this issue is important for the future direction of the CME denomination in regards to its millennial members, and specifically

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[9] Kerby Anderson, "The Millennial Generation – The Future of Christianity in America," Probe Ministries, Accessed February 14, 2016, http://www.probe.org/the-millennial-generation/

[10] Ibid.

[11] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), Kindle, Loc. 6082.

[12] Ibid.

African Americans among them, because African American young adults have historically benefited from the support and spiritual guidance of the Black church. The CME church has specifically

> [sic] held since its inception that religion and education are important pillars of the denomination for the empowerment of its youth, as well as the Black race. The belief fortified the determination of a predominantly black denomination to establish and maintain schools for the impartation of Christian education among their people. Education was viewed as the single greatest opportunity to overcome the social, economic, and personal inequities that Blacks encountered in their day to day existence; and it was perceived as the key to unlocking the shackles of ignorance and [oppression].[13]

If the CME denomination is not intentional about its efforts to disciple and spiritually empower the millennial generation, the currently miniscule millennial population is likely to dwindle even further, with significant negative implications for the future existence of the CME denomination.

The following chapters will develop this study on how to bring and retain more young people in the CME Church. Chapter Two will provide the historical background of the CME denomination, an overview of the history of Linden-Shorts CME church, and a brief description of the community which surrounds the church, as well as a description of the existing congregation. Chapter Three will provide the conceptual framework used to direct the study, along with a review of the empirical, theological, biblical, and other relevant literature. This chapter will close with a synthesis and summary, as well as suggest the practical applications of the conceptual framework for this ministry setting.

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[13] Othal Hawthorne Lakey, *The History of the CME Church* (Revised), (Memphis, TN: The CME Publishing House, 1996), 437-441.

Chapter Four provides the objectives for the study, describes the methodology in more detail, and concludes with an evaluation of the study, the final results, and a summary. Chapter Five describes what was accomplished in the study, what was learned, what might have been done differently, and makes some suggestions for future studies.

Methodology

The decision to conduct an investigative study based on the millennial population in the CME church is done in order to offer the CME leadership and CME congregations a researched resource that provides reasons for the millennial generation's absence and lack of involvement in the CME church and suggests how to reverse that trend. To support my study, I read scholarly materials and remained in conversation with church leaders in order to ascertain the extent of the millennial generation's paltry and inconsistent attendance at Sunday morning worship services as well as their lack of consistent involvement in church related activities. I also spent time dialoguing with the millennials in order to hear their personal stories and experiences with the church and religion. It was important for me to hear what the millennials were saying about themselves, the church, and factors that both incline and disincline them to be actively engaged in the church.

The key research questions that transpired during my research on and observation of millennials are: 1) Where are the millennials on Sunday morning? If they are not in a church, where are they and what are they doing? 2) Do millennials view the church as relevant to their developmental and spiritual needs? 3) Do congregations and pastors understand the needs of the millennial generation in relation to their worldviews and their psychological and spiritual development?

How to get answers to these questions? I found an ethnographic approach to be suitable. According to Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, "ethnography addresses beliefs, values, attitudes, perceptions, emotions; verbal and nonverbal means of communication; social networks; behaviors of a group of individuals with their friends, family, associates, and fellow workers—historical and environmental influences; and patterned use of space and time."[14] The specific category of ethnography the researcher engaged in LeCompte and Schensul define as applied ethnographic research.[15] Its primary characteristics are:

- The focus is on a problem that is important to the researcher and key people in the setting where the research will take place.

- The results are intended to be useful in solving the problem for members of the community or the institutional setting where the research will take place.

- The results can be used to develop programs and other intervention strategies that address the problem.

- Ethnographic methods are used to document and/or evaluate the approaches that evolve from prior research and problem-solving strategies.[16]

Each of these characteristics fit my intended study of the declining attendance of millennials in the CME church and other mainline denominations. I

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[14] Margaret D. LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2010), 5.

[15] Ibid, 11.

[16] LeCompte and Jean J. Schensul, *Designing and Conducting Ethnographic Research*, 11.

felt that the results of this study could prove useful to the CME church as it seeks ways to engage the millennials in meaningful ministry opportunities and in becoming spiritually mature adults.

The primary focus group for this study was the millennial population of Linden-Shorts CME church, but because of their limited number and in order to add validity to the study, I also interviewed millennials of other CME churches, millennials of other denominations, and millennials who do not attend church at all. Millennials who participated in the study represent Georgia, Alabama, and North Carolina.[17] The millennials were selected based on their ages (22-35), which coincided the age-span of the millennial population at Linden-Shorts. Because Linden-Shorts CME church is a predominantly African-American congregation, the participants in this study are African-American millennials as well.

According to a June 25, 2015 report from the United States Census Bureau, "millennials are the population born between 1982 and 2000,"[18] which made their age range 16 to 34 at the time of this study. The age group for this study ranges in age from 22 to 35 (See Appendix A for the meeting agenda which was the impetus for this study). This age range was selected based on the ages of the millennials who make up the young adult cohort in the CME church and also because 22 to 35 year-olds are usually more independent in their worldview than 18 to 21 year-olds, whose religious affiliation may

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[17] Pastors from these areas agreed to assist with the study by inviting millennials to meet in designated areas for the interviews.

[18] "Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers and Are Far More Diverse, Census Bureau Reports," Accessed February 22, 2016, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-113.html?cssp=SERP

be swayed by the church involvement, or lack thereof, of their parents and/or peers.

Twenty-two year olds and those older, on the other hand, may have completed college, be

married and raising children, have gained financial independence, and possibly already

have stable careers. These social factors often determine the choices people make

regarding religion and spirituality.[19]

This study followed the ethnography methodology of using an open-ended

interview questionnaire structured to answer the proposed research questions. The first

section of the questionnaire was demographic in nature, asking the respondent to give

their name, age, church attendance, and geographic region. The main body of the

questions was designed to determine whether the millennials perceived the church as

relevant or irrelevant to their needs as young adults; it asked them to provide reasons to

support their answers. The questions also sought to identify what spiritual practices are

most important to this age group, and what the most important aspects of worship are to

them. (See Appendix A for a sample of the questionnaire). Sample questions during the

group meetings were as follows:

- Do you attend church, and if so, how often?

- What spiritual practices are important to your age group?

- What type of worship style is appealing to you?

- What aspects of church are relevant to your life?

In small groups, I met with millennials in the three aforementioned states. During

the group meetings, I conducted face-to-face interviews with the millennials. Previously

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[19] David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 1. Setran and Kiesling suggests reasons which affect church attendance patterns in young adults.

I had sent out questionnaire interviews by e-mail to millennials who expressed an interest in participating in the study but could not attend the meetings because of their schedules.

After compiling this information, I looked for the frequency of similar and/or related answers from the questionnaires; this information was tallied, compared, and then summarized. The information that I obtained from the interviews was also summarized and compared to some of the strategies presented by other researchers. The last part of this project presents possible strategies that churches can use as ways to re-engage and disciple millennials. It is suggested that the church emphasis should not just be on adding numbers, but on making disciples who will in turn make other disciples and, possibly, become members of a thriving faith community that is willing to embrace the gifts, ideas, and energy of the millennial generation.

Definitions

Ethnography: "Ethnography is a social scientific research method. It relies heavily on the researcher's up-close, personal experience and possible participation, not just observation."[20]

Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME): This denomination was first known as, "The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America, which was organized in 1870." After a name change in 1954, it is currently known as "The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church," and is a predominantly black denomination.[21]

Disciple: The Greek term μαθητής (*mathētēs*) refers generally to any "student," "pupil," "apprentice," or "adherent," as opposed to a "teacher." In the ancient world, however,

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[20] Michael Genzuk, "A Synthesis of Ethnographic Research," Accessed December 8, 2015, www. bcf.usc.edu.

[21] Lakey, *History of the CME Church,* 23.

the term is most often associated with people who were devoted followers of a great religious leader or teacher of philosophy.[22] For the purpose of this study, the term draws on the history of the church's call to make disciples who follow the example of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

The Millennial Generation: These are people born between 1980 and 2000.

Young Adults: According to the CME church, young adults are persons between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. For the purpose of this study, young adults will also be defined as millennials between the ages of twenty-two and thirty-five.

Emerging adults: Psychologist Jeffery Jensen Arnett is credited with creating this terminology to refer to young adults of ages 18-29.[23] Millennials also fall into this age group and may also be referred to as emerging adults in this study.

The Black Church: Refers to a predominantly black/African American denominational institution.

The Church: A building for Christian worship; a congregation of Christians, a body of Christians with a common faith or denomination.[24] In this study "church" will be used to refer to the denomination.

Congregation: Refers to members of a specific Christian church.

Names of Generations: and the birth years ascribed to them:

- The Silent generation/The Builders – born between 1925 and 1946
- The Baby Boomers – born between 1946 and 1964

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[22] "Understanding the Meaning of the term Disciple," Bible.org, Accessed March 3, 2016, https://bible.org/seriespage/2-understanding-meaning-term-disciple

[23] Jeffery Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2015), Kindle, viii.

[24]*The New International Webster's Concise Dictionary of the English Language*, 126.

- Generation X — those born between 1965 and 1983

The Millennial Generation – those born after 1984, according to this study. Other studies define the millennial birth years as 1980 to 2000. [25]

Senior adults: people over 40.

Mainline Protestant denominations: "The Mainline Protestant churches are a group of Protestant churches in the United States that contrast in history and practice with evangelical, fundamentalist, and charismatic Protestant groups. Mainline Protestants were a majority of all churchgoers in the United States until the early 20th century, but now constitute a minority among Protestants. Mainline churches include The United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church, the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America, among others."[26]

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[25] See also, "Millennials Outnumber Baby Boomers and Are Far More Diverse, Census Bureau Reports", accessed February 22, 2016, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2015/cb15-113.html?cssp=SERP

[26] "Definitions," Accessed March 3, 2016, Mainline Protestant Definitions, *The New International Webster's Concise Dictionary of the English Language*, 126.

CHAPTER II

MINISTRY IN CONTEXT

The History of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Denomination

The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (CME)[1] was organized in 1870. At its

inception "the CME church consisted of Negroes who, while slaves, had been members

of the Methodist Episcopal Church, [in the] south."[2] It was their intention "to organize a

separate and independent church for colored persons who had been members of the white

church while they were slaves, and who chose to remain in it in order to get their own

independent church upon the authority and goodwill of the white church."[3] "From its

earliest days, the CME denomination has had a rich history of educating young men and

women to become contributing members of society."[4] "Currently, the CME

denomination has four affiliations with liberal arts colleges and one seminary. These are

Lane College in Jackson, TN; Miles College in Fairfield, AL; Paine College in Augusta,

GA; Texas College in Tyler, TX; and Phillips School of Theology at the

Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia.[5] In addition to its focus on

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[1] Originally named the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America in 1870, the name changed in 1954 to the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

[2] Lakey, *The History of the CME Church*, 15.

[3] Ibid, 24.

[4] Ibid, 438.

[5] The CME Church, "C.M.E. Affiliated Educational Institutions," accessed December 6, 2015, http://www.thecmechurch.org/educationalinstitutions.htm

education, "the CME church has planted churches in the United States as well as in

Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Haiti, and Jamaica"[6].

Another important feature of the CME church is its hierarchal structure and

itinerant ministry appointments.[7] The polity of the CME church is episcopal in nature,

with bishops having the highest level of authority. The bishops make all the annual

pastoral appointments. The next level of authority after the bishop is the Presiding Elder

who reports to the bishop and oversees the local churches. All CME churches are held to

the same code of conduct, which is outlined in the denomination's *Book of Discipline*.

The *Book of Discipline* serves as a procedural manual for the CME church, and for this

reason, the uniformity of the church structure lends itself to what is termed a

connectional church.

On a national level, membership of the CME church remains small compared to

other Methodist affiliates (United Methodist, African Episcopal, African Episcopal Zion)

as recorded by the World Council of Churches.[8] According to the World Council of

Churches' latest website report, "the number of CME adherents in the United States was

holding at 858, 670, and there appears to be an even widening gap between an ageing

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[6] The CME Church, "C.M.E. Affiliated Educational Institutions," accessed December 6, 2015, http://www.thecmechurch.org/educationalinstitutions.htm

[7] Pastors are appointed to churches on an annual basis.

