

**Millennials and the Church**  
**May 2019**

**Authenticity and Community**

Adriane Bilous

In a *New Kind of Christianity* (2011), Brian McLaren, a spokesperson and leader for many young Christians, argues that numerous church leaders have lost touch with their millennial congregants – spending more time “preaching to the choir” and involving themselves in institutional maintenance, rather than listening to the desires and needs of their young congregations. He calls for a renewed vision of a “post liberal, post conservative, post sectarian, postmodern” Christian faith.

Many young Christians are heralding his work as revolutionary and sparking a need for change and social renewal. For them, McLaren proposes a re-evaluation of faith to address some of the issues that have separated communities within the larger Christian faith — issues like heteronormativity, a Biblical sophistry that alienates non-Christians, the problems with claiming an exclusionary access to the Truth and, most importantly, the challenge to older churchgoers to stop isolating themselves in their congregations and get out into their communities.

Millennials are seeking not only an “authentic” faith that they feel will allow them to deepen their relationship with God, but also an authentic institution that emphasizes service, community and compassion to those in need.

**Finding Authentic Faith**

*I think (and just give me some rope this evening) that Christmas is a time when we are to remember our struggle with God. It is a good struggle... It is a noble struggle. And yes, we have limps to prove it. This is what God wants from us at Christmas: honesty about our lives, so that God can struggle with us. It is our honesty that gives God access to our struggles.*  
*-Pastor, New City Church[1] during a Christmas Eve sermon.*

The “Christians with a limp” metaphor is telling, as it demonstrates the guilt or feelings of inadequacy that many experience when trying to define their faith to others — and, some might say, to themselves as well. To be unable to adequately describe one’s own faith in a word or a sentence can be seen as weak or uncommitted. But this could be far from the truth.

Millennials eschew “easy” forms of religious practice. They seek congregations that offer a rigorous learning community that also emphasizes care and compassion for others. In turn, they feel empowered to construct religious identities that fit their personal needs. Pushed to see that they

are no better or stronger or wiser than others and that others are also in need of help and comfort, they are able to make peace with imperfection and perceived individual weaknesses.

### **Space for growing an authentic faith**

How do congregations and pastors create an authentic experience that engages individuals who are cynical of their elders' traditions and highly suspicious of "feel-good" sermons?

- **Find balance**

A congregation or service devoid of ritual lacks a valuable communication tool that can strengthen community and faith. Similarly, preaching a "personal fulfillment" narrative (one that highlights how individuals can succeed in their careers, their relationships and life by answering the ultimate question, "who am I?") lacks the depth millennials crave. These sermons tend to be more "touchy-feely," lacking the intellectual quality of other, Bible-based sermons. Many see a focus on self-improvement as distant, but not entirely separate, from the pursuit of authenticity. Clergy and lay leadership must grapple with which rituals strengthen their congregation, incorporating those that invite members in, while still tending to the individual. Preachers need to create sermons that weave personal fulfillment narratives together with cerebral, thoughtful and profound worship.

- **Create community**

When ideologies do not attract new members, they need to be replaced with different frames. For example, in attempts to alleviate generational tensions, clergy leaders can re-fashion theological differences into a "community" framework, with common beliefs about poverty, Jesus-emulating philanthropy and self-fulfillment. In doing this, they harness the fluidity of ideology in an effort to build sustained congregational membership.

- **Show your limp**

When looking for a congregation, millennials are drawn to an authenticity that does not "pretend to be perfect," that does not judge anyone's faults (especially those in need) and offers a community that doesn't shy away from imperfection. Unfortunately, in trying to appeal to a younger generation that seeks self-awareness and self-fulfillment, pastors can become nothing more than what some may call "motivational speakers." Although many young people begin with churches within their original denomination, eventually they search out congregations that embody specific values towards helping those in need, yet another characteristic that defines "authenticity" for this group. Millennials seek new forms of religious practice that enable them to participate in communities that emphasize care and compassion for others and that allow them to be at peace with imperfection and individual weakness.

While it's tough to nail down the aspirations and options of an entire generation in one article, the goal here is to shed light on the process of aggregation that enables millennials to create unique religious identities that fit their current lives. Accepting vulnerability and creating community reaches beyond the doors of the parish. It pushes us to question how we determine who is "one of us" when creating a supportive community. In our efforts to engage millennials, we must consider how we invite the stranger (and each other!) into affirming and life-giving community.

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**Resources:**

- [Oldfields, Newfields, and Balancing Tradition and Innovation](#) by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital practices blog, May 14, 2018
- [Wanted: Authenticity](#) by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 2, 2011
- [Millennials: What Do We Know and...Should We Care?](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital practices blog, July 8, 2015
- [First Impressions](#) by Kevin Minch, Vestry Papers, November 2014

[1] Name of congregation has been changed to protect privacy.

**Engaging Millennials**

Jason Merritt

Conversations about reaching and engaging millennials (those [born between 1981 and 1996](#)) tend to slip into quests for universal preferences and traits. The trouble is, on any measure of preference the median American Millennial is only one of 70+ million individuals. The human experience is too dynamic and varied to expect much uniformity among a group that large. The same is true for Generation X, Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation—and it will be for all future generations.

To compound the issue, many trendy generational perceptions are derived from a mostly white, middle-class view of the American experience, which is both wrong and statistically [self-defeating](#). Other stereotyped traits are simply new verses in our national pastime of blaming the young for being youthful — ignoring that the youngest millennials are nearing their mid-20s, and the elders of the cohort (like me) see 40 on the horizon.

**Skip the stereotypes**

Don't get me wrong — I believe major shifts in American society, culture and technology can leave loose imprints on an emerging generation as they form their worldview. However, none of that can replace the arduous task of contextualizing big changes for our own situations, communities and neighborhoods. Using the same messages, content or programming across the entire spectrum might not work house-to-house or across town, let alone several states away.

Some of the major shifts that serve as vital data points of context for millennials include: the birth of the Internet and the subsequent upheaval across industries and sectors; the terror attacks of

September 11, 2001 and the War on Terror; the rise of relentless, invasive advertising; urbanization and globalization; and a series of global economic scares, including the Great Recession.

These are just a few of the defining moments of the broad millennial experience, but any one of these events and shifts likely impacted specific communities and individuals differently. This is why it is imperative to (mostly) ignore pop-cultural caricatures of millennials, and instead try to contextualize the broad impacts and implications these shifts continue to have in our own community.

### **Begin with research**

Research can help build a foundation of knowledge to start from. Fortunately, this research often provides insights into entire communities, not just millennials.

Spend some time with the Pew Research Center and their [wealth of data](#) on how different generations move through time. The methodology is trustworthy, and they have comparative studies that show [how millennials compare to other generations at the same age](#). These snapshots of all generations in the same life-stage debunk many myths about millennials being anomalies in lifestyle decisions — delaying marriage and children, for instance. Most data show that they are directly in step with well-established trend lines of societal changes. You might particularly enjoy exploring their [Religious Landscape Study](#).

Check out [Google Trends](#). It analyzes search terms real-time or over a particular time period and gives you the ability to compare different search terms to see what people in your city, state or nation are “Googling” on their devices. Try this experiment as a first step: Go to [Google Trends](#) and type “Church near me” in the Enter a search term or a topic field and narrow the search to your city or state. When the results come up, adjust the timeline from 12 months to 30 Days. You can see the surge of searches on Sunday mornings, but what about other times of the week? Maybe those are good times to share information on social media.

Make a habit of regularly exploring your social media analytics and insights. You don’t need a fancy system to do it, since most platforms will give you varying levels of filters to analyze the audience that already follows your account. Once you get familiar with the process, you can start to notice trends and takeaways as you experiment with message content, timing and frequency.