[8] "World Council of Churches: Christian Methodist Episcopal Church," Accessed February 16, 2016 http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/christian-methodist-episcopal-church. These are the latest numbers that the researcher has located. According to the Religious Congregations and Membership Study, 2000 (Counties File), national totals had not been reported by the denomination. Accessed February 16, 2016. http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/RCMSCY.asp. The 2015 Hartford Seminary report gives a number of 800,00; and the 2012 US Census reports membership at 850,00. There was no breakdown for age.

population of members and the youth and young adult population."[9] An inconsistency

with the reporting of the denominations' membership has to do with the way individual

churches report membership changes annually. Every year before the annual conference,

each pastor is required to submit an End-of-Year report on his or her church to the

Presiding Elder. The report includes a section for members added during the year and one

for existing members. Pastors are also instructed not to purge their church rosters of

former members who are no longer attending, except for those who died over the course

of the year. For this reason, church totals would be inaccurate even if they were available.

During the three years that I assisted with compiling the report as pastor of Linden-Shorts

CME church, the numbers for the district were never published for the pastors to review.

Further, during the time that I attended the conferences, Pastors' Reports were given

verbally, but a tally of new members was not a required part of this report. Consequently,

this study does not have a baseline number of young adult membership as a valid starting

point to substantiate the decline in young adult attendance. Instead, the researcher used

observation and national studies in order to support and validate the investigation as to

why the millennials are not active members of the CME church.

With this background in mind, we can now turn on to the local church that I

served for three years.

Linden-Shorts CME Church

Linden-Shorts CME church was first organized in 1925 with the same pride and

distinction that heralded the CME denomination in the nineteenth century. It was an

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[9]"World Council of Churches: Christian Methodist Episcopal Church," Accessed February 16, 2016.

independent Methodist church established for working-class colored people who lived in the city of Atlanta, and soon became the center of their lives. As the city of Atlanta expanded and the congregation grew, the church moved to its current location, 710 Commercial Avenue NW, Atlanta, GA.[10]

Linden-Shorts CME church is located in north-west Atlanta and is one of thirty-six churches within the Atlanta-Rome/Georgia North region of the CME denomination.[11] It is historically a black protestant church, located in a predominantly African-American community.[12] Linden-Shorts CME church is currently in its third location since the church was established. Originally, the church was established in 1925 in the city of Atlanta. The church moved to its second site in Atlanta in 1951. In 1965 the church moved again to its current location at 710 Commercial Avenue NW, Atlanta. Linden-Shorts sits in a community wedged between two major thoroughfares, Hamilton E. Holmes Parkway and Donald Hollowell Parkway (once known as Bankhead Highway). Both of these highways are named after prominent African Americans, which speaks to the fact that the area has a predominantly Black population.

The community which forms the church environment is known as the Center Hill/Carey Park community, a predominantly African American area of Atlanta. A brief tour of this community today reveals a neighborhood that has gone through some major transitions since 1970 when the church moved to this location. There are no major

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[10] Linden-Shorts CME Church moved from inner city Atlanta to the current location in 1965.

[11] The Atlanta-Rome district is a region within the state of Georgia for the Christian Methodist Episcopal denomination, and a presiding bishop presides over the state of Georgia.

[12] The surrounding community of Linden-Shorts is predominantly African American. The church is nestled in between two major thoroughfares, Donald Hollowell Parkway (once known as Bankhead Highway) and Hamilton E. Holmes.

businesses within a ten-mile radius of the church, only check-cashing stores, gas stations, sub-standard grocery stores, and a few other run-down shops. The surrounding neighborhood homes show much wear and tear, and the homes closest to the church range from abandoned to renter real estate, with little investment in upkeep and appearance. This, however, is only a personal impression gained from riding through the community. Additional documented demographics would be important to gather when pastors and congregations make plans to evangelize the area.

Linden-Shorts CME church is one of many churches in this area. Directly behind Linden-Shorts is Faith Baptist Church, and less than five miles from Linden-Shorts is another CME church. Another factor which might influence the number of millennials in attendance on any given Sunday is the abundance of church choices in the immediate area of the Linden-Shorts church. Nevertheless, the following demographics represent the Linden-Shorts surrounding community. The *Neighborhood Scout* gives the following analysis of the current community:

- Many of the residences in the Center Hill/ Carey Park area were built between 1940-1969; others were built between 1970 and 1999.

- Vacant apartments or homes are a major fact of life in the Center Hill/ Carey Park area. Most of the housing is vacant year round.

- 22.9% of the neighborhoods' households are run by single mothers, which is a higher concentration than Neighborhood Scout found in 97.6% of American neighborhoods.

- The neighbors in the Center Hill/ Carey Park area have low incomes; it is among the lowest income neighborhoods in America.[13]

- The racial make-up of the Center Hill/ Carey Park is 54.0% black; 38.4% white; 5.2% Hispanic or Latino; and 3.1% Asian.[14]

- The age distribution is 10.3% under five; 21.8% is 5-17; 18.3% is 18-29; 16.9% is 30-44; 18.7% is 45-64; and 14.1% is 65+.[15]

While these statics represent the community where the church is located, they are not indicative of the church membership. The racial make-up of Linden-Shorts is 100% African American. There were no evangelistic efforts to change this dynamic during the time of my ministry there. The majority of the members live in suburban areas of Atlanta, commuting from Lithonia, Decatur, Douglasville, College Park, and East Point. A few of the senior adults still live in the surrounding neighborhood; and five families in the church were still residing in this neighborhood at the time of this study.

The members attend Sunday morning worship, some attend Wednesday night Bible study, and other activities are held mostly on Saturdays. There were no ministries that reached out beyond the walls of the church during the first two years of this study. During the third year of the study, I encouraged the congregation to look at opportunities to reach out to the community. Based on conversations with some of the leaders of the church, the neighborhood was apparently somewhat intimidating to the congregation.

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[13] "About This Neighborhood," Accessed March 3, 2016, Neighborhood Scout, http://neighborhoodscout.com/reports/19833992

[14] "United States Census Bureau: Quick Facts," Accessed March 7, 2016, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/RHI205210/1304000. 2010 totals.

[15] Ibid.

Two identified drug houses were in close proximity to the church, and several times cars

were broken into during morning worship, evening Bible study, or afternoon programs.

Foot traffic through the church parking lot was also a concern to the congregation. People

in the community used the parking lot of the church as a path from the surrounding

streets to get to the main road, Donald Hollowell Parkway. During my pastorate, I

suggested that the congregation reach out to the community members who walked across

the lot as a sign of concern and in attempt to engage the surrounding community. The

more senior members were somewhat hesitant about engaging in this type of ministry,

because, as several of them stated, "we are not comfortable approaching the people who

walk across the church parking lot." In short, such dialogue was futile because members

were afraid of the community.[16] Finally, after discussing the benefits of reaching out to

the community, some of the men of the church agreed to consider walking the streets and

introducing themselves to the community to better acquaint themselves with the

community and pass out information about the church.[17]

Ministry Issue

The millennial population is almost non-existent at Linden-Shorts. During the

three years that I was a part of this congregation, there were only five millennials who

attended church regularly. Over the course of the three years the numbers increased to

seven regulars, along with four other millennials who began to appear more frequently

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[16] Members' fear of this neighborhood is a reality based on the reported high crime, vacant property, and drug activity they witnessed.

[17] I suggested that if the congregation reached out to the community and if the community felt that the church was sincerely interested in them, then maybe some of them might visit the church. I also suggested that this reaching out to community might deter some of the vandalism to the church and to our cars.

for worship and special programs. When my appointment at Linden-Shorts ended, three millennials left the church and it has been reported to me that the millennials who left do not intend to return.[18] Unfortunately, the system of itinerant appointments for pastors has not been very helpful for the stability, growth, and evangelistic efforts of this congregation.[19]

Moreover, when I arrived at Linden-Shorts CME church three years ago in 2012, it was apparent that the congregation was aging and that the millennials were few in number. No evangelistic efforts were in place, and the millennials who infrequently attended did not fully understand why pastors were always coming and going. Perhaps because of the frequent pastoral arrivals and departures, many of the congregational leaders had been in their positions for a number of years and did not feel the need to relinquish these positions or involve the millennials in leadership. During my second and third year, I had a sincere desire to begin to build a relationship with the millennials, and try to understand what the more senior adults in the congregation could do to better encourage, support, and engage them in the life of the church. This effort started with me involving them in worship on the second Sunday of each month and through off-site fellowship. In the third year, I was appointed to Linden-Shorts as Senior Pastor and I really felt that this would be a great opportunity for me to suggest a more intergenerational church program that would promote millennials' more actively

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[18] Building relationships is an important developmental process for young adults. It took me two years to gain the trust of the millennials at Linden-Shorts. When I was reassigned after serving as senior pastor for one year, several millennials shared that they would no longer attend Linden-Shorts CME Church. According to some of the millennials in my focus group, "each time we get a pastor we can relate to, the pastor is moved."

[19] Part of the Methodist tradition is to appoint pastors for one year at a time. Linden-Shorts CME church has had five different pastors in ten years.

involvement in the life of the church, including them working with senior leaders both in leadership positions and also simply to develop into spiritually mature disciples of Christ.

In addition to my focus on the small number of millennials who attended Linden-Shorts, I also recognized that the absence of millennials from church in general was more common and pervasive than I had imagined. Whenever I visited other churches, attended CME conferences, and other CME functions, millennials were either few in number or absent. For this reason, further research pertaining to the millennial generation and their involvement or lack of involvement in the institutional church became the impetus for this study. The primary focus that emerged was on why the millennial generation's attendance and participation in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church was so inconsistent and what could be done to reverse this trend.

CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework for this study is based on church attendance and

church involvement patterns of the millennial generation in an inner city church. The

methodology for this study, which is applied ethnography, supports this framework.

Ethnography is a social scientific research method, and literally means "a portrait of

people."[1] The portrait that I have painted for this study is related to the declining church

attendance of millennials over a three year period and their lack of committed

involvement in other church related activities. Observations, conversations, and a review

of literature guided my research questions. The research questions focused on three

aspects related to the low weekly church attendance. The initial findings from the focus

group also support this research; it was through the millennials' personal experiences that

I was able to develop an understanding of their perceptions about their own church

attendance and their expectation of the congregation and the church leaders. Through

additional observations and conversations with other millennials and pastors of other

CME churches, I discovered that the low attendance by millennials at Linden-Shorts was

a pattern common throughout the denomination.

With this in mind I used applied ethnography as a way to involve myself in the

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[1] Genzuk, A *Synthesis of Ethnographic Research* accessed February 8, 2016, http://www-bcf.usc.edu/~genzuk/Ethnographic_Research.html

daily lives of this small group of millennials in order to study their reasons for their

inconsistent church attendance as well as their lack of interest in other church activities.

The literature presented for this chapter addresses attendance patterns and church

affiliation trends of millennials. Current studies answer the concerns that pastors and

congregation perceive as an inconsistency of religious commitment within the mainline

denominations. The literature also addresses what congregations can do differently in

order to disciple young adults. In addition to the research questions that I have formulated

for this study, the following statement from the CME Church website underscores the

significance of this study.

> When we talk about Young Adult Ministry two areas of concern come to mind.
> First, the congregation's acceptance of Young Adults as a vital part of the church
> by including them in the overall ministry plan of the church. Secondly, how do we
> provide ministry to Young Adults that is relevant and meets their specific needs?[2]

With this in mind and the information gathered from the focus group, observations,

conversations and research, I found that the review of literature further supported my

hypothesis that if congregational leaders/pastors become intentional and informed about

the needs of the millennial generation, and support them through intergenerational

activities, the attendance of millennials in Sunday morning worship and church activities

might increase.

Literature Review

> Although most children in the United States are raised in a faith tradition,
> their outward religious expression declines significantly by the time they
> are in their twenties, even though many claim religion and spirituality to
> be important.[3]

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[2] Young Adult Ministry, Christian Methodist Episcopal Department of Christian Education,
Accessed May 2015, http://www.thecmechurched.org/Pages/Young Adult.aspx.

[3] Carolyn McNamara Barry and Mona M. Abo-Zena, *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and
Spirituality: Meaning-Making in an Age of Transition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

The first section of the literature reviews the arguments that psychologists have made in regards to the life stage of millennials and how this life stage is shaping the views and behaviors of millennials and organized religion. The second section offers a perspective on this same phenomenon through the lens of sociology. Sociologists have determined that the behavior of millennials in regards to participation in religious organizations such as church is greatly influenced by social events.[4] In addition to these areas of study, national trends that have been recently published will be presented in order to show that the declining attendance of millennials in religious institutions cuts across denominations, and that the numbers are increasing. The last section of the literature review is a biblical perspective, which reminds us that church leaders have a responsibility to nurture, guide, and disciple all generations in the church. Theological considerations from an African America perspective will support the importance of the Black church for the millennials, and the final section reviews studies which have been conducted by other researchers who are also looking for ways to engage and support the millennial generation in the church.

Young adults' lukewarm participation in the institutional church is endemic. Therefore, the review of literature presented in this section is relevant to the CME church's millennials' absenteeism from the church denomination-wide. The following studies offer findings that have implications for why the millennials are finding religious institutions less attractive than did previous generations. Although these studies were not

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Research in this book affirms the findings of my study. This book suggests that this third decade of life is the critical stage for the development of religious and spiritual identity.