Finally, use the most universal and simple method of research possible: Just ask! Millennials might surprise you with how open they are to answer your questions. Use common sense and courtesy when picking your moment (READ: don’t overwhelm the first 20-something you see), but if your intentions are honest and your approach is friendly, many millennials would love to help you better understand their peers. Online surveys can work, but nothing replaces the vulnerability and depth you’ll get through a face-to-face conversation. Asking a small group of millennials — if possible — is ideal to ensure a broad perspective.

### **Be present, build trust**

These tools and tactics are helpful in laying a foundation of knowledge, but breaking through and making an impact takes time and a consistent effort to build trust.

With [mistrust running high](#), and digital connectivity to facilitate it, millennials have developed a strong instinct to vet institutional value chains through online research and peer-to-peer networking. Members of all generations do this, but millennials have internalized the practice from youth and have the technology to facilitate it at their fingertips. This means your church or organization needs a robust online presence that reinforces who you are in real life. A mobile friendly website, popular social media channels (only the ones you can maintain), and email communications are the basic framework to consider and refine.

Once present, it's crucial to provide access to the previously inconsequential aspects of who you are. The old adage "no one wants to see the sausage being made," doesn't apply to younger generations as much. The online ecosystem of 2019 values honesty, consistency and vulnerability — so pull back the curtain. The more open and honest you are — cultivating a natural tone and style that doesn't feel forced — the more trust you will build among everyone who places a high value on authenticity, including millennials.

Your goal should not be to invade and disrupt, but to become part of their daily online experiences with engaging content that reinforces who you are in real life — pictures, small stories, videos, etc. These small touch points are crucial to developing trust over time, and for millennials, [at a distance](#).

It's impossible to say what the "typical millennial" will prefer, since there isn't a standard-issue millennial. We are not a monolith. It's also impossible to precisely say what will trigger your local millennials to explore your church, choose to join your community event over another or commit to a life following Jesus. However, it's possible to position yourself to listen and learn by being an engaging member of the online ecosystem that millennials (mostly) inhabit. Being present is a prerequisite to trust and consideration for all. It is also how we welcome the stranger, no matter what the young whippersnappers may look or sound like.

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#### Resources:

- [Social Media Campaigns](#) by Charis Bhagianathan, Vestry Papers, November 2016
- [Make Time for Marketing](#) by Tom Ehrich, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 27, 2015
- [The Future of Community](#) by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital Practices blog, July 25, 2017
- [Your Church Needs a Welcome Video](#), by Christian Anderson and Trevor Black, Vestry Papers, November 2016

## **Millennial Mythbusters: Church Edition**

Alissa Anderson

In my years as both a millennial and a churchgoer (and, more recently, a priest) I've heard a lot of commentary about my generation, particularly related to various aspects of life in the Church, and a lot of that commentary has not exactly hit the target. Below are, in my experience and according to national trends, a few myths — and truths — about the millennial generation.

### **Myth #1: Millennials prefer 'contemporary' worship styles and expect to be entertained**

I began with this one because I'm actually hearing it less and less, and I think it's finally becoming recognized as the myth that it is. That said, it bears repeating. While the millennial generation is a diverse group, and I'm sure there are millennials who enjoy contemporary, entertaining worship, this is simply not true as a blanket statement. Liturgical innovation should be mindful and reverent, and it should come out of the worshipping community's desires and interests.

### **Myth #2: Millennials are distracted by their phones during worship and programs**

In my current ministry setting, there is no WiFi in the nave. This has been problematic at times, as cell service throughout the building is poor-to-nonexistent, rendering communication into or out of the sanctuary difficult. According to church lore, at the time the WiFi was installed, the rector — innocently enough — thought having it available in a worship space was undesirable, because it would lead to people being on their phones all the time during church.

This is a concern I've heard a lot, but I tend to see worse phone etiquette from older generations. Everyone can benefit from moderation when it comes to cell phone use, but fear or hatred of it is the wrong tack. Technology and social media have the capacity to enhance our lives and contribute to our mission — but only if they're not viewed as the enemy.

### **Myth #3: Millennials won't volunteer or commit to events**

There is some evidence that millennials are less likely to commit and more likely to flake than older generations. I would argue that this stems from a potent combination of paralysis in the face of myriad opportunities and burnout in a society that devalues sabbath time in favor of overwork and constant availability.

In fact, millennials volunteer more than any other generation, but they are focused on purpose, seeking to live in a way that holistically supports their values. What a gift this is for the Church. Now we have greater motivation than ever to help members identify their gifts and select ministries that use and engage those gifts.

### **Myth #4: Millennials don't pledge (or don't pledge enough)**

This one may not actually be a myth, but it has nothing to do with a perceived lack of generosity. While the amount of money millennials give to charitable causes is less than previous generations,

polls have shown that anywhere from 72 to 84 percent do give to charitable organizations—more than older generations. And they do that in spite of significant un- and under-employment rates and the highest student loan debt burdens in history.

As far as pledging is concerned, ease and availability of online giving is critical, as is education around pledging — how pledge donations are used, why pledging is important and the personal and spiritual components of giving. The onus is also on us as the Church to figure out how to move forward in a world where expendable income for most people is steadily decreasing and the dollar amounts of pledges are following the same pattern.

#### **Myth #5: Millennials just aren't interested in church**

I am able to contradict this statement by my very existence as a millennial priest — and I'm not the only one. It's true that millennials are more likely to have no religious affiliation ("nones") than previous generations. Many are finding the community they crave elsewhere, and that's okay. Church attendance patterns are changing as well, and that's okay, too.

We won't get anywhere by wishing for a return to the Church of our childhood (whenever that may have been). What we have now is the knowledge that everyone in our churches is there because they want to be, and the conviction that there is no age group that does not stand to have its life and spirit transformed by an encounter with the living God. What we do with that is up to us.

#### **Myth #6: Millennials are all the same**

You knew this was coming, didn't you? It's the requisite disclaimer in every article about generational dynamics — and it's required for a reason. While generational research is interesting, and can be useful, it is not meant to take the place of relationships and respect for diversity. One stereotype about millennials is that millennials hate being stereotyped (see what I did there?).

We are all God's children. We are all humans on a journey. Articles about millennials (like this one) are generally about what makes them different from other generations, intentionally or unintentionally setting up an us/them perspective. But the fact is that what sets generations apart is less significant than what brings us together. One of the marvelous things about church is its capacity to be a truly intergenerational community. For this kind of community to work, though, we have to welcome all of the voices at the table. We are all vital to the Church, and we all bring those things that make each of us uniquely valuable. *For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.*

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#### **Resources:**

- [Talkin' About My Generation](#) by Miguel Escobar, ECF Vital practices blog, January 25, 2011

- [Millennials—Our Next Greatest Wave of Givers?](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 23, 2014
- [Alternative Questions and the Church](#) by Alan Bentrup, ECF Vital practices blog, February 2, 2017
- [Spiritual Resources Online](#), an ECF Vital practices webinar presented by Kyle Oliver, January 15, 2013

## **Millennials in Leadership**

Nicole Foster, Colin Chapman, Hershey Mallette Stephens

*Editor's Note: Why is it important to place millennials in positions of leadership and decision-making in our church? We asked three millennial leaders to share the challenges of their generation and why we need more voices like theirs to strengthen and invigorate our church and future.*

Let's talk about millennial leadership within the Anglican Communion... Can you hear the crickets chirping? Right.

Whether you pull an "I know of one" or a "what about..." comment, people are simply not aware that millennial leaders are few and far between nor are they cognizant of the impact this has on the present and forthcoming Church. Churches love to recruit millennials to fill their youth ministry positions or to run their social media platforms. But when it comes to the senior positions — those that most likely require ordination — there is a black hole where the millennial generation is concerned.

For the last several years, conversations on this topic have largely swirled around the focal point of worship style. From praise bands to traditional liturgy, assumptions have been made about millennials, who are often blamed for our lack of participation within the wider church. But can we really, honestly, leave the conversation to just liturgical affinity? Perhaps there are global events that have deeply impacted the life of the millennial, affecting their representation in the pews. It's quite possible that what has influenced this part of creation born between 1980 and 1996, has little to do with the worn-out "Drums vs. Pipe Organ" argument.

Several stumbling blocks both within and outside of the Anglican Communion could be contributing to the black hole of millennial leadership within our worship spaces.

### **Stumbling Block 1: 20th century ministry training in the 21st century**

The training that a millennial would need to minister to other millennials is not what many mainline denominations offer currently. What they provide are 20th century expectations for aspirants to ministry, along with 20th century training methods. Let's start with the training requirements, which expose the underlying expectations for the type of aspirant considered a good candidate for ministry.

The requirement of a classical seminary education, a topic that has been simmering in several denominations, is up for discussion. Most mainline denominations require a candidate for ministry to get a classical seminary education which, if pursued full-time, will take three to four years to complete. On top of that, ministry candidates must take on Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) training and pray that the program pays them for their time. This kind of training more or less assumes that the candidate is privileged, both economically and educationally, and has the resources to forego a fulltime job and cast numerous adult responsibilities onto others. And all while doing fieldwork that focuses on the sick and the dying and does nothing to prepare them for young movers and shakers.

### **Stumbling Block 2: Coming of age during economic uncertainty**

Many millennials struggled to gain a career or enter the workforce during the Great Recession of 2007-2009. The Pew Research Center states,

While the Great Recession affected Americans broadly, it created a [particularly challenging job market](#) for millennials entering the workforce. The unemployment rate was especially high for America's youngest adults in the years just after the recession, a reality that would impact millennials' [future earnings and wealth](#).

Consequently, the costs for training for holy orders — raising funds or occurring debt to pay for three to four years of seminary, earning a living for themselves and/or family, etc... — are daunting. Given that these stumbling blocks probably won't go away for a few more drawn-out church conventions, how can we, as the church, help foster millennial leadership for the second largest generation on earth, after the baby boomers?

God has the answer. Knowing this, we can be blunt and honest with ourselves, with the church and with the Lord about where we see pitfalls and where we see hope amongst the church militant for the coming age.

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Millennials are the first generation in the church raised in an environment where our congregations have been in a state of perpetual decline. This means that the millennial perspective is not only fresh and may be in touch with a younger and larger demographic, but is also rooted in a desire to try something new. In our experience, the practices in which we were raised have not been effective for quite some time. Yet they are still in place today.

Millennials are less connected to things and traditions. More often, they have an affinity for the *intention* behind a practice, and the *motivation* that sparks a desired outcome. Millennials have

respect for the past, but they also understand that the future of the Episcopal Church is not a certainty.

To understand the millennial leader, it is important to be mindful of the great societal change millennials have seen in their comparatively short lives. While previous generations may have spent their entire lives using volumes of encyclopedias to gather information, the thirty-year-old millennial has experienced hardcover encyclopedias, Encarta Interactive CD-ROMs and Wikipedia, all in the course of the last 20 years. If one feels that a millennial might be insensitive about implementing change, it's important to remember that the world has never shown sensitivity to millennials as it rapidly changed around them.

The benefit of this upbringing is that the millennial is not afraid to try new things, or most importantly, not afraid to fail in the process.

Unsurprisingly, while millennials share an affinity for new ideas and practices, it would be inaccurate to assume that all are unified in their approach. There are certainly millennial leaders who get excited about new forms of media and communication and embrace new technologies to push evangelism forward. Just as likely, you will also find millennial leaders who see a rich benefit in our non-digital traditions of corporate prayer, classical hymnody and our affection for a physical book. No matter the approach, a millennial's desire is rooted in one thing: integrity of mission.

What we do must be rooted first and foremost in our Gospel mission. The millennial does not suggest new forms of communication simply to look flashy, nor to promote traditional Anglican worship to highlight the past, but only because he or she truly believes (and can often articulate) that these practices, new and old, can create a larger Church and build disciples for Jesus.

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Obviously, millennials should be considered in church decision-making, because we are adults who are a part of the church. Our desires are much like those of every generation in the Communion of Saints before us. We want community, we want to pass something on to our children and we want to grow in faith. Below are just two reasons I think millennial leadership is important for the Episcopal Church today.

### **Millennial leadership is relational**

I consider myself a highly relational person. It's just that my community is not necessarily geographical. For example, I talked to friends and family in four different states and three countries about their relationship to religious communities for this article. We pray and work in a church that is inherently relational. At its best, the Episcopal Church's hierarchical polity creates opportunity for right relationship in community.

Many millennials have the ability to think simultaneously about the universal and the particular as they navigate problems and decisions. Holding the tension of how the particular informs the universal and how the universal shapes the particular can at times feel overwhelming and even paralyzing. In a non-geographically-bound community, we are forced to consider the impact of our everyday decisions on people living in a wide diversity of contexts. This type of processing can come out a bit clumsy, so hang in there with us, because it is also a gift that has allowed some young church leaders to encourage our churches and communities to try new things and welcome new people.

### **Millennial leadership is driven by hope**

In a time of climate change, widening gaps between the rich and poor, seemingly intractable problems of racism, patriarchy and economic exploitation, millennials can't afford to live on cheap optimism. Instead, we have to depend on hope in the face of absurd realities all around us.

I am a black woman, an Anglican and a priest. Needless to say, I live in extreme complexity and must consider how the interconnected nature of race, gender and socioeconomic status shows up in the institutions of Church and the systems of my daily existence.

Many young people my age — whether, Black, Asian, Latinx, White or multiracial — exist in a huge amount of ambiguity and flux. We know we are the first generation in this country in recent memory to have worse social, economic, political and health outlooks than our parents. Many millennials know that the American Dream, is just that: a dream. We have less equity and significantly more debt. The result is that many are financially insecure, hustling in the gig economy, scraping by on hook-ups and hand-me-downs. Yet on the whole, millennials seem to be hopeful.

There is Good News for the Church. We Christians know that hope is the foundation of faith and relationship is the life-blood of the Body of Christ. And truth be told, the Church is perfectly suited for millennials. We like old things, we like innovation, we like sad stories, we like anti-heroes and we like social consciousness and a bit of rabble-rousing. We are all called to serve an extraordinary God, through the challenges and difficulties of ordinary life, in the context of flawed systems and institutions full of manufactured obstacles, man-made suffering and oppression. I want to belong to a church that will build community and speak out against policies and corporations that make life untenable for young people or any other people. Our kids may not inherit land and fortune from us millennials. But perhaps if we are involved in decision-making now, our children and generations to come just might be endowed with a Church and reality that reflect God's justice, love and hope in the world.

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## Resources:

- [Relational Matters](#) by Greg Syler, ECF Vital Practices blog, August 14, 2013
- [Building Young Adults Networks](#) by Mary Cat Young, Vestry Papers, March 2013
- [Speaking of Hope](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, February 24, 2018
- [Rethinking Clergy Education](#) by Gary Shilling, Vestry Papers, November 2016

## A Young Person in a Young Church

Nelson Serrano

I am 31-year-old young adult from Colombia and a transitional deacon, called to live and serve in diversity. When I came to the Episcopal Church by the pure grace of God and to visit a friend at her workplace, I imagined it simply as a member of the Anglican Communion and nothing more. With the passage of time, and thanks to the different calls I have received from God through it, I must say that the Episcopal Church is more than I imagined. It is a community of faith and prayer, where despite geographical distances, we are a single broad, diverse body. That body speaks different languages, has many cultural manifestations and often different ways of thinking and worshipping. But in spite of that, our church encourages and helps us follow Jesus together, because “Love is the way.”