[4] See Robert Wuthow in *After the Baby Boomers*, and David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling in *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood.*

conducted specifically to address millennials and their religious issues, this information is central to why the millennial generation's religious affiliations are largely either declining or completely non-existent. What these psychologists contribute to the research suggests how the millennial generation's social trends and cultural influences shape their worldviews, and how their worldviews in turn influence their perceptions of spirituality as well as their affiliation (or lack of affiliation) with religious institutions.

Empirical Literature

In *Emerging Adulthood,* psychologist Jeffery Arnett looks at the behaviors of emerging adults in relation to religion as a part of a more comprehensive study that focuses on the experiences of "emerging adults" and what it means to be an adult in America. "In 2000, Arnett posited a new life stage —'emerging adulthood'—to describe the growing chasm between adolescence and the completion of traditional adult milestones."[5] Arnett suggests that "emerging adults" is a better description for young adults because they are still developing into the roles that are usually associated with adulthood.[6] In the section of his study that addresses religious beliefs in emerging adults, Arnett argues that the "beliefs of emerging adults are stronger than their behavior; 44% reported that religious faith is "very" or "extremely" important in their lives; and 75%

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[5] David Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), Kindle, 3.

[6] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *The Winding Road From the Late Teens Through the Twenties: Emerging Adulthood* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), *1*. Jenzen explains that, "In 1960 the typical 21-year-old was married or about to be married, they were either done with education or would soon be done. They were settling into jobs or into long-term parenting roles. Young people of that time grew up quickly and made serious and enduring choices about their lives at a relatively young age. Today, the life of a 21-year old is very different. Marriage and parenthood are at least six years off. Education may last several more years —job changes are frequent, as young people look for work that not only pays well but will be more fulfilling."

reported believing in God. According to Arnett, "emerging adults tend to personalize their relationship with God in a way that makes participating in organized religion unnecessary or even an impediment to the expression of their beliefs."[7] Emerging adults, he suggests, "are therefore skeptical of religious institutions and wary of being a part of one, which makes religious participation much less important to emerging adults than their religious beliefs are."[8] In addition to the fact that emerging adults appear to be less interested in religious institutions, Arnett also proposes that in the "emerging adult's period of developing into full adulthood, just as the identity development in love and work is critical, forming a worldview becomes even more intensive and serious in emerging adulthood."[9] Thus the shaping of the individual's worldview, Arnett suggests, "invariably includes religious beliefs, which appear to be a universal part of identity development."[10] Arnett believes that "few people enter emerging adulthood at age 18 with a well-established worldview; but few people leave their twenties without one, just as few people leave their twenties without a definite direction in love and work."[11] If making meaning out of life and developing a worldview begins to take shape during the eighteen to twenty-something years, the impact of spiritual formation and the opportunity for congregations to assist with this development becomes very necessary. It becomes a time when congregational leaders could foster opportunities that would assist millennials with the development of their worldviews; if leaders are ignorant about this aspect of the

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[7]Ibid, 219.

[8] Ibid, 218.

[9] Ibid, 211.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Arnett, *The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties: Emerging Adulthood*, 212.

developmental stage, or uninvolved in it, the church's role can be more detrimental than helpful.

Psychologist Jean M. Twenge, in *Generation Me*, leans more than Arnett towards one's culture having a strong impact on the shaping of one's worldview and religious attitudes. Twenge's contribution to the body of research could definitely benefit church leaders in understanding millennials and how culture shapes their worldview, which may also influence the millennials' understanding of religion and religious affiliations with religious institutions. Unlike Arnett, however, Twenge argues that the decline in millennial involvement with the church is more cultural than developmental.[12] In *Generation Me*, Twenge claims that "when a person is born dictates the culture one will experience, and that culture will shape much of the person's behavior, which includes social trends, technology, the economy, behavioral norms, and values. The society that molds a person stays with them throughout life."[13] Twenge notes that "because millennials do not ascribe to one right way of doing things, and they are less trusting than past generations with the church, trusting in God and government."[14] Further, according to Twenge's research, "the overall American religious commitment has declined precipitously, especially since 2000. The number of millennials entering college, she reports, who named themselves as 'none' in response to their religious affiliation, tripled between 1983 and 2012, and more young teens are growing up without religion in their

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[12]Jean M. Twenge, *Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled —and More Miserable than Ever Before* (New York, NY: Atria Books, 2006), 2.

[13] Twenge, *Generation Me*, 2.

[14] Ibid, 34.

lives."[15] Thus Twenge attributes "the decline to two significant mechanisms: more teens are being raised by non-religious parents, and young people are leaving religion as they grow into young adulthood, which can be attributed to them losing faith in religious institutions."[16]

Arnett and Twenge's research has great implications for congregational leaders and for their understanding of the millennial generation and the culture in which they operate. The CME denomination, in particular, is steeped in traditions that millennials may find stifling to their creativity and desire to be involved. Furthermore, as the CME church continues to focus on raising financial assessments instead of, intentionally involving and supporting millennials, the numbers of millennials attending church may continue to decrease. Not necessarily for lack of interest in the church, but for lack of relevant exposure to the essence of the church's purpose and teaching.

Based on the findings of these two psychologists, one can conclude that the CME church must understand that the millennials are literally seeing things from a totally different perspective than previous generations. They will not become a part of religious institutions just because their parents have been a part of one. Nor will they uphold traditions that have no meaning for them. To attract the millennials, the CME church may need to assist millennials in developing their worldview based on the positive messages found in scripture and the spiritual practices and fellowship experienced in community. Sociologists have also studied how the millennial generation is impacted by social trends

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[15] Ibid, 42.

[16] Ibid, 43.

and the age of technology. In *Why More Americans Have No Religious Preference: Politics and Generations*, Michael Hout and Claude S. Fisher argue that

> The minority of adults who prefer no religion doubled from 7 percent to 14 percent between 1991 and 2000. The very small (but growing) segment of the population raised without religion quit joining churches (for the most part), and between 5 and 7 percent of Americans raised in a Christian tradition, especially in cohorts that came of age in the 1960s and their offspring, left organized religion.[17]

These findings support the theory that as the older generations (the Boomers and the Silent Generation) die out, they are not being replaced in churches by the younger millennial cohort.[18] Yet this progression of the religiously unaffiliated did not start with the millennials. Hout and Fisher report that the decline started as early as the 1990s, which was before the first millennials graduated from high school. If this trend towards being religiously unaffiliated started with the parents of the millennials, some percentages of the millennial generation may not have any religious background to connect them to a religious organization. Yet Hout and Fisher also argue that the non-affiliates of religion generally have not distanced themselves from God, just from organized religion.[19]

Robert Wuthnow is another sociologist who adds to the body of research on generational differences and the effects of these social differences upon religious practices of the millennial generation. In his most recent work, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*, Wuthnow

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[17] Michael Hout and Claude S. Fischer, *Why more Americans have no religious preference: Politics and generations*. American Sociological Review 67, no. 2 (2002): 165-190, https://login.ezproxy.auctr.edu:2050/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/218769128?accountid=8422.

[18] Sociologists define the Baby Boomers as a cohort born between 1946 and 1964.

[19] Hout and Fischer, *Why more Americans have no religious preference*, no. 2: 165-190.

suggests that several social factors influence church attendance in young adults. Some of the most significant factors he identifies may determine whether and when young adults attend worship services and whether young adults commit to a church community.[20]

Here I look at three of these factors in particular. The first is "changing marital patterns among younger adults [that] are adversely affecting religious attendance. Those who do not marry or who do not remain married are not only less likely to attend religious services regularly than those who are married."[21] The second factor that may impact church attendance and affiliation is related to first point in that if young adults wait to marry later or not at all, they may also wait to have children or they may decide not to have children at all. Wuthnow also considers that "having children and wanting to set a good example for them is one of the reasons to go to church." In addition to this, "a growing number of younger adults have children out of wedlock or raise them as divorced parents, and these different patterns of parenting may be associated with the propensities to participate in religious congregations."[22] "The third and final factor Wuthnow identifies is that of employment patterns; religious participation may be impacted by more women being employed full-time and having less time to devote to religion."[23]

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[20] Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), Kindle, 1583.

[21]Ibid.

[22] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers,* 1608.

[23] Ibid. "[T]he decrease in church affiliation may have little to do with the amount of hour's women work or whether they work full-time or part-time. What may be significant is that "one's social relationships form more through the workplace than in other settings, such as in congregations." 1662.

In the study, "Religious Resources or Differential Returns?" Brandon

Vaidyanathan reports that "declining religious service attendance during the transition

from adolescence into young adulthood is a consistent finding across traditions."[24]

Vaidyanathan attributes this to,

> 1) Limited scholarly attention to these trends based on denominational
> differences, and 2) the fact that most studies focus on factors from later life
> stages, such as the effects of college attendance, marriage, having children, etc.[25]

Thus, Vaidyanathan suggests that, "the influence of parents, church, religious

education, and peer groups have important enduring effects on religiosity in young

adulthood, which then considers proximate factors as long term ones as a way to disciple

young adults."[26]

We turn now to look at the issue of low church attendance and low church

involvement of millennials from the perspective of African American scholars.

Sociologists C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya in their study, *The Black Church in*

the African American Experience, report that there is growing concern in the black

communities of underclass black teenagers and young adults. Lincoln and Mamiya report

that "the church can no longer assume that the black poor in the future will continue to be

loyal churchgoers as they have been in the past."[27] Their research suggests that Black

churches will need to continue to seek out this declining population as well. Instead of

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[24] Brandon Vaidyanathan, "Religious Resources or Differential Returns? Early Religious Socialization and Declining Attendance in Emerging Adulthood." Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 50, no. 2: 366-387. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed March 14, 2016).

[25] Vaidyanathan, "Religious Resources or Differential Returns?"

[26] Brandon Vaidyanathan, "Religious Resources or Differential Returns?"

[27] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1990), 6082, Kindle.

waiting for the poor and even the middle class to feel the need to come to the church, the church will need to be intentional in reaching out to this population.

One of the programs and techniques that Lincoln and Mamiya found successful in their study was "the use of music training programs; choirs, concerts and vocal and instrumental forms of training."[28] When church leaders tap into the interest and needs of young adults and offer them programs and opportunities to express their interest within the context of the church, Lincoln and Mamiya suggest that "the church then becomes a means for youth and young adults to escape from a 'ghetto existence.' "[29] This, however, does not happen just because a church offers programs and opportunities that interest this population. The building of relationships through these programs and opportunities is the key to attracting the millennials, and bringing them into the church.

National Trends

National surveys attest to the growing number of millennials who do not attend worship services regularly but who have not dismissed the idea of spirituality and the existence of God. One of the national studies that addressed the apparent decline in religious affiliation of millennials with organized religion is the *American Religious Identification Survey 2008.* "The *American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) 2008* is (another) random digit dialed (RDD) survey of a nationally representative sample of 54,461 adults." Of the 54,461 people surveyed, "7,407 people identified themselves as

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[28] Lincoln and Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American*, 6087.
[29] Ibid.

'Nones,' or as not belonging to any specific religion.[30] According to the report, "there are some characteristics that distinguish the Nones from the general U.S. population, but two stand out, gender and age. Nones are disproportionately male, 60%, while women actually make up a slight majority of the general U.S. population, 51%." Further, the study suggests that "Nones are significantly younger than the general population: 30% are under age 30 and only 5% are 70 years or older."[31]

This survey, however, like the Pew Research Survey, suggests that "blacks are slightly less likely to be Nones; but based on these findings, the gap is small between black Nones and other ethnicities. Another interesting finding from this study is that "73% of those reported as Nones emerged from religious homes."[32]

Although this study was not directly and exclusively related to the millennial population and their religious affiliations, the findings may be pertinent as the millennial generation becomes the senior generation in the next twenty years, given that the oldest millennials are now over thirty years old. Therefore, the concluding summary from this report is worth considering.

> In many ways, the *Nones* are the invisible minority in the U.S. today—invisible because their social characteristics are very similar to the majority. What this may suggest is that the transition from a largely religious population to a more secular population may be so subtle that it can occur under the radar, as happened in the 1990s. In the future we can expect more American *Nones* given 22% of the younger cohort of adults self-identify as *Nones* and they will become tomorrow's parents. If current

[30] Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, "American Religious Identification Survey: Summary Report 2009," Accessed April 9, 2016, http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf

[31] Ibid.

[32] Kosmin and Keysar, "American Religious Identification Survey." http://commons.trincoll.edu/aris/files/2011/08/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf

trends continue and cohorts of non-religious young people replace older religious people, the likely outcome is that in two decades the *Nones* could account for around one-quarter of the American population.