### **A diocese that encourages people to dream and try new things**

The Diocese of Colombia, where God called me to ordained ministry, is not one of the largest dioceses in the Episcopal Church, but it is a place where God has called people with many talents, virtues and a desire to help others. As a young person, this was fundamental, because it allowed me to see that this is not a Church of formulas, where the task of announcing God’s love is written and fixed. Rather, it is a one that allows us to explore paths, to think new ways of being Church, to have dreams and crazy ideas for inviting others to believe in Jesus.

I have also learned from my context that in matters of evangelizing we should not worry about the lack of resources. We should worry about lacking the desire to do things. A few people with limited resources can do much, if we put forth effort and work together. An example of this is the youth event that we were able to carry out some years ago with the leadership of Bishop Duque, our diocesan bishop, and the Rev. Diego Sabogal. Despite limitations, we had young people from Bogotá, Cali, Cartagena, Malambo, Medellin and other congregations from around the country. Because the Episcopal Church allows us to dream without limits and to try new things, I am encouraged to be a part of it.

### **If social media is a window on the world, the Church should be there also**

One of the things I have been most passionate about as a young adult was caused by a personal experience. Towards the year 2009, in the middle of a personal crisis, Facebook became my window to the world and together with Messenger, the only way to socialize. The Church, however, was seldom seen on social networks, and I questioned this. Surely, I was not the only person going

through a difficult moment in my life and needing someone to talk with to help me accept who I am.

When I joined the Church, and began supporting the work of Hispanic Ministry, I was deeply interested in seeing how the Church moved in social media, how it was becoming visible, letting its voice be heard and listening to others. It filled me with joy and inspired me to commit to the exercise of evangelization through social media in support of the life of the Church. When young people see our social media presence today, they find a Church that welcomes, accepts and supports them, allowing them to be who they are. They can feel that we are their Church, and come to love her with all their soul, as I do.

### **Young people are the Church's present**

The progress made in changing the traditional claim from young people are the future of the Church, to young people are the Church's present, is important to me. The Church becomes young when we are not afraid to make room for young people, to listen to their words, use their ideas and let them be who they are. Through Episcopal Youth Events (EYE and now EJE) the Church listens to young people. It approaches us, lets us know that we are the Church and that the rest of this branch of the Body of Jesus loves, accepts and needs us. Other parts of the Church — including the Presiding Bishop's staff and its legislative body — are also interested in hearing our voices. They want to help renew the Episcopal Church, drawing on the strength of its growing numbers of young people.

I identify with the ministry of many bishops, beginning with Presiding Bishop Curry, who comes close to us not only through words but in actions like attending meetings and listening to us. They take selfies with us, encourage us and recognize what we do for the Church and the passion we bring to our ministry and service. The Episcopal Church allows young people to be young and has helped me discover where I feel called to serve.

Ordained ministers are not only in the office, waiting for the faithful — they are on public transport talking to people, in the street administering “ashes to go.” They are in the supermarket with people in their daily life, in the hospital with those who suffer and with children in schools. They are networking with other organizations, committed to transforming the world and willing to march to defend justice and peace. The Episcopal Church shows me many ways to exercise ministry and allows me to dream and work so that many more may know Jesus, may pray, worship and respond to his call as diverse beings who believe that he is love, that he is the Way.

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#### **Resources:**

- [Come As You Are](#) by Lucy Cabrera Montes, Vestry Papers, May 2015
- [Feeling Valued](#) by Ariana Gonzales-Bonillas, Vestry Papers, January 2014

- [Young People—Not Merely the Churches Future](#) by Vanessa Riutta, ECF Vital Practices blog , November 15, 2013
- [God, It's Your Church](#) by Alfredo Feregrino, Vestry Papers, November 2016

### **Una persona joven en una Iglesia joven**

Nelson Serrano

Soy un joven-adulto colombiano de 31 años y diácono en transición, llamado a vivir y servir en la diversidad. Cuando llegué a la Iglesia Episcopal por pura gracia de Dios y por visitar a una amiga en su lugar de trabajo. Me la imaginé simplemente como una Iglesia miembro de la Comunión Anglicana pero nada más. Con el paso del tiempo, y gracias a los diferentes llamados que he recibido de Dios a través de la Iglesia, debo decir que la Iglesia Episcopal es más de lo que me imaginé. Es una comunidad de fe y oración, en la que, a pesar de las distancias geográficas, somos parte de un solo cuerpo amplio y diverso. Ese cuerpo habla diferentes lenguas, tiene muchas manifestaciones culturales y en muchas ocasiones diversas formas de pensar y adorar. Pero a pesar de ello nos anima y ayuda a seguir a Jesús juntos y juntas porque “el camino es el Amor”.

### **Una diócesis que anima a la gente a soñar y hacer cosas nuevas**

La Diócesis de Colombia, donde Dios me llamó al ministerio ordenado, no es una de las Diócesis más grandes en la iglesia episcopal, pero sí es un lugar al que Dios ha llamado personas con muchos talentos, virtudes y con un deseo de ayudar. Como joven esto fue fundamental, porque me permitió ver que ésta no es una Iglesia de fórmulas, en la que la tarea de anunciar el amor de Dios está escrita y fija. Es una Iglesia que permite explorar caminos, pensar nuevas formas de ser Iglesia, tener sueños e ideas locas para llamar a otras personas a creer en Jesús.

He aprendido también de mi contexto, que en cuestiones de evangelizar no debemos preocuparnos por la falta de recursos. Debemos preocuparnos por la falta de ganas de hacer las cosas. Pocas personas con recursos limitados pueden hacer mucho, si ponemos nuestro empeño y trabajamos juntos. Un ejemplo de ello fue un encuentro de jóvenes que realizamos hace algunos años con el liderazgo del Obispo Duque, nuestro obispo diocesano, y el Rvdo. Diego Sabogal. A pesar de las limitaciones estuvimos presentes jóvenes de Bogotá, Cali, Cartagena, Malambo, Medellín y otras congregaciones del país. Me anima de ser Episcopal porque nos permite soñar sin límites, y hacer cosas nuevas.

### **Si las redes sociales son una ventana al mundo, la Iglesia también debería estar allí**

Una de las cosas que más me ha apasionado como joven adulto fue causada por una experiencia personal. Hacia el año 2009, en medio de una crisis personal, Facebook se convirtió en mi ventana al mundo, y junto con Messenger en la única forma de socializar. Sin embargo, me cuestionaba la poca presencia de las Iglesias en las Redes Sociales. Seguramente yo no era la única persona que estaba pasando por un momento difícil en mi vida de aceptar quien soy, y necesitar a alguien con quien hablar.

Cuando me vinculé a la Iglesia, y empecé a apoyar algunas labores del Ministerio Hispano, me apasionó ver como la Iglesia se estaba moviendo en las redes sociales, cómo se estaba visibilizando, estaba dejando escuchar su voz, y escuchando a otras personas. Me llenó de gozo y me animó a comprometerme en el ejercicio de una evangelización por redes como apoyo a la vida eclesial. Cuando la juventud ve la presencia de nuestra Iglesia hoy en las redes sociales, encuentran una Iglesia que les da la bienvenida, les acepta y les apoya permitiéndoles ser quienes son. Pueden sentir que somos su Iglesia, y llegar a amarla con toda su alma, como yo.

### **Las personas jóvenes son el presente de la Iglesia**

Me parece muy importante el avance que se ha hecho cambiando el discurso tradicional que las personas jóvenes son el futuro de la Iglesia, a que las personas jóvenes son el presente de la Iglesia. La Iglesia se hace joven en la medida en que pierda el temor a dar lugar a las personas jóvenes, escuchando sus palabras, use sus ideas y les deje ser lo que son. A través de los Eventos de Jóvenes Episcopales (EYE y ahora EJE) la Iglesia escucha a las personas jóvenes. Se nos acerca, nos muestra que somos la Iglesia y que el resto de esta rama del Cuerpo de Jesús nos ama, nos acepta y nos necesita. Otras partes de la Iglesia, -- incluyendo el personal del Obispo Presidente y su Cuerpo Legislativo -- también quieren escuchar nuestras voces. Quieren ayudar a renovar la Iglesia Episcopal, con la fuerza de las personas jóvenes, que día a día son más.

Me identifico con el ministerio de muchos obispos, empezando por el Obispo presidente Curry, que no solo con el discurso se hace cercano a nosotros, sino también con sus actos como asistiendo a reuniones a escucharnos. También, se toman selfies con nosotros/as, nos animan y reconocen lo que hacemos por la Iglesia, y la pasión que traemos a nuestro ministerio y servicio. La Iglesia Episcopal nos permite a las personas jóvenes ser jóvenes y me ha ayudado a descubrir donde me siento llamado a servir.

Las personas en el ministerio ordenado no están solamente en la oficina, esperando por los fieles – están en el transporte público hablando con la gente, están en la calle poniendo “cenizas para el camino.” Están en el supermercado con las personas en su vida cotidiana, en el hospital con las personas que sufren y con los niños y niñas en las escuelas. Están haciendo redes con otras organizaciones, comprometidos con transformar el mundo y no temen marchar por defender la justicia y la paz. La Iglesia Episcopal me permite ver muchos caminos para ejercer el ministerio, y me permite soñar y trabajar para que mucha más gente conozca a Jesús, ore, adore y responda a su llamado como seres diversos que creemos que Jesús es amor, y que es el Camino.

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#### **Recursos:**

- [Ven tal y como eres](#) de Lucy Cabrera Montes, Vestry Papers, mayo 2015
- [Sentirse Valorados](#) de Ariana Gonzáles-Bonillas, Vestry Papers, enero 2014

- [Identificando y formando nuevos líderes](#), un webinar con Sandra Montes y Juan Ángel Monge, octubre 27, 2016
- [Dios, es tu iglesia](#) de Alfredo Feregrino, Vestry Papers, noviembre 2016

## **Intentional Community**

Isaac Everett

If you ask Episcopalians to name the most valuable thing the church has to offer, they'll probably say stuff like "grace," "community" or "Jesus." (Or "the BCP," bless their hearts.) I'm not going to say that any of that is wrong, but for millennials, there's another thing the church has to offer, and it might not be what you think.

First, some full disclosure: I was born in 1981, which either makes me the world's oldest millennial or the world's youngest Gen Xer. I think I'm a millennial, though, and here's why. My older brother, who's less than two years older than me, lives with his wife and two children in a suburb in a house that he owns. Classic Gen X.

I, on the other hand, live in the city in a house I don't own with six other people, one of whom I'm married to (and five of whom I'm not), and I've lived that way for almost my entire adult life. For me, saying I'd like to own my own house is like saying I'd like to visit Narnia. I mean, I'd strongly consider it if I thought it were possible, but I don't spend my spare time looking in wardrobes.

### **Living in community**

I often get questions from older people in my life like, "Isn't it weird to have roommates as a married couple?" Or "When are you gonna grow up and get your own place?"

The secret is that my wife and I are really, really happy. The six years that we've lived in our current community have been some of the best years of our lives, and we don't plan to ever live any other way. Christian intentional community – a group of people living together like a family, intertwining their rhythms of life and disciplines of spirit, has changed our lives.

We helped launch this Boston community as recent transplants from Manhattan so that I could work half-time for a young, scrappy and hungry congregation called The Crossing. We joined a small group of other young folks dreaming of ways to live out their values, and we hatched a vision for creating an intentional community.

I didn't know how life-changing that dream would be. Over the last six years, I became an Episcopalian and later, an Episcopal priest. I'm now employed full-time, running an organization (Creche) that replicates that dream and creating new intentional communities in the city of Boston in collaboration with Episcopal parishes.

Older generations of Episcopalians are often startled by the demand for communities like ours, possibly because our parish culture doesn't understand the needs of young adults. If you ask a

young adult in church about their deepest needs, you usually get some variation of “I need an affordable place to live, a loving and supportive community and meaningful ways to serve that align with my values.”

The Church’s response is usually, “Well, I hope you find those things. Meanwhile, Eucharist is at 10 am.”

Creche is an effort to give people the things they’re asking for.

### **Intentional relationships**

One of the many gifts that millennials bring to Christianity is that by and large, we’re either not interested in church at all or we’re really, really into it. We’re unchurched or overchurched.

It’s why even though church attendance is down, clergy recruitment among young adults is the highest it’s been in forty years. Even as our denomination wrings its hands about church decline, ours is a generation for whom sitting in a pew once a week is simply not enough. “Not just my feet,” we say, “but my hands and my head as well!”

Four years ago, I was working on a project to bring a bunch of younger communities together to co-author an online Lenten devotional. One of the groups we reached out to was Emmanuel Church in Boston’s Back Bay. They got back to us right away, saying “We’d love to be a part of this! But we’re not exactly a young people parish.”

That was in 2014. Soon after, those relationships blossomed into Creche, and Emmanuel has been in the trenches every step of the way. We launched an intentional community with them this summer, and at their parish picnic last spring, four years later, I counted over a dozen Emmanuelites between age 25 and 35.

Only a few of those folks are living in the intentional community. Creating and supporting an intentional community is just one way that Emmanuel is helping young adults commit their lives to God. Young people are coming to Emmanuel because it’s a congregation that takes them and their needs seriously.

The last time I preached there, someone who hadn’t been to church in a while said to me, “I wondered why there were so many young people here, and then I realized that they must have come to hear you preach.”

“No,” I replied. “Actually, none of them knew I’d be here today. Your church is just growing.”

### **Housing crisis**

I was having lunch with a fellow millennial recently who was unemployed and searching for a place to live. This is no small task – rent in Boston is rising more than twice as fast as wages. The average rent for a one-bedroom in my neighborhood, Jamaica Plain, is \$1700/month. And even if you can

afford that, odds are good that you can't afford the upfront costs of first and last month's rent plus a security deposit and a broker's fee.

So my friend had been couch surfing for several months, trying to save up enough to get a room somewhere. It's brutal. It keeps the people from finding stable housing. For renters in Boston, it's a full-on housing crisis.

Now if you're a homeowner, you're not affected by the housing crisis, full stop. In fact, the house crunch actually helps you by causing your home equity to appreciate. Millennials, meanwhile, are spending 35-45 percent of their income on rent. That's why my generation is only half as likely to own a home as our parents were at our age, and it's why home sales in Boston have dropped more than ten percent in the last decade.

The whole system prevents new people from getting a foot in the door of home ownership. It consolidates housing in the hands of professional landlords and encourages short-term leases and high resident turnover. It advances gentrification and destabilizes neighborhoods.

It also segregates the poor from the rich, actively driving them apart and preventing them from forging relationships, from finding the likeness of Christ in one another. Jesus did not say, "There will always be poor people." What he said was, "The poor will always be with you."

But are the poor with us? Not when it comes to housing.