The Pew Research Center and the Barna Group are also leaders in national research on the millennials and religion, with a study from the Pew Research Center being one of the most quoted studies in the literature that I reviewed.[33] Although both groups provide extensive data, little of the data deals specifically with the African American population. Therefore, the information provided by these studies reveals the perspective of the general population, and the apparent decline and low number of millennials who attend religious services, in addition to the small percentage of millennials who are no longer affiliated with religious organizations.

Over the past ten years, the Pew Research Center has conducted two specific studies which mentioned the decline of church affiliation among millennials. The two studies that the Pew Research Center conducted were also larger studies which addressed the *Religious Landscape and Trends of Religion in America*.[34] Most of these surveys were random samples of people from various denominations and backgrounds, and the data regarding millennials was a part of a larger sample.[35] Based on the findings of this

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[33] "Pew Research Center is a nonpartisan fact tank that informs the public about the issues, attitudes, and trends shaping America and the world. We conduct public opinion polling, demographic research, content analysis and other data-driven social science research." Accessed February 5, 2016, http://www.pewresearch.org/about/ "The Barna Group is a visionary research and resource company that has conducted more than one million interviews over the course of hundreds of studies, and has become a go-to source for insights about faith and culture, leadership and vocation, and generations." Accessed February 5, 2016, https://www.barna.org/

[34] Two studies were conducted that yielded statistical data regarding the religious practices of millennials young adults. A 2007 study, "A Brief History of Religion and the U.S. Census," and the 2014 study, "America's Changing Landscape," was a follow-up to that of 2007. From these studies separate reports where generated discussing the religions trends of the millennial generation.

[35] America's Religious Changing Landscape: Christians Decline Sharply as Share of Population; Unaffiliated and Other Faiths Continue to Grow. Accessed 2/5/2016, http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/

national study, "one of the major factors affecting religious affiliation and the possible decline in mainline congregations is the rising numbers of Nones."[36] Further findings of this same report suggests that "as the millennial generation enters adulthood, its members display much lower levels of religious affiliation, including less connection with Christian churches, than older generations."[37] According to this study, it is speculated that some millennials will pursue religious affiliation when they are older, although as of this report "older millennials have not become substantially more likely to participate in small-group religious activities or say they rely on religious guidance on questions of right and wrong."[38] The question that this study raises is: What impact do these statistics have on congregations that are struggling to make an impact on the millennials who currently are still in their congregations, as well as on the millennials who are religiously unaffiliated? This report sheds light on a national problem, not just a local church problem, nor just a denominational problem.

The Barna Group's study may offer some insights to congregations who find themselves affected by these national trends. According to its study, *Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church,* published in September 2011, there was no one particular reason why young adults leave the church. Quite a variety of reasons were noted, but six

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Pew Research Center, "America's Religious Changing Landscape." This study also suggests that 36% of young Millennials (those between the ages of 18 and 24) are religiously unaffiliated, as are 34% of older Millennials (ages 25-33). And fewer than six-in-ten Millennials identify with any branch of Christianity, compared with seven-in-ten or more among older generations, including Baby Boomers and Gen-Xers.

[38] Ibid, , http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/
14 of 31.

significant themes were reported and published,[39] themes that are very different from the research discussed in the Pew Research study. These six reasons for young adults leaving the church can offer congregations a starting point for dialogue and inquiry with the current millennial population and the older generations as well. The methodology, however, was very similar in that both studies conducted surveys via home phone and cell phone interviews. The six reasons this study summarized as follows:

1. Churches seem overprotective

2. Teens and twenty somethings' experience of Christianity is shallow

3. Churches come across as antagonistic to science

4. Young Christians' church experiences related to sexuality are often simplistic, judgmental

5. [Millennials] wrestle with the exclusive nature of Christianity

6. The church feels unfriendly to those who doubt. [40]

David Kinnaman, President of the Barna Group, extended the research from *Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church*, with a more in-depth study in his book, *You Lost Me*. Kinnaman's study for this research project and book consisted primarily of telephone and face-to-face interviews with young adults ages 18-29. In addition to the interviews, on-line surveys were also administered. During this multi-year study (2007-2011), Kinnaman discovered several valuable considerations for churches who are concerned about meeting the needs of this age group. Among those findings, Kinnaman

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[39] "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church." Accessed February 5, 2016, https://www.barna.org/barna-update/millennials/528-six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church#.VucQaNiZ9p4

[40] "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church"; see the six characteristics listed above.

identified "three groups of young adults which he categorized as being lost: "nomads,

prodigals, and exiles."[41] Kinnaman reported that many young adults talk about "being

dis-engaged from the church—and sometimes from Christianity altogether. Many say

they grew up in the church and have since dropped out."[42] Kinnaman's research points

out what he calls gaps in the efforts of church/congregations to make disciples and pass

on the faith to the next generation. Kinnaman suggests that the three most significant

gaps are:

1. Relationships: many young adults feel that older adults don't

   understand their doubts and concerns, a prerequisite to rich mentoring

   friendships. Kinnaman reports that many of the young adults

   interviewed do not have older adult friendship except for their parents.

2. Vocation: many young adults are interested in serving in mainstream

   professions, such as science, law, media, technology, education, law

   enforcement, military, the arts—yet most receive little guidance from

   their church communities for how to connect these vocational dreams

   deeply with their faith in Christ.

3. Wisdom: helping the young adults to value wisdom over information

   is another gap for the church. Young adults are digital natives

   immersed in glossy pop culture that prefers speed over depth, sex over

   wholeness, and opinion over truth. Kinnaman asserts that becoming

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[41] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church...and Rethinking the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), Kindle, 292.

[42] Ibid., 65.

wise does not happen by simply "saying a prayer, or memorizing a list of dos and don'ts, nor by completing a six-week program. Churches must be invested for a lifetime process of deep transformation."[43]

Finally, Kinnaman restates that "the church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture."[44] In order to reverse the drop-out rate of young adults from the church, Kinnaman suggests that congregations must come to realize that this is a collective calling to love, support, accept, and partner with the next generation. There should be a rediscovery of intergenerational collaboration and there must be an awareness of global issues that affect the lives of this generation. Finally, churches must be willing to engage controversial issues and concerns such as sexual orientation, racism, unemployment rates, access to resources, and religious pluralism.[45]

In response to Kinnaman's study "Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church," Thom Rainer, president of Lifeway Christian resources, offers another perspective: "Six Ways Millennials Are Shaping the Church."[46] Rainer argues that "every new generation affects churches in America, and the millennial generation is not different."[47] In this article, Rainer suggest that the millennials are making some profound shifts in America's churches. Noting that, "There are fewer of them in church than in

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[43] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 343-391.

[44] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 197.

[45] Ibid., 366.

[46] Thom Rainer, "Six Ways Millennials Are Shaping The Church," Accessed March 14, 2016, ThomRainer.com, http://thomrainer.com/?s=Six+Ways+Millennials+Are+Shaping+the+Church+

[47] Ibid.

previous generations. No more than 20 percent attend church once a month or more,"

Rainer reports that the six most profound ways that millennials are shaping the church are

that:

1. There are fewer millennials in the church than in previous generations.
   While there are many millennials [based on this study], only one in five is
   in church today.
2. The millennials' desires for relationships are affecting the churches they
   choose to attend.
3. This generation is doctrinally serious. Christians among millennials care
   about doctrine.
4. The millennials are intensely community focused. They are more likely to
   be in a church where the leadership and the congregation care about and
   are involved in the community they serve.
5. This generation is already affecting the size of the worship gathering.
   Millennials are moving towards smaller informal gatherings, rather than
   the large worship services.
6. The millennials will check the facts of church life. This generation is
   somewhat of a doubting generation, and they have resources to check
   anything said or offered by churches.[48]

While I may not have witnessed all six of these shifts, I can attest to 1, 2, 5, and 6

from what I have observed in the CME church gatherings and from conversations with

millennials. The absence of millennials is evident based on this study. From the previous

research, we learn that millennials enjoy meaningful relationships and they are always

connected to someone via Facebook, Instagram, Snap Chat, etc., and they come to church

with their cell phones and will instantly Google information they hear from the pulpit.

Rainer's six ways in which millennials are shaping the church are not very

different for the reasons Kinnaman gives for millennials leaving the church. Millennials

are looking for congregations who are interested in building relationships with them and

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[48] Rainer, "Six Ways Millennials Are Shaping The Church."

who have a vested interest in their lives and their well-being, both spirituality and

emotionally. Millennials are "ideological, yet are committed to create a better future."

argues Mark Lindsey in "What Millennials Value."[49] "They want to be engaged in a

leadership model that reflects the organic nature of church —one that flows naturally

from the church context and recognizes all members in the process, including them—

rather than a more traditional organizational structure found in many aging churches."[50]

Operational Literature

This section offers additional research from the context of the church. These

researchers offer their findings in an effort to add to the body of research by offering

suggestions about steps they have taken to address the needs of the millennial generation

in either their denominations or their own churches.

In their book *From Jay-Z to Jesus: Reaching and Teaching Young Adults in the*

Black Church, Dr. Benjamin Stephens III, and Dr. Ralph C. Watkins looked at the issues

and concerns surrounding a "hip-hop generation," which they define as ages 18-39.[51]

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[49] Mark Lindsay, "What Millennials Value: Reversing the Departure Generation." Accessed March 14, 2016, Church Executive, http://churchexecutive.com/archives/what-millennials-value-reversing-the-departure-of-a-generation. Mark Lindsey serves as an Executive pastor at Shadowbrook church in Suwanee, Georgia. He hold an undergraduate degree in management, and a doctorate in leadership and administration.

[50] Lindsay, "What Millennials Value: Reversing the Departure Generation," http://churchexecutive.com/archives/what-millennials-value-reversing-the-departure-of-a-generation

[51] Stephen Stephens, III and Ralph C. Watkins, *From Jay-Z to Jesus: Reaching Young Adults in the Black Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), Questions from the Foreword (Loc. 21 of 1142, Kindle Edition).

In 2013, Dr. Stephens was appointed by Presiding Bishop Charles E. Blake Sr., as the Church of God in Christ International Youth and Young Adult President. Dr. Stephens is the co-author of the cutting edge book, *From Jay-Z to Jesus*. Dr. Stephens was selected by Charisma Magazine as one of the nation's top 21 emerging Christian leaders.

Ralph C. Watkins is an Associate professor of Evangelism and Church Growth at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.

Stephens and Watkins make the following suggestions to church leaders as they seek

ways to support and empower young adults within the church: "When planning a

program for young adults, the young adults should be a part of the process from start to

finish; and they don't need chaperones; they need mentors. It is also important to

remember that young adults must be treated with respect; they are no longer children."[52]

The third and most important consideration, argue Stephens and Watkins, is that

"young adults can energize the church. But in order to do so they must be a part of the

total life of the church, including worship. They should not be relegated to young adult

Sunday, they must be a part of every Sunday."[53]

Finally, Stephens and Watkins feel that it is important to seek out the young

adults in the church and in the community, "communicate with them openly and

honestly, and definitely train the young adults for leadership positions."[54] These

considerations may indeed inspire the millennials who are already in the church to remain

as a part of the congregation, as well as take an active role in the life of the church.

In the book *Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60*, Edward

Hammett and James Pierce offer a practical approach for building bridges in the church

between generations as one of the suggestions for evangelizing and making disciples of

the millennial generation. Hammett and Pierce's study is focused on meeting the needs of

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[52] Stephen Stephens, III and Ralph C. Watkins, *From Jay-Z to Jesus: Reaching Young Adults in the Black Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009), Questions from the Foreword (Loc. 21 of 1142, Kindle Edition).

[53] Ibid, 557-569.

[54] Ibid, 584.

every generation within the congregation. They argue that "congregations must realize that they can no longer function like they did in 1950. This is not to say that the biblical message should change, but there needs to be an altering of methodology so that those in our new world might be able to hear the good news in ways they can understand it and embrace it."[55] Therefore, Hammett and Pierce offer hope to churches by the following reminders to congregational leaders:

- The building is not the church, buildings need to be maintained, but people need to be transformed and sustained through all of life's stages.
- Give ministries time to work, and if they are not working at all, maybe it is time to go in another direction.
- The mission of the church is one of evangelism; it's connecting with the needs of the people and making and growing disciples through the sharing of the Good News.
- Church leaders must be reminded that church is not just for the believers, it was created to evangelize the non-believers as well. The millennials represent a population boom, but the churches' numbers are declining and the unchurched population in America has increased by 92% between 1991 and 2004.[56]

In his study, *Youth Ministry That Lasts: The Faith Journey of Young Adults,* Wesley Black makes suggestions for "pastors, parents, and youth ministers who are interested in better preparing Christian adolescents for active church involvement in

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[55] Edward H. Hammett and James R. Pierce, *Reaching People Under 40 While Keeping People Over 60: Being Church for All Generations* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007), Kindle, Loc. 293.