In Creche's communities, we've got full time students, part-time teachers, nonprofit administrators, journal editors, attorneys, bank auditors, childcare providers, folks who are underemployed and folks who are overemployed. Yet across these diverse incomes, we forge deep, intimate connections with one another, intertwining our lives across the differences that usually keep us apart.

### **Intergenerational relationships**

The two fastest growing age groups in Boston are 20-34, and 65+ – younger millennials and aging boomers. These two groups have a surprising amount in common. They tend to have small households and limited incomes, and they report feelings of social isolation. This makes intentional community attractive to both young adults and seniors, and makes them surprisingly compatible roommates.

Psalm 71 says, "Do not cast me off in my old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent." The fear of isolation in our senior years is very real. And it happens far too often. Just like we segregate the poor, we also segregate the elderly to their detriment and ours. Study after study has shown that in retirement communities and assisted living centers, it's not the quality of care that contributes most to decrepitude, it's the routine.

Living intergenerationally disrupts that. The spontaneity that comes from living with younger people has measurable effects on longevity and quality of life. Seniors who live with younger people live longer, healthier lives. It's that simple.

And it's a mutual benefit. We launched the first Creche House primarily with people in their 20s and 30s. From the outside, it seemed like none of these young adults who had bounced from dorm room to dorm room to craigslist sublet were treating their house like a home.

A few months later, our first baby boomer moved in. The first thing she did was paint her walls, and the day after that, she hung curtains on her windows. Soon her room was loveliest in the house. The other, younger housemates, who had lived their lives in short-term non-homes, were blown away by how much nicer her room looked than everyone else's and soon followed suit.

The benefits of intergenerational living go both ways.

### **What we have to offer**

So what's the most valuable thing the church has to offer? Millennials do need grace, community and Jesus. But we also need an affordable place to live, and the Episcopal Church has real estate it has owned since long before the current housing crisis.

We might not have it for long, though. My diocese has closed 15 parishes in the last 12 years. Most urban parishes sold their rectories years ago. And a lot of church spaces are unused or underused six days a week.

But it doesn't have to be that way. By renting, renovating and repurposing church properties, we can create a way of being church that is both very new and very old – one that looks more like a monastery than a parish.

By using underused church resources to plant intentional communities, we can build a vision of the kingdom for the old and young, the rich and poor, rooted in faith and growing in love.

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### **Resources:**

- [Church Building Use](#) by Annette Buchanan, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 31, 2017
- [Welcoming Young Families](#) by Sarah Townsend Leach, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 23, 2018
- [A Tale of Three Buildings](#) by Janet Lombardo, ECF Vital Practices blog, February 18, 2019
- [Millennials in Leadership](#) by Nicole Foster, Colin Chapman and Hershey Mallette Stephens, Vestry Papers, May 2019

## **Preach!**

Megan Castellan

When I was a teenager, one of the first indications that I might have a calling to ordination was my discontent during sermons. The priest in our local church was, to my adult mind, unobjectionable. But my teenage self found her sermons so frustrating, that each week I would lecture my bemused family at great length about what she could have done better. Usually, I would rewrite her sermons entirely in a fit of ire during the week. It wasn't the theology that I objected to, per se — it was how she said it. It was the way she communicated what should be the most exciting, moving topic in our world that left me flipping through the historical documents in the BCP.

There has been much said about the generational divide in other contexts. Generations affect how we approach stewardship, technological engagement, membership and even music. But generations also hear sermons differently — which becomes obvious if you've ever tried to make your way through one of the book of sermons recommended in the 39 Articles. No one has preached like that for a while!

First — let's dispel some immediate fear. Sermons as an art form are not necessarily dead. While there is undoubtedly a place for well-done dialogue and discussion-based homilies, the basic, time-honored sermon format of a lone person talking is not foreign to millennials. Think of podcasts. Lectures may be evaporating a bit as a teaching strategy, but meanwhile, podcasts and audiobooks are experiencing a resurgence of popularity. So don't worry that the sermon in its original format is on the way out. The format remains constant; but the style is changing.

### **Shorter attention spans**

For one thing, attention spans have changed. Podcasts and audiobooks are popular, but if you consider the way people consume them, it's usually while engaged in some other activity. Listeners are multitasking — which has become more and more habitual (whether that's a positive or negative is for another article).

So the task of the preacher now is not just to hold the congregation's attention for a period of time, but to hold it undivided, which is a good deal harder. Unlike the podcast host, your audience is constrained from, say, driving a car while they listen to you or cleaning the house or entering data into a spreadsheet. Ideally, they are listening to your every word, fully engaged as the Spirit illumines the scripture through your preaching. All this means that your audience has a shorter attention span. The podcast host can hold forth for 45 minutes; you, the preacher, may get ten to twelve on a good week.

This means that the old three-point sermon doesn't work like it used to. At best, a preacher can pull off a one-point sermon. In the words of a mentor, "Say one thing, say it well, then sit down." To try to communicate more than one basic idea, one basic concept, is to overload the busy minds of your congregation. It's not that they don't want to listen to what you have to say or that they are disinterested. Personally, I deeply care about this stuff — but I can't pay attention past a certain point, because nothing in my experience has trained me to do so.

Television shows cut to commercial every seven minutes, teachers in schools were trained to be as interactive as possible, and I'm used to consuming information in small, internet-ready pieces. In this time, the preacher's job is to step into our frenetic world and speak some enlightening truth that can shape the busyness of the rest of my brain. You can buck this trend, but it's a much harder task and a good deal less of what you want to communicate will be heard.

### **Language matters**

Language, like attention spans, can either enable younger people to hear your message or prevent any reception at all. Millennials, by and large, have grown up hearing gender-inclusive language. (It was a policy at my university to fail papers if they used man/men to refer to humanity — and I am an older millennial who attended a fairly conservative college.) Many of us also have grown up hearing gender-neutral language in referencing people in their jobs, relationships and conversation.

So to my ear and the ears of my peers, phrases like siblings or beloved in Christ instead of brothers and sisters, or spouses instead of husbands and wives sound more natural and normal. This may read like an attempt to be meticulously correct, but realize that for younger generations, it is language that accurately reflects our world. Humanity is not all male! Spouses are not just husbands and wives! When preachers use older language, it's jarring to younger people and alienating, because it draws a line between the world they are describing and the world we know and inhabit. Language matters.

Similarly, examples matter. I once heard a sermon that was going along swimmingly, when the preacher said, "You know, it's like how we all know exactly where we were when JFK was shot." The people around me nodded; my face burned, and I tried to scrunch down in my seat. I have no memory of JFK being shot — that was 20 years before I was born. Because the preacher, speaking with the authority of the pulpit, was calling upon a common experience that excluded me, I felt I like I had gone from an included and welcomed member of the congregation to someone who didn't belong.

This is easy enough to avoid. For starters, don't assume that everyone shares your life experience. Not everyone in your pews has kids or is able to have kids. Not everyone is partnered or wants to be. Not everyone is able to partake in certain economic or cultural markers. Nostalgia here is also a danger. Know that while you and many of your congregations might hold fond memories of the days of Walter Cronkite and the Mad Men era, be careful about the nostalgia you use to spice your stories. Some people in your pews may remember those years as the time when women were severely limited and people of color had no rights.

I realize that is a severe warning, but the easiest solution is the basic screenwriting maxim — show, don't tell. If you want to use an example from your own experience in a sermon, take an extra step and think about why. Why does that experience speak to you in this context? If you want to compare the week's Gospel to raising kids, rather than saying, "Well, we all know how raising kids can be," think hard about how you experienced raising kids. What emotion or thought do you connect with that experience? How is it like the Gospel here? Then say that. Unpack and explain your examples. Don't just assume everyone in your congregation can follow you.

## **Trust the hearers and the Spirit**

Ultimately, the job of a good sermon is an extended thought exercise. The preacher tries to break open the scriptures, so that the thoughts and feelings on the page become so real to the congregation that they are able to connect what they are hearing with the thoughts and feelings of their own lived experience — both individually and communally. As a preacher, I can only do so much of that work myself. I can use language that includes the congregation. I can unpack my own journey with the scriptures so everyone can empathize. I can do my best to focus the message so the congregation stays with me.

But in the end, the hearers, aided by the Holy Spirit, do the heavy lifting. The more the preacher is able to speak their language and include them in the homiletical journey, the more the listeners will be able to enter into the world of the text for themselves and the more receptive they will be to the movement of the Spirit in their hearts. A good sermon that speaks to all generations opens the door. It is still the Spirit that moves through it.

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### **Resources:**

- [Storytelling as Evangelism](#) by Edmund Harris, ECF Vital Practices webinar, May 24, 2016
- [Preaching and Discipleship](#) by Scott Gunn, ECF Vital Practices blog and webinar, April 6, 2017
- [Engaging Millennials](#) by Jason Merritt, Vestry Papers, May 2019
- [God, it's your Church](#) by Alfredo Feregrino, Vestry Papers, November 2016

## **What Do We Want?**

Ellis Montes

I am a millennial. I was born in 1992 in Houston, Texas. I grew up in the Episcopal Church, and I have decided to continue to follow Jesus in this branch of the Movement. I do not like coffee; I do not own a vinyl record or a player; I have yet to eat a slice of avocado toast; I have never been to Coachella or anything like that; I have never been to Portland; and I do not own an Apple product.

Millennials are not a monolithic culture. We are not just what happens in LA or New York. We are from all over the United States, and we embrace those who come from far away places, offering what little we have to those who may have nothing. Growing up, I have seen a colorful cast of characters on TV and in music, and as I continue to observe the emerging pop culture of the next generations, I am pleased to see many more voices coming to the fore. We are an aware generation, and having seen authenticity in different cultures, we expect it wherever we go.

Just as our culture reflects a vast diversity, so should the music meant to attract us. Millennials are more connected to the rest of the world than past generations. A lot of this can be attributed to social media, where forums and websites help connect people through common interests that transcend borders. Because of this, millennials are more conscious of what is authentic to other cultures, and some engage with new cultures so much that they feel like part of them. For example, many people my age enjoy listening to music that is popular in other cultures. I cannot count the number of people I know who listen to K-pop or Nordic Metal — and mostly in non-English languages.

### **Skip the stereotypes**

Now, what does this mean for our churches? It means that we need to pay attention to the people coming to us. Hillsong United is not the only way to sing to a younger person in your congregation. They might like the Hymnal. They might like Taizé. They might like Mongolian throat singing!

The most important thing is to reach out to them and find out what they like. As a millennial, I have encountered some of the most judgmental writing in major media outlets about people around my age, articles that describe us as irresponsible, self-centered, adult-aged children. As a consequence, many millennials walk into new spaces bearing the burden of the articles or stereotypes on the minds of those around us. It is no wonder that there is so much anxiety and depression in our generation. We need to be aware of this in our churches, and to rethink any pigeonholing we might be doing to anybody who comes in through our doors.

### **Authenticity is key**

Millennials are looking for authenticity. Our awareness of the cultures that surround us in neighborhoods throughout the United States and beyond in the world makes us want to see everybody represented respectfully and not as caricatures (say, in the fashion of Three Amigos). We are interested in hearing what other voices have to say. In our popular culture, we are seeing the successes of people of color.

Hispanic means Puerto Rican, Dominican and other cultures and countries of origin, rather than just Mexican. Asian means Singaporean, Japanese, Korean and others, rather than just Chinese. We want to see more authenticity in the treatment of other cultures in the Church. Again, this means that those in power need to reach out to the different cultures in their congregations. It also means giving minorities positions of power and not just as “consultant,” “advisor” or “volunteer.”

Authenticity also means offering something that we actually need. Millennials today are subjected to a new society where everything is fast-paced. We go about doing business where emails must receive replies in less than six hours and phones are to be answered instantly. We are creating careers out of swatches of different jobs. All of this wears us down! So when we choose to fill whatever little time we have left, we want a break.

In the world of “evangelism,” I have seen so many churches offering services for youth and young adults centered around fast and loud music, light shows, smoke machines, large screens and phone

apps. Instead, the spaces we often long for are calm, slow and pensive. Just look at what's becoming more marketable to millennials: meditation software, essential oils, candles, crystals (for prayer and meditation), yoga. We're looking for ways to engage with the mysterious, not just the technological. We need prayerful, worshipful and meaningful spaces, just as Jesus has taught us.

### **Conversation builds bridges**

In the last year, I have been learning that conversation is one of the most powerful tools for evangelism. As a classically trained musician, I am quite familiar with the people who end up as music directors, instrumentalists, cantors, choristers and musicians with other responsibilities in our churches. Many of these musicians and many millennials are longing for spiritual direction in their lives. Many have been so hurt by Christianity that they have a harsh view of the Church as a whole, but they make music in a church because it is a job, just like working at an office. Often, though, the job is enjoyable, since the music is written by some of the best composers.

There is an opportunity for evangelism with your musicians. Talk with them about music. What does it mean to you? What does it mean to your musicians? What does it mean from a spiritual aspect? Real discussion can help bridge the gap between so many of our musicians and our churches.

Will it always work? Probably not. But it is a way to build a good working relationship, rather than the blind eye from the pulpit and unkind remarks from the choir loft that musicians sometimes experience.

Millennials are aware of our churches, and the way to reach out to my generation is through conversation. Talking with them will bring about greater relationships that show the love of God across the age gaps. It is in this way that we will grow in an authentic faith.

*To show what one millennial appreciates, here's a list of 10 sacred pieces/songs that I really like, in alphabetical order:*

*Anónimo: Gloria a Dios (Machu Picchu, Himnario 492)*

*J.S. Bach: Et in terra pax (BWV 232)*

*Albert F. Bayly: What does the Lord require (Hymn 605)*

*Gabriel Fauré: In paradisum (Op. 48)*

*Sandra Montes: Todo lo puedo hacer*

*J.A. Olivar y M. Manzano: Cuando el pobre (Wonder, Love, and Praise 802)*

*Josef Rheinberger: Kyrie (Op. 126)*

*Richard Smallwood: Total Praise*

*C.V. Stanford: Gloria Patri (Op. 10)*

*Marcos Witt: Tu Fidelidad*

**Ellis Reyes Montes** is a multifaceted and dynamic musician and writer. A life-long Episcopalian from Houston, Texas, he pursues his passions in music and writing with the loving support of his family. He is the music director of Grace Episcopal Church, and he is a Story Weaver with the Beloved Community StorySharing Campaign. In addition to maintaining a church music program and facilitating story sharing, he performs with various ensembles around the country, and he maintains a blog: [openlyepiscopalian.blogspot.com](http://openlyepiscopalian.blogspot.com), where he seeks to investigate the love of God for all of

*God's creation. Whenever he is not writing or practicing/performing, he can be found studying languages, playing bridge, or reading.*

**Resources:**

- [Bartering for Bands](#) by Anna Olson, ECF Vital Practices blog, October 6, 2016
- [Millennial Mythbusters: Church Edition](#) by Alissa Anderson, Vestry Papers, May 2019
- [Authenticity and Community](#) by Adriane Bilous, Vestry Papers, May 2019
- [Talk with Millennials, Not About Millennials](#) by Br. Angel Gabriel, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 17, 2019

**Millennial Giving: What Gives?**

Sarah Leach

**Who are the “millennials,” relative to fundraising in the church?**

*They are educated and have purchasing power, but debt is a big factor in financial decisions.*

According to Pew Research’s study, “Millennial Life,” they are more educated than previous generations (39% have a Bachelor’s degree or higher). If they graduated college, they make a comparable income to young adults of prior generations (around \$56,000 per year on average), but also have less accumulated wealth and more debt than prior generations, perhaps due to that education. If they did not attend college, the earnings gap is larger than in prior generations (around \$36,000 per year on average as compared with around \$39,000 for Boomers at the same age).