[56] Ibid, 3517-3590.

young adulthood."[57] Black's study reveals that "relationships play a major role in whether or not young adults attend church, in addition to:

1) Acceptance: which involves whether young adults perceive the church environment as supportive and loving;

2) Meaningful involvement: young adults want to feel that they are needed, and will therefore seek out places where they feel they can make a significant impact, and

3) An intergenerational approach is important: young adults are seeking the wisdom of older adults. Churches will need to look for opportunities to offer intergenerational activities and ministries.[58]

In addition to the previous studies, this final study is most closely related to the study that I have conducted. This thesis, *Why They Stop Attending Church: An Exploratory Study of Religious Participation Decline Among Millennials from Conservative Christian Backgrounds*, addresses the absences of millennials in mainline churches. In this study, Jessica Chase looks at the problem associated with "millennials from conservative Christian backgrounds, who stop attending the church."[59] She conducted interviews to determine why the millennials who were raised in the church stop attending church in their young adult years. Based on thirteen face-to-face

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[57] Wesley Black, "Youth Ministry That Lasts: The Faith Journey of Young Adults," in *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 4, no. 2 (2006): 19-48.

[58] Ibid, 44.

[59] Jessica Chase, *Why They Stop Attending Church: An Exploratory Study Of Religious Participation Decline Among Millennials From Conservative Christian Backgrounds* (Thesis, University of Central Florida, 2010), 2.

interviews, Chase determined that the millennials she interviewed left their churches because "the millennials feel that there is a spiritual and intellectual disconnect from Christianity, and 2) they view church as a hostile environment that is contrary to their well-being and that of other people."[60]

Theological Considerations

The theological considerations in this section derive from African Americans' experience of God within the Black church experience. Given the decline in church attendance of young adults in the CME church, what theological considerations address millennials in the Black church? How do they experience God? And how have theologians addressed the concerns of African American millennials in regards to the church?

According to Grant Shockley and Olivia Pearl Stokes in *Black Church Studies*, "while education is a tool of liberation, discipleship is both the aim and the means of education. Christian education in the Black Church continually calls children, youth, adults, and older adults to be disciples of Jesus."[61] Shockley and Stokes suggest that "disciples are to be lifelong learners who participate in the educational purpose and mission of the congregation with the intent of gaining new knowledge, insight, spiritual growth, and faith maturity."[62] It is therefore through this educational process in the Black church that "disciples challenge the status quo in an effort to transform, empower,

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[60] Chase, *Why They Stop Attending Church*, 61.

[61] Stacey Floyd Thomas, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 152.

[62] Floyd Thomas, *Black Church Studies: An Introduction* 153.

restore, and resist, bring about liberation and healing."[63]

As young adults attempt to navigate the social ills of racism, sexism, and classism, the Black church should indeed offer a safe place for these disparities in American culture to be heard and navigated, while using the stories in scripture to undergird the process of shaping a healthy worldview. Further, young adults have an opportunity to "understand that God is passionately, eternally, vigorously concerned about the flourishing of Black people. "This process of empowering God's people through education within the context of the congregation, report Shockley and Stokes, is not reserved for the church building; it is to move beyond the walls of the church to the larger society."[64]

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. offers theological insights which can be applied to the current predicament of the millennials and their habitual absences from the church. In the chapter "The Strength to Love," from the book, *A Testament of Hope,* King writes about the significance of the church.

> Millions of people do feel that the church provides an answer to the deep confusion that encompasses their lives. It is a place where the weary traveler can come and find bread. In this house (the church), the traveler seeks three types of bread. The bread of faith, the bread of hope, and the bread of love.[65]

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[63] Ibid, 175.

[64] Ibid.

[65] James M. Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.,* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1986), 499.

Dr. King ascribes the need for bread from the church to the tumultuous times, and describes what this bread offers to the weary traveler who is seeking to be fed. These are the three types of bread that churches must also offer millennials. In King's description of this bread, he suggests that "the bread of faith" supports the "bread of hope. In a world full of disappointments and disillusions, both hope and faith are needed as sustenance when power structures are corrupt and all hope is fleeting."[66] In addition to faith and hope, "there is also a deep longing for the bread of love. Everyone wishes to love and be loved."[67] King suggests further that "he who feels he is not loved feels that he does not count."[68]

The three types of bread that King suggests that the church offers he believed were often missing and so left members feeling disappointed. King goes on to say that the church must be known as a place of love and light; and "if it is not, then it becomes an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority."[69] This bread that King so passionately spoke of in his writings is the same bread that the millennial generation still seeks from the church. When they are not fed this bread, like other generations before them, they leave the church in search of bread from other places.

The developmental challenge that congregations face in supplying this bread of love, faith, and hope is seen when the generations collide as opposed to dialoguing and partnering in the church. Each generation needs the support of one another and when one

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[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid, 499.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid., 501.

generation is fed and another generation is starved, hope, faith and love are no longer developed in this setting. The following summaries of essays help to address this conceptof partnering among generations.

In *Black Practical Theology* edited by Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith, Jr., we are reminded that, "the aim of *Black Practical Theology* is to bring into dialogue with church and parachurch leaders in black communities' select scholars who are working within the constructive, biblical, and ethics disciplines of black theology and those scholars who work within practical theology and its customary subdisciplines."[70]

In "Bridging Civil Rights and Hip Hop Generations," Evelyn Parker suggests that "the problem of the contemporary generational divides between young people and elders in black churches and communities is primarily one of diverging worldviews."[71] According to Parker, the Black church leaders are often faced with trying to reconcile and minister to two opposing generations. The two opposing generations consists of two cohorts, the first born between 1965 and 1984, and the second cohort born between 1985 and 2000."[72] The second cohort would be defined as the millennial generation. In her essay, Parker asserts that the Hip Hop generation and the Civil Rights generation (born between 1929 and 1955) have very different worldviews and this difference in worldviews keeps the two generations at arm's length in the church. Several common

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[70] Dale P. Andrews and Robert London Smith, Jr., eds., *Black Practical Theology* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2015), 3. See the trends that have shaped the Hip Hop generation in Appendix B.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Evelyn Parker, "Bridging the Civil Rights and Hip Hop Generations" in *Black Practical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), "Bridging the Civil Rights and Hip Hop Generations, 20. In her essay Parker quoted Bakari Kitwana's work from his book, *The Hip Hop Generation*.

practices in the church, Parker suggests, contribute to this dilemma. The most prominent

is what Parker asserts is "demonization, disrespect, and disengagement on the part of the

black youth and older adults."[73] "When preachers and prominent entertainers demonize

black youth, from pulpits, on TV or radio, or in other public spaces, black youth will drop

out (stop coming) to the communal spaces (church) where they encounter older adults.

Still, Parker believes that there is hope for the two generations to "walk together," "if

they practice: listening together, learning from one another, and leaning on one

another."[74] Parker suggests that, "*walking together* offers a new metaphor for an

intergenerational approach to ministry among adults and young partners. *Walking*

together involves the praxis of listening, learning, and leaning so that black congregations

and communities led by their teens and adults, locked arm-in-arm, can sing together, *All*

along this pilgrim journey, I want Jesus to walk with me."[75] As the two generations

attempt to walk and sing with each other, "the Hip Hop and Civil Rights generations have

the assurance, says Parker that Jesus walks with them as well."[76]

This second summary is based on the research of James H. Evans, Jr., in his essay

"Rejoining Black Youth, Families, and Our Elders."[77] Evan's argument is based on his

belief that "theology, whether systematic or constructive, finds its reason for being in the

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[73] Ibid, 25. Parker notes the following characteristics as emblematic of the demonization of youth and young adults. For girls- Booty –clapping dances, being scantily clad, sexual promiscuous, and taking illegal drugs. For black boys – being dirty-mouthed, wearing saggy pants, dealing drugs, and being violent menaces to society.

[74] Ibid, 27.

[75] Ibid, 33-34.

[76] Parker, "Bridging the Civil Rights and Hip Hop Generations, 34.

[77] James H. Evans, Jr., *Rejoining Black Youth, Families, and Our Elders*, in *Black Practical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 35.

practical lives of people. All theology, he suggests, is to some degree, practical."[78] It is

from this position that Evans addresses "the problem of black youth, intergenerational

relations, and ageism, in relation to community."[79] Evans argues that "there is a growing

issue in the black churches, which he suggests is a result of the failure to enfranchise,

protect and nurture…young black men."[80] Thus he poses the question of "how black

theologians and practical theologians can work with black churches to engage black

youth and black men to break the various cycles of violence and crime."[81] Evans asserts

that "black churches are in need of an intergenerational approach to ministry so that

young people can learn from their elders and their elders can learn from, and connect

with, and relate to young people."[82] He goes on to say that, "more than listening and

responding is required if progress is to be made. Young people need to be encouraged

and shown how to access the life-saving practices that have allowed black families to

survive."[83] In order for this to take place, Evans argues that the emphasis on the black

family must, once again, be a focal point for the church, but not the family as defined by

political structures. Black families, Evans argues, have a history of family that behaves

like family. Evans suggests that the definition of the black family should only matter to

the black family, and that that definition is: "Where love is poured out abundantly, truth

is shared compassionately, and joy is pursued with abandon, this is family."[84] Finally,

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[78] Evans, Jr., *Rejoining Black Youth, Families, and Our Elders*, in *Black Practical Theology*, 35.

[79] Ibid, 36.

[80] Ibid, 37.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid, 38.

[83] Evans, Jr., *Rejoining Black Youth, Families, and Our Elders*, 39.

[84] Ibid., 40.

Evans suggest that "when the black family is strengthened, the church will also be strengthened. The backbone of the black church, he contends, has been the black family, and therefore, it is imperative for the church to contribute to strengthening the black family, no matter what that black family looks like to the wider community."[85]

A Biblical Reflection

This section highlights a major biblical text that closely relates to the ministry issue with which I am wrestling, that is, how the CME Church could run an intergenerational church in order to keep the millennials that are still in the church as well as connect with those that are outside the church. The text has several implications for the church leadership as they seek to disciple millennials. The pericope for this section is John 21:15-17 which reads:

> When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said[86] to him, "Feed my lambs." 16 A second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" And he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. 18 Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go." 19 (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

The first part of the biblical review is the context of the text (John 21:15-17). Following the context, I analyze the importance of Jesus' discourse with Peter. The

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[85] Ibid, 41.

[86] NRSV.

concluding section will offer a critical commentary of this text indicating analogies to the researcher's issue of the millennials' absence in the mainline churches, the CME Church in particular.

The context of my pericope clearly indicates that John 21 is an addendum to chapter 20, which had concluded by revealing that those who believe without seeing were more blessed (v. 29) than those who need to see in order to believe. The central part of John 20 is Jesus' appearance to Mary before the empty tomb (20:15-17). Following this first appearance, Jesus reveals himself to the disciples while they are in the locked upper room (20:19-22). The beginning of John 21 continues Jesus' self-revelation to the disciples, but this time the disciples are fishing at the Sea of Tiberias. Briefly, this is the scene that John portrays.

The disciples (Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two others) had decided to go fishing at the initiation of Peter. They all got into the boat and fished all night, but caught nothing (v.3). The next morning, Jesus appeared to them standing on the shore. He asked the disciples, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" (21:5). They answered that they had fished all night without catching any fish. He then asked them to throw the net out on the right side of the boat. They obeyed the advice of a complete stranger, and caught an abundance of fish. It was at this point that one of the disciples "whom Jesus loved" recognized that the apparent stranger was in reality Jesus. On hearing this, Peter impulsively jumped into the water, apparently in a great hurry to reach Jesus. The disciples realized that Jesus had made a fire on which were fish and bread. He invited them to join him for breakfast. It is clear, based on the way he shared

the bread and fish, that Jesus was following the format of the Last Supper, except that he served fish in place of wine.

After the disciples had finished the breakfast, Jesus turned his attention specifically to Peter, (v.15) and asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?[87] Peter replied, "Yes Lord you know I love you." Jesus commissioned him: "Feed my lambs (21:15)." Jesus asked Peter the same question again and Peter answered in the same way. Jesus asked him to "tend my sheep." But by the third time, Peter appeared to be hurt by Jesus' repeated questioning. He emphatically replied, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you" (v.17). To which Jesus replied, "Feed my sheep." According to John, Jesus gave Peter a word of wisdom about the cycle of life, from one's ability to do the things by oneself to the time when one is not able and someone will do things for them. Then Jesus told Peter to follow him (21:17).