*They are self-focused (and that isn’t necessarily bad).*

According to The Millennial Impact Report, they care most about things that impact their daily lives. They are interested in causes and social issues that affect them personally. Millennials are also more driven to engage locally than nationally.

*They are important to your church’s future.*

Millennials are positioned to be the biggest generational group in America. Currently, only the Boomer generation has more people and in the immediate future, as their numbers decrease, millennials will surpass them in number.

**The way millennials “do church” is unique**

*They are more likely NOT to do church. But is that the point?*

We know many are not in church. We know. We hear it all the time (often accompanied by gnashing of teeth). I'm not here to focus on those millennials who are not at church. I'm here to focus on those who are at church.

Pew data from 2015 show that while the largest share of millennials (35%) is unaffiliated with a religion, there are still some who are religious and Christian – 11 percent of them are mainline protestants, which is where the Episcopal denomination would fall. Interestingly, most millennials raised without religion are unaffiliated as adults.

So, 11 percent of millennials are in our mainline Protestant churches, and many have no plans to leave. Are you so busy worrying about their peers who are not in church that you neglect those who are already there? I hope not.

*They are more traditional than you might think... but don't ever use that word.*

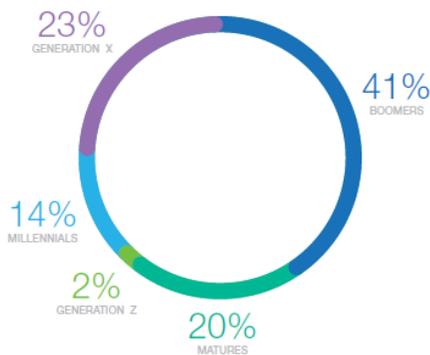
In a 2014 study, Barna Group surveyed millennials about their preferences in worship spaces. They preferred those that were more "traditional" looking, with mid-sized capacity, classic stained-glass windows and a cross at the front of the worship space. When presented with a series of words to describe their "ideal" church, respondents chose community (78%), sanctuary (77%), classic (67%), quiet (65%), casual (64%), and modern (60%). As the authors so aptly sum it up: "And herein lies a cognitive dissonance common to the young adults interviewed in the survey. Many of them aspire to a more traditional church experience, in a beautiful building steeped in history and religious symbolism, but they are more at ease in a modern space that feels more familiar than mysterious."

*They want you to ask them what they want.*

The best bet? Don't assume you know what millennials want from your church – from the physical space; from the worship services; from opportunities to engage and form community; from the ways and amounts to give of their time, talent and treasure. Don't just assume they want "hip" spaces and services and online giving. Use online tools like surveys and face-to-face conversations to ask them what they want. If you show them that you are in a two-way relationship now, it will pay dividends in their investment in your church in the future.

FIGURE 4

CONTRIBUTION TO TOTAL GIVING (PERCENT OF TOTAL DOLLARS)



|             | AVERAGE DONATION AMOUNT PER YEAR |         |           | CONTRIBUTION TO TOTAL GIVING |      |       |
|-------------|----------------------------------|---------|-----------|------------------------------|------|-------|
|             | 2010                             | 2013    | 2018      | 2010                         | 2013 | 2018  |
| Gen Z       | N/A                              | N/A     | \$341     | N/A                          | N/A  | 2%    |
| Millennials | \$341                            | \$481   | \$591 ▲   | 8%                           | 11%  | 14% ▲ |
| Gen X       | \$796                            | \$732   | \$921 ▲   | 24%                          | 20%  | 23% ▲ |
| Boomers     | \$901                            | \$1,212 | \$1,061 ▼ | 40%                          | 43%  | 41% ▼ |
| Matures     | \$1,066                          | \$1,367 | \$1,235 ▼ | 28%                          | 26%  | 20% ▼ |

▼ ▲ shows statistical significance between 2013 and 2018 at a 90% confidence interval.

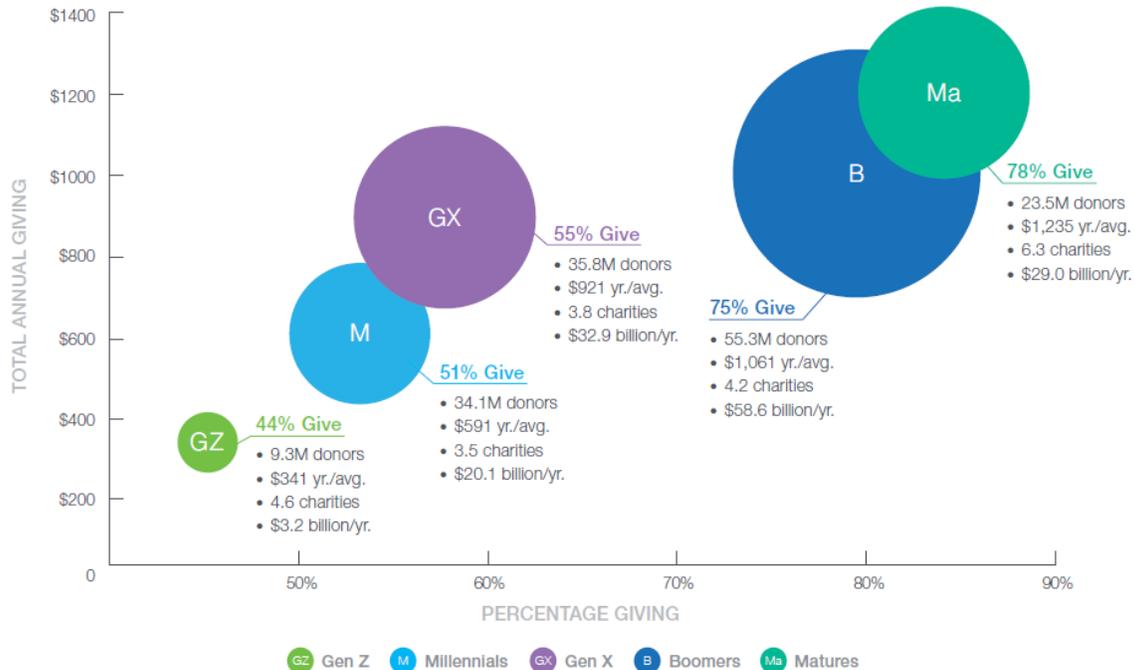
**Millennial giving is distinctive**

*They are giving at strong rates...for young adults.*

According to Blackbaud Institute's "The Next

Generation of American Giving,” around half of millennials make gifts to charities. This translates to just over 34 million people giving an average of \$591 per year to around 3.5 charities, totaling \$20 billion per year. However, compared to the other three older generations, millennials are your least significant pool of potential givers for now, giving only 14% of total dollars to charity in 2018.

FIGURE 2  
GIVING BY GENERATION IN 2018



Millennials have not yet reached that comfortable place of middle age, where according to the Blackbaud study, philanthropy often peaks: “Historically, most giving has come from people in middle age and older.... Millennials are not only at a life stage dominated by career and family priorities; they have inherited a world of economic uncertainty in which nothing can be taken for granted.”

The attention you give to them and to developing their giving habits now should be seen as an investment in the future.

*They want to give your church their treasure