The significance of the Jesus-Peter dialogue for my dissertation project issue is three-fold, and it is predicated by Jesus' command verbs: feed (my lambs); tend (my sheep); and feed (my sheep). As I struggle with trying to figure out why the millennials are absent from the CME church, I can envision the risen Jesus appearing at the periphery of the Linden-Shorts church that is doing "business as usual" and getting same results. The church leadership is working at night, signifying that they have no vision for revitalizing the church. I can see Jesus appearing and asking the tired workers, "You have no new members [millennials], do you?" To which they would answer, "We have

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[87] There is no indication of to whom Jesus is referring when he uses the term "these." It is possible that he meant the other disciples, who may have been standing close by during Jesus' conversation with Peter.

evangelized [worshiped] all these years but have attracted no millennials to Linden-Shorts." Jesus would immediately realize that they had been worshiping in the same way (at night with no vision, and on the left, i.e., wrong side, exclusively). Night and left have negative connotation in Hebrew and in most cultures. It is by changing their strategy, i.e., by worshiping and evangelizing in the "morning" and on the "right side" of the "boat," i.e., "the church" where the millennials are, that they would attract many unchurched young adults to the church. When the church leaders change their worship and evangelizing method, my interpretation of the text suggests, the CME church will once again be able to attract more members than they can contain in their generally small-sized sanctuaries.

The three verbs and the commands Jesus made to Peter and the mission with which he charged Peter suggest a strategy the church might adopt to address the millennial church ministry issue. Peter was the leader of the twelve disciples. Jesus was aware that if Peter could realize his mission, he could influence the other disciples to do the same.

First, Jesus called Peter to feed the lambs. Analogically, Jesus is calling the CME church leadership to spiritually nourish the millennials. Many of them have raised themselves in foster homes, single parent homes, and in the streets. They miss a stable father/brother/mother figure by which to model their lives.

Second, Jesus commanded Peter to tend the sheep. The two verbs "feed" and "tend" do not mean the same thing. Feeding is done to the young who need the assistance of adults; but tending is done to the adults who can no longer take care of themselves. So Jesus tells Peter to take care of both the younger and older generations. Analogically, the

CME church leadership is called to have the vision to integrate the older generation still worshiping in the sanctuaries with the millennials worshiping in open air meetings, halls, and a few in churches. For the leadership to achieve this goal, it must accept Jesus' call to, "Follow me." Just as Peter was told not to mind what the other disciples were going to do, Jesus is also telling Linden-Shorts church leadership to mind only its own business/mission without minding what the other churches are doing; i.e., whether they are integrating the adults and millennials in church boards and leadership positions or not.

CHAPTER IV

MINISTRY PROJECT

The objective of this ethnographic study was to investigate why the millennial generation is represented in such small numbers in the Christian Methodist Episcopal church during Sunday worship services, as well as in other church related activities. This section will 1) explain the process I followed in conducting this study; 2) discuss the findings of the study; 3) evaluate the process used to conduct the investigation; and 4) provide a summary of the investigation noting its implications for the CME church.

The methodology used for this investigation was applied ethnography. Three groups of millennials were asked to participate in this study. Two of the groups consisted primarily of CME millennials and the third group represented other denominations. Two CME pastors assisted by inviting millennials in their congregations to participate in the study. The pastors who assisted me with this endeavor also pastor congregations similar in size and demographics to Linden-Shorts.

The first aspect of this study involved observing the millennials in their church environment and their behavior in relation to church attendance at Linden-Shorts CME church in Atlanta, Georgia. I spent time with these millennials in their church setting for three years, and began to dialogue and meet with them for the last two years of the study[1]

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[1] The number of millennials that the researcher observed and worked with consistently over a two-year period was ten. Other millennials became a part of this group at various times during the two-year period, but they were not consistent in attending worship or other church activities.

During those two years of meeting with these millennials, I became concerned about their sporadic attendance of church as well as their apparent displays of apathy regarding involvement in church activities (meetings, special services, and ministry opportunities). During the second year of this study, I invited the millennials of Linden-Shorts to participate in a focus group. The focus group was organized in order for me to get to know the group more intimately; and to give them an opportunity to share why they appeared to be disinterest in the church. Some of the concerns that emerged from the first meeting were: 1) the millennials desire to be treated like adults and not children; 2) the millennials wanted to have input in the worship service; and 3) the millennials felt that the church needed to be more involved with outreach ministry. During the time of this group meeting, there were no outreach ministries in the Linden-Shorts church.

During the third year of the study, seven of the ten millennials attending Linden agreed to participate in the study about why millennials are not participating in the church and its many events. Out of the ten millennials who attended Linden-Shorts at various times, only four completed the interviews and questionnaires. Because this number was too small to give me the full picture of the millennial issues with the church, I decided to expand the research by seeking a more diverse sample of responses and did this by inviting three other congregations to participate in this investigation. I visited three church sites in order to conduct interviews with millennials of other churches, and I also sent several questionnaires via e-mail to several other young adults who expressed an interest in participating, but could not meet at the designated sites because of other obligations. The sites used for this investigation were in Atlanta, Georgia; Gadsden, Alabama; and Charlotte, North Carolina. Two of the groups met in a home and one of the

groups met in a church. The number of young adults which met for this investigation was indicative of the small number of young adults who attend weekly services at CME churches. The largest group to assemble consisted of eleven millennials.

Interview questionnaires were first given to millennials who represented Linden-Shorts; four of the ten sent out were returned. Sixteen interview questionnaires were completed by CME millennials from other congregations and nine interview questionnaires were completed by millennials who represented other denominations. The total number of interview questionnaires completed was thirty.

During each gathering, I engaged the group in conversation regarding the study and allowed individuals to share their feelings about the church and other related topics such as their careers, goals, and aspirations for the future, as well as current challenges, etc. I asked that they share their feelings about church and religion on a questionnaire that was provided. I also asked that they be as open and honest as possible, and I assured them that I would keep their answers anonymous. I also told them that the answers would be complied in order to ascertain information that could assist congregations in reconnecting with the millennial generation and mentoring them to become disciples. After the questionnaires were completed, refreshments were served, and I remained in conversation with the participants for as long as they still wanted to talk. It was during these informal discussions that I tended to gather the most data relevant to the research.

It was important for me to give young adults a voice regarding their own church attendance, expectations of the worship experience, and what they perceive as important for their own faith development. The questions were formulated with this objective in mind. During the group gatherings, the participants also had an opportunity to share their

feelings among themselves about the questions on the questionnaire and any other concerns they felt were valuable for the other members of the church to know and take into consideration as they planned their church programs. One theme that emerged from each group was the fact that "young adults are not children. They feel valued in other aspects of their lives except at church."[2]

Findings

The primary concern of this study was to determine why the millennials' attendance at church and involvement in church activities is so low. It was also important to determine what millennials are seeking in the church, and what congregations, specifically church leaders, could do to address their concerns.

Thirty interview questionnaires were completed and three group discussions were held with millennials ages 22-35. Some direct quotations have been inserted following the findings in order to allow the reader to hear the voices of some of the millennials who participated in this study. The participants represent three groups of millennials: the CME church, other denominations (Presbyterian, United Methodist, Episcopal and Baptist), and those without a church or denominational preference.

1) Do you attend; if so what is the most meaningful aspect of the worship service?

   - 19 say they attend church almost every Sunday

   - 9 attend church at least twice a month.

   - The other 2 attend church a few times a year.

2) All participants stated that they attend church at some point during the year.

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[2] One of the group participants said this, but I agreed to keep that name out of the report.

3) On the Sundays when you are not in church, what are some of the things that fill your day?

   1. Spending time with family and friends

   2. Work or preparing for the work week

   3. Resting

   4. Sports events

This question addresses the feelings that millennials expressed in conversation about the church holding on to traditions that are irrelevant for today.

4) What is the most meaningful aspect of the worship service?

   - 15 said the message, i.e., the Bible lesson is most meaningful. One respondent said, "sermons which offer life lessons"

   - 6 said the music

   - 2 prayer

   - 3 fellowship

Direct Quotations from Participants:

"I look forward to the sermon; I look forward to hearing how the message lines up with the scripture."

"I feel the most important aspect of being in a worship service is connecting with God. I personally believe if I don't connect with God, then the service doesn't help me."

5) When you hear the word tradition, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

   - "Rules"

   - "Things we repeat based on what we have been taught"

- "Passing down rituals"

- "Rituals"

- "Something boring"

- "Something that is rigid"

- "Churches that won't change"

- "Principles and procedures that we must adhere to"

- "History, family and love"

- "Not open to change"

Direct Quotation from participant:

"For the young people, if you have never had the traditions in the church explained to you what they are and why they are still existing, you cannot relate to them."

6) List the following spiritual practices in order of importance: prayer, Bible study, and worship, quiet time, serving others, and offering hospitality. You may add other practices that you feel are important to your spiritual development.

The numbers are listed based on the priority given by the majority of individuals responding to the question:

1. Prayer (17)

2. Worshipping God

3. Bible Study

4. Serving others

5. Offering hospitality

7) Many people identify themselves as spiritual as opposed to religious. How does this statement apply to you? Millennials have been noted in the research as identifying themselves as more spiritual than religious. This identification has implications for millennials not being affiliated with a particular denomination.

- 4 said they see the two as being connected and that there must be a balance between the two
- More spiritual than religious
- They are the same to me
- No difference

Direct Quotations from Participants:

"Spirituality means getting into a better relationship with God."

"I am spiritual more than religious because I do not connect with the more traditional aspects of worship."

"When I think of religious, I think negative. I associate it with rules and being forced to fit into a particular mold; spiritual implies freedom to me."

"I see myself as religious and spiritual. My religion laid the foundation for my spiritual journey."

8) If you are a member of a church, in what ways does the church meet development as a mature and responsible adult?

- 12 said their developmental needs were not being met by the church they attend
- 13 said their developmental needs were being met in the church they attend

"The church does not meet my developmental needs; my needs are met based on my experiences."

"The church meets my developmental needs through Bible study, outreach ministry, and the singles ministry."

"I don't feel that the traditional church allows or provides for the growth of young adults because they feel we are too young; we are not seen as adults."

"No, our church appears to be aging out because of resistance to changing and updating the ministry."

"The church does not meet the needs of a 21st century young adult. I believe there should be more activities for young adults and the worship that relates to young adults."

"Yes, because we are a young church and we relate to ourselves."

"No because the sermons appear to be directed more to the older members or the newly married."

9) If you do not attend a church, what resources do you utilize in order to develop into a mature and responsible adult?

None of those who were interviewed felt this question applied to them; thus this question was not answered.

10) If you could start a church, what elements of worship would you include?
The last question was very important to this study because this question represents what millennials say they want and what they believe churches need to emphasize.

The responses listed below are based on similar responses:

- Praise and worship/ praise team

- A focus on prayer

- Testimony

- "Sermons that are relevant to life now"

- Lively music / inspirational music

- Bible study

- The arts – praise dance, mime and drama

- Technology

- Acceptance

- Community involvement

"A pastor who can make every member feel he or she is important."

"Sermons that are easy to understand."

Evaluation

The millennials that agreed to be a part of this study shared that this was a meaningful study for their generation. They also shared that it was refreshing to have someone interested in how they felt about the church. One group asked whether the results would be shared with church leaders.[3]

The overall study of this group was interesting and meaningful for me. However, I would have liked to have had a larger sample and more participants who are un-churched. All but two of the participants belong to a church, even if they do not attend

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[3] Some of the participants thought it would be helpful to share this study with church leaders.

regularly. In addition to this consideration, I would also have liked to have spent more time with the millennials at Linden-Shorts CME church in order to determine whether an intergenerational ministry would revitalize the church for both the millennials and the senior adults. But since the church prelate did not honor my request to continue as pastor of this church in order to complete the research project, I could not implement the plan. As a result the church slid back to into their traditions and the millennials continue to feel marginalized and so are sporadic in their church attendance.

Summary

The primary focus of this study was to determine why the millennials in the CME church are represented in such small numbers during Sunday morning worship service, as well as in other church related activities. Based on the findings from the interviews and questionnaires, there does not appear to be one specific reason for their absence or for their inconsistent attendance at Sunday morning worship services. The first three interview questions addressed church attendance: Do they attend church, and if so, how often? When they are not in church on Sunday, what other activities fill their time? Out of the thirty interviewed, nineteen said that they go to church every Sunday; ten said they go to church either twice a month or once a month; and one said s/he goes a few times a year. Apparently, based on the questionnaires, interviews, and group discussions, consistent church attendance is not a significant priority for the millennials. This lack of consistency may also be related to the fact that some of the participants said that the churches they attend do not meet their developmental needs. The research suggests that millennials will go to church if they are treated as adults and integrated into all aspects of the church. This was also true for three of the millennials who participated in the study.

Two were ministers and one was a musician.[4] The musician did offer, however, that he felt compelled to attend church because of his role as a musician, but note that he was "dissatisfied with the music he was asked to play." Another important theme that emerged regarding church attendance was the one related to relevant sermons/messages. Millennials appear to be seeking timely instructions from pastors, but they are disillusioned with the church when the messages are not clear or relevant to their needs.

Questions four through eight addressed the millennials' perspective on the importance of spiritual practices, spiritual development, how they define themselves (whether as more spiritual or more religious), and their views on traditions of the church. The three spiritual practices that the majority of the interviewees said were most important to their lives were 1) prayer, 2) the act of worshipping God, and 3) music. Sixteen of the thirty participants said that they consider themselves more spiritual than religious. Three of the interviewees said that they have a balance between being spiritual and religious. Three of the millennials felt that being "spiritual allowed the individual to be free and more connected with God than being religious." Being religious was perceived as being rigid and full of rules. When asked whether the church met their developmental needs towards spiritual maturity and helping them navigate the challenges they face in life, nineteen of the thirty said no. When asked why they felt this way, one interviewee said "the older adults in the church don't give the young adults opportunities to be leaders; they relate to us like we are still children." Another interviewee said that, "the church does help me develop spirituality and as a young adult because the older adults have conversations with us and give their personal testimonies of their lives."

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[4] Two of the millennial participants were ministers in a Methodist church.

From this perspective, the millennials appear to be seeking spiritual depth; but they are not very interested in religious traditions and religious affiliation with a particular denomination. This finding confirms what sociologist Robert Wuthnow calls "spiritual tinkering" among millennials. "This tinkering," Wuthnow suggests "takes the form of searching for answers to the perennial questions in venues that go beyond religious traditions and in expressing spiritual interest through music and art as well as through prayer and devotional reading."[5]

Apart from church attendance, which was the focus of this study, two other questions I feel were very significant for this study and to church leaders. These were questions four and ten. These questions asked about: "the most important aspect of the worship" (Q4), and "if you were to start a church, what elements would you include? (Q10) For question number four, fifteen of the thirty felt that the sermon was the most important aspect of the worship service, followed by music and prayer. It was apparent as well that what the senior adults once called devotion (singing and praying before the main service) meant very little to millennials. African American millennials overwhelmingly enjoy what they call "praise and worship." Singing and ushering in the spirit before the main service is very significant to this age group.

Question ten offered a very diverse set of answers, but the most frequent themes were praise and worship, prayer, and the inclusion of the arts with the music; praise dance, drama, mime etc. Thus, based on the responses that I received from the millennials

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[5] Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 3154. Wuthnow suggests that "spiritual tinkering is a reflection of the pluralistic society in which we live, the freedom that is allowed in making choice about our faith, and the necessity of making those choices in the face of the up rootedness and change that most young adults find themselves in."

who participated in this study, the millennials are not abandoning church for church's sake.

The millennials appear to be looking for a rich and meaningful church experience in which they can be involved, validated, and nourished. Based on our open discussions, they feel that if they can raise children, hold management positions in their jobs, manage their own finances, be leaders in society, why can't church leaders and congregations offer them the same opportunities and respect in the church?

This study has led me to the conclusion that many millennials have not given up on the church; they just want the church to recognize them as adults and to be more relevant and respectful of their needs. In order for this to happen, I also believe that church leaders must be willing to engage the millennial generation in conversation and that the millennials must avail themselves of these conversations.

It is important to remember that millennials are still in the life stage of formulating their worldviews and trying to make meaning out of their lives. As the millennials navigate their psychological and developmental changes and continue to evolve into mature adults, pastors and senior adults have a great opportunity to make a significant impact on how millennials will understand religion and spirituality later in life. Based on the research that I have undertaken for this study, this can only be accomplished through intergenerational dialogue and activities which are structured in a way in which all generations are respectful of each other's differences and similarities.

CHAPER V

CONCLUSION

The church today is at a critical juncture in regard to two major societal changes. The first societal change is the generational transition from the Baby Boom generation to the generation X and millennial generation. The second change is a cultural shift that is occurring in Western society as the prevailing culture moves from the Enlightenment/modern era to the emerging/postmodern era. How the church responds to these generational changes and —even more importantly—to these cultural changes will determine how faithful and successful the church will be in the twenty-first century in accomplishing God's mission for the church.[1]

<div align="right">Jimmy Long</div>

In this study I have addressed some of the generational concerns regarding the church and the millennial generation. Each generation offers new challenges for the church, but these challenges can either strengthen and transform the mission of the church, or minimize the church's effectiveness in society in the future. The primary thesis of this study was to assess the reasons for and respond to the sporadic church attendance of the millennial generation, as well as their limited involvement in church related activities. This research showed that church attendance and church involvement (or lack thereof) among the millennial generation offers the church both new challenges and new opportunities. One of the challenges that church leaders must face is that many millennials are not opposed to church; they are however opposed to worshipping the way

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[1] Jimmy Long, *Emerging Hope: A Strategy for Reaching Postmodern Generations* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 20-21.

their parents and grandparents worshipped. Similarly, worship for millennials is not confined to a building, nor to traditional ceremonies. The millennials involved in this study desire a spiritual connection with God, in church and outside of church. The overwhelming majority of participants expressed this, for example by stating that prayer is a major spiritual practice for them and it is a spiritual practice on which they believe the church should focus. With this in mind, the following section reviews the research question generated by this study and offers further implications for ministry and additional research.

Research Questions and Implications for Ministry

As the opening quotation to this chapter pointed out, the millennial generation and cultural shifts are affecting the church. The millennials who participated in this study offer churches a realistic understanding of how the church can possibly understand this shift in terms of spirituality and religious institutions. The following answers to the research questions posed by this study are a result of the interview questionnaire responses and other related research which supports this study.

1) Where are the millennials on Sunday morning if they are not in a church? When they are not in church, what are they doing? Based on my findings, most of CME millennials say they attend church regularly. However, when the millennials are not in church they spend time with friends and family, or they rest and prepare for the work week. Although the millennials interviewed for this say they attend church regularly, almost half of those interviewed say they attend church at least twice a month. The participants who do not attend a CME church likewise say that they attend church at least twice a month. Based on the data from the

interviews, my perception of regular or consistent church attendance is different from what millennials perceive as regular church attendance. As a pastor, when I looked out over the congregation each Sunday and only saw millennials once or twice a month, I was concerned. This is because I was looking at numbers and consistent attendance (every Sunday) as a sign of spiritual growth and development. Thanks to this study, I have learned that millennials do not necessarily equate being in church every Sunday with a strong relationship with God, or spiritual depth. Still there is value in being a part of a faith community, for example because a faith community often offers support and encouragement for families and individuals when crises and other difficult situations arise. This is not to say the church is the only place where support and encouragement occur during crises and difficult times, but many times when these situations happen, young people do turn to the church or a faith organization for answers.

Yet the church must not wait for crises or difficulties to arise before they take an interest in millennials. If millennials are a part of the congregation, it is incumbent upon the pastor and more senior members to embrace those millennials and offer them opportunities for ministry and leadership, as well as consistent support and encouragement.

2) Do the millennials view the church as relevant to their developmental needs and spiritual needs? Some of the millennials felt that the church addresses their developmental needs, while others felt that the church does not meet their developmental needs. In order to clarify this question more fully, it was important to define what developmental needs the church should address. In the discussion

with the three groups, the developmental needs were more fully explained as spiritual needs and the needs of this generation as they seek to make meaning out of life during this developmental stage. The needs varied based on 1) family structure, 2) the extent to which the individual has been a part of a faith community, and 3) the role that society plays in relation to the individual's value system.

As was stated in the earlier literature, emerging adults are deconstructing an earlier belief system that developed during early childhood, as they now attempt to reconstruct meaning in their adult lives. The church is still challenged to help guide this process in meaningful and constructive ways, for: "Without a communal environment, however, emerging adults may lack a sufficient continuity to guide them through the rebuilding process."[2]

3) Do congregations and pastors understand the needs of the millennial generation in relation to their spiritual development? There appears to be a generational gap between what pastors and congregational leaders understand about millennials and what millennials understand about the role of the church in their spiritual development. Based on the answers given by the participants in this study, spirituality appears to be an individualistic practice, which does not necessarily need to be developed within a faith community. The millennials who participated in this study were desirous of carrying out what the church defines as spiritual practices, e.g., prayer, Bible study, worship; yet several of the millennials in the

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[2] Barry and Abo-Zena, *Emerging Adults' Religiousness and Spirituality*, 51.

study did not necessarily feel that the church or religious institutions are the keepers of these practices. Millennials appear to have a deep understanding of spirituality that does not always manifest itself in the religious gatherings.

(See also Appendix E for an additional resource for church leaders to promote intergenerational dialogue and ministry opportunities for millennials in their congregations.)

Limitations of the Study

While many studies have addressed church attendance among millennials and the impact of this generation on American culture, additional research is needed from an African American perspective. Although much of the research about millennials and their religious practices are normative for all races, African American millennials are still faced with challenges that are unique to them, and congregational leaders need to be intentional about the spiritual development of this population. The study that I conducted allowed these particular African American millennials to say whether they go to church, why they go to church, and what they need or expect from the church. It was thus a small contribution to this gap in the literature.

The primary limitation of this study was the small sample of interviewees. Out of fifty millennials who were contacted to participate in this study, only thirty millennials completed the interview questionnaire. Another limitation was my inability to remain with the original focus group to determine whether this group would become more engaged in the activities of the church and denomination if they were given a voice and opportunities to be integrated in the total life of the church, including its leadership. Before leaving this congregation as a result of the bishop's appointment changes, I had

invited a millennial to participate on each of the boards and ministries which were headed by senior adults. This I felt would give the millennials a practical understanding of church polity as well as allow them to participate in suggesting new and creative strategies for revitalizing an aging congregation.

An additional and significant limitation of this study was the insufficient church data regarding church attendance records and membership records. Baseline data would be inaccurate because church rosters are inaccurate because pastors are not allowed to update church attendance rosters from year to year by culling the names of now inactive members or of those who have moved away. Why are they pushed to make these inaccurate reports? I suggest that this practice allows the assessments paid by individual congregations to remain the same even if the existing congregation is incapable of meeting the amount required from the district. In short, it makes the denomination more financially secure, the local churches less financially secure.

Suggestions for Further Study

The results from this study can be expanded by increasing the number of interviewees and by interviewing millennials from different cultural backgrounds. Additional questions need to be incorporated into the interviews that are related to other types of church involvement. In addition to the interview process, this study has the capacity to be used in a church setting over a three to four-year period, which could involve an intergenerational approach. This would give congregations an opportunity to mentor the millennials in their midst and to allow each generation to learn from the other.

Finally, this study was based on literature that approaches the millennial generation's religiosity primarily based on institutional church attendance and

involvement. Yet the findings of several studies suggest that the institutional church is only one among several aspects of millennials' spiritual practices and faith affiliations. This study could also offer more of a perspective of millennials who have found alternative faith communities. (See Appendix D: *CrossFit as Church? Examining How We Gather*, by Angie Thurston and Casper ter Kuile, two Harvard Divinity school millennials who offer a study of an alternative faith community).

Appendix A

First Focus Group Agenda

Church: Linden-Shorts CME Church
Purpose: Doctor of Ministry Project
Date of first Meeting: December 20, 2014
Time: 7:00 p.m.

Closed Session: Young Adults Only
This focus group will discuss:
- The current state of the church (all churches)
- Causes of the declining trends in family worship
- What will the church look like in twenty years?
- Why young adults are no longer attracted to the church?
- What types of ministries will attract young adults?
- How can the seasoned saints be helpful to the young adults?
- How can the ministerial staff be helpful to the young adults?
- Where do you fall on the spiritual continuum?
- Spiritual gifts survey

This first session will be a closed session in order to get honest answers. The information

recorded will be used solely for the continued growth and support of the young adults at

Linden-Shorts CME Church. No names will be attached to any of the information shared.

Appendix B

Interview Questions:

Name (Optional) _____   Date_____

Age_____

Denomination (if applicable) _____

Region (check one): North Carolina___ South Carolina _____ Georgia ____ Alabama_____

_____

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this Doctor of Ministry project.

1.   Do you attend church? If yes, how often? And why do you attend church?

2.   If you do not attend church, give reasons why you do not attend church.

3.   On the Sundays when you are not in church, what are some of the things that fill your day?

4.   When you attend church, what do you feel is the most important aspect of the service?

5.   When you hear the word *tradition*, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

6.   List the following spiritual practices in order of importance: prayer, Bible study, and worship, quiet time, serving others, and offering hospitality. You may add other practices that you feel are important to your spiritual development.

        1.

        2.

        3.

        4.

        5.

        6.

7.   Many people identify themselves as spiritual as opposed to religious. How does this statement apply to you?

8.   If you are a member of a church, in what ways does the church meet your developmental needs as a mature and responsible adult?

9.   If you do not attend a church, what resources do you utilize in order to develop into a mature and responsible adult?

10.   In a few words, if you could start a church, what elements of worship would you include?

Appendix C

Black Practical Theology

The important social issues which affect how the Hip Hop generations worldview has been shaped. Six major phenomena of the 1980s and 1990s shaped the worldview of the Hip Hop generation: 1) pop culture and its ability to serve as a surrogate for the values and attitudes offered by black bodies in the entertainment industry. 2) Globalization, which evolved from multinational corporations that operate primarily in the United States, Europe, and Japan. 3) Persistent segregation in a theoretically post-segregation society. Black youth have experienced inequality tantamount to the Jim Crow era, when segregation was legal. 4) Public policy regarding drugs, violence, education, and even style of dress has criminalized black youth and made them the most highly incarcerated population of any racial/ethnic group in the United States. 5) Media that represents black youths as soulless brutes. 6) A quality of life that renders black youth poor, unemployable, and at a high risk for death by homicide, suicide, and AIDS.[3]

These are the phenomena that the black church must acknowledge as church leaders look for meaningful ways to engage and minister to the needs of the millennial generations. These phenomena which shape the worldview of the Hip Hop generation are also manifested in the way this generation operates within the confines of institutions (church and educational institutions).

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[3] Parker, *Black Practical Theology*, 34.

Appendix D

Additional Supporting Literature

In *For Such a Time as This: Young Adults on the Future of the Church*, editor

Kathyrn Mary Lohre suggests that in this period of change and declining membership in

mainline protestant churches, "churches will need to assume roles as conveners and

bridge builders in an era marked by the free exchange of ideas and information through

local, national, and global networks."[4] Lohre believes that it is not enough for churches to

attract millennials into their congregations and go back to business as usual. Rather,

"churches must engage across generations to shape missional goals for the future to

which God is calling them."[5] This project is a cry to church leaders for intergenerational

dialogue.

Further findings associated with this study summarized the personal essays from

the authors who wrote for this study. It is thus the assumption of this work that

millennials have a sincere desire to act on behalf of the critical social issues that the

nation now faces: "dire poverty and racism, the devastation of creation, and obscene

violence and war." If, Lohre argues, church leaders begin to focus on such critical issues,

then the millennials will be an active part of congregational life.[6]

Another study that reflects the same mind set of millennials and millennial leaders

can be found in the work of a millennial pastor in her book, *Tribal Church* Pastor Merritt

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[4] Kathyrn Mary Lohre, *For Such a Time as This: Young Adults on the Future of the Church* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2014), Kindle, 72.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid., 76.

describes her church as *Tribal*, because of its intergenerational congregation. Pastor

Merritt offers church leaders a critique of the practices that alienate and often suggest that

what millennials bring to the table is of no value to pre-existing traditions, policies and

procedures, and that ageism is running rampant in our society and in our churches.[7] Thus,

in order to build relationships in the church between generations, Merritt documents in

this work the elements of what she calls a *Tribal* church--a church in which each

generation has value, and a place where, "the church responds to the gifts and needs of

adults under forty by taking into account their physical, social, and spiritual

circumstances."[8]

> As a result of this tribal ideology, Merritt describes the church as a "relational
> community, which is not pastor-centered, polity driven, or program-oriented. It
> is less concerned with denominational labels and hierarchy. The church focuses
> on an intergenerational network that allows for the viewpoints of young adults,
> even on controversial issues. Within this relational body, there is a realization
> that effective ministry increases with the intention to share power with a new
> generation. [Thus] members of the Tribal church work to counsel, guide, train,
> and enable young leaders.[9]

The sharing of power in the church with the millennial generation may in fact be an issue

that has also impacted the declining numbers of millennials in many congregations, but

also millennials who qualify as pastors, lay leaders, and hold other administrative

positions. Some millennials hold leadership positions at their jobs and in other

organizations, but when they enter the church in many instances they are apparently

perceived as children who still need to be cuddled and guided.

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[7] Carol Howard Merritt, *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007), Kindle, 240.

[8] Merritt, *Tribal Church*, 281.

[9] Ibid., 297.

In Scott Wilcher's book, *The Orphaned Generation*, he argues that if churches intend to reach and keep the next generation as lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ, their members must renew the way they think about young people.[10] Using the scripture 1 Corinthians 2:16b, "But we have the mind of Christ," Wilcher challenges the church to have eyes behind their minds which reflect the mind of Christ. If, he states, the church is to reach young people, it must operate with a mind like Christ.[11] Wilcher goes on to suggest that in order to keep the young adults engaged, the existing members must make them feel wanted by changing their own hearts and minds and not their committees.[12] Building relationships with young adults and accepting them will only happen when the church begins to think differently, and, in time, behave differently toward the young adults. That, he states, requires that our minds be renewed to reflect more closely the mind of Jesus Christ.[13]

Finally, in the study, *CrossFit as Church? Examining How We Gather*, Angie Thurston and Casper ter Kuile, two Harvard Divinity school millennials, look for alternative ways of coming together, other than in the traditional church community. "These gatherings are held in other venues, yet they serve the same function as religious communities; they are helping people aspire toward goals, transform themselves, and work toward change while holding each other accountable. These communities are also

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[10] Scott Wilcher, *The Orphaned Generation: The Father's Heart for Connecting Youth and Young Adults to Your Church* (Chesapeake, VA: Upstream Project, 2010), 10, Kindle.

[11] Ibid, 12.

[12] Ibid, 26.

[13] Ibid.

inspiring creativity, while helping young people find their purpose and mission in life."[14]

All of these attributes should also be a part of every church ministry, but based on my

research and time spent in the CME church, these attributes are often missing or poorly

developed in lieu of conducting church the same way it has been conducted for the past

hundred years.

Millennials, who were born into an age where everyone is always connected

through Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snap-chat, etc., find it difficult to meet once a

week for a church service that disconnects them from the world they live in on a minute-

by-minute, text-by-text basis.

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[14] Angie Thurston and Casper ter Kuile, "CrossFit as Church? Examining How We Gather," Accessed March 10, 2016, Harvard Divinity School, http://hds.harvard.edu/news/2015/11/04/crossfit-church-examining-how-we-gather.

Appendix E

A Model for Churches to follow to promote intergenerational dialogue, with a focus on the millennial generation.

Introduction: The Millennial Generation: What the Church Needs to Know

Prior to churches deciding to conduct this workshop, it will be important for the congregation to participate in a visual scenario (as demonstrated below) before addressing the attendance and participation of the millennial generation. This is important because a congregation may be comprised of as many as five generations each Sunday. One generation may be larger than the other; but each generation is significant to the life of the church community.

The book of reference for the following information comes from the work of Edward H. Hammett and James R. Pierce in *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60*. This research offers a very in-depth description of how previous generations' worldviews have been shaped by society and how these worldviews influence the church.[15] The congregation is asked to sit according to their age or generational groups, as follows:

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[15] Edward H. Hammett and James R. Pierce, *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60: Being Church for All Generations* (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2007), Kindle 993-1113

- The Builders--born before 1946, or a combination of the GI generation 1900-1924 and the Silent Generation 1925-1946.
- The Boomer Generation – 1946-1964
- The Buster Generation – 1965-1983 also known as Generation X or Gen X.
- The Millennial Generation – born since 1984

If time allows, the congregation can work in groups to identify the trends that shaped

their worldview and then each group can share what they wrote down.

If the time is short, the leader can share the information below with the group.

A brief description of what shaped each generation's worldview based on Hammett and

Pierce's book: (The definitions below are direct quotations from the book)

- The Builders, born before 1946, or a combination of the GI generation 1900-1924 and the Silent Generation 1925-1946.
  "This Generation built the country as we know it today. They shaped the church and most of the church-related institutions. They overcame the Depression and the Second World War. Lived on one income, and gender roles were clearly defined. In some churches they continue to lead—and even control –the way the church is organized and how the money is spent."[16]

- The Boomer Generation – 1946-1964: "The influences that shaped this generation were television, the Cold War, assassinations, the civil rights movement, Vietnam, Kent State, rock and roll, the birth control pill, legalized abortion, illegal drugs, Kennedy's new frontier, the Peace Corps, the space race, Watergate, and the resignation of President Nixon. Boomers became known as the me generation, and their relationship with the church became more personal than institutional. In the family both spouses work, and it is the first generation with more than a 50 percent divorce rate. Made to go to church as children, many quickly abandoned the church at their first opportunity, only to return to it when their children were born."[17]

- The Buster Generation – 1965-1983 also known as Generation X or Gen Y.
  "A generic generation that remains largely unknown and not understood. This generation has been shaped by the AIDS epidemic, legalized abortion (Roe v. Wade), technology, a varying economy, video games and television. This generation accepts situational ethics, truth is in the eye of the beholder, and living

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[16] Ibid, 993-1013; the following characteristics can be extended based on the needs of the congregation.

[17] Hammett and James R. Pierce, *Reaching People under 40 while Keeping People over 60,* 1020-1049.

in shades of gray instead of black-and-white. Most don't go to church: one in seven are active church goers."[18]

- The Millennial Generation – born since 1984. "This generation has grown up in an age of technology and prosperity, the children of two-parent-income or single-parent families. They are materialistic and want the best of everything. Millennials need unconditional love, a safe place for building relationships, and leaders who won't abandon them."[19] (More will be said about this generation in the presentation).

After the previous discussion and enactment by the congregation, the workshop will focus on the millennial generation and intergenerational ministry. In many congregations the millennial generation may be the smallest group, they are also the group that is just emerging into adulthood and congregations have a valid reason to be concerned about the millennials' involvement in the church.

Part I - The Millennial Generation (Who are they and why are they important?)

"Adult millennials inhabit colleges and graduate schools, have families, own businesses, and lead churches throughout the United States. They bring with them a worldview as fresh as they themselves, but older generations are [having a difficult time embracing this new energetic and creative cohort.][20] This resistance to embracing the millennial generation has serious implications for the future of mainline protestant churches.

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[18] Ibid, 1091-1113.

[19] Ibid, 1113- 1142.

[20] Mark Lindsay, "What Millennials value: reversing the departure generation", Church Executive, Assessed April 6, 2016, http://churchexecutive.com/archives/what-millennials-value-reversing-the-departure-of-a-generation

Millennials, however, have a lot to offer the church and the world. Their worldview may be different from other generations; but this difference can be celebrated and used to transform the church. Instead of alienating them from the church, which causes the millennials to explore opportunities for community elsewhere on Sundays and throughout the week, the church should find ways to engage and support them.

Part II: What can pastors, ministers, and congregational leaders do to engage the millennial generation?

1. Understand their worldview

2. Have open honest dialogue with this generation

3. Spend time with the millennials inside and outside of the church

4. Provide leadership opportunities for the millennials

5. Mentor the millennials in leadership roles

1. Understanding what is shaping the worldviews of millennials is one of the keys to understanding why they think and operate the way they do.[21]

   - Massive consumer economic system

   - Technology

   - Globalization

   - Mass public schooling

   - The digital communications revolution

   - Sociocultural pluralism

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[21] Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5. According to sociologist Christian Smith the larger social and cultural context powerfully influences the ideas, experiences, and outcomes of young adults' lives.

- The sexual revolution[22]

Part III – Have the group brainstorm this question before sharing the findings of the study. What millennials need from pastors, ministers, and congregations to know about them in relationship to the church and religion: (The following points were taken from the interview questionnaires of the Doctor of Ministry project)

- Millennials already hold leadership positions

- Millennials enjoy authentic relationships with older adults

- Millennials are serious about spirituality, but are often turned off by religion and meaningless traditions

- Millennials enjoy small group settings that focus on prayer, Bible study and the sharing of stories

- Millennials enjoy creative worship styles which incorporate drama, the arts, sermons which relate to modern day challenges, and an emphasis on praise and worship through music and prayer [23]

Part IV – Concluding Remarks

The millennials are in your congregations. There may be one, two, three or more, but they are there and they need to be recognized and respected. Psychologist Jeffrey Arnett has named them as emerging adults. They are adults who are still being shaped and molded into what God has called them to be. Whether they are represented in small numbers or large numbers, the millennials have voices and their voices need to be heard

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[22] Ibid., 5-6.

[23] See also John Roberto, "Faith Formation with Emerging Adults: Congregational Practices, Lifelong Faith: Summer 2010, accessed April 9, 2016, Volume 4.2, http://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/__aff_emerging_adults.pdf

in regards to life, spirituality, and theology. Each generation brings value to a faith community, and therefore church leaders must continue to develop a faith community that is shaped by the "feeding and tending" of each generation which is represented in the congregation.

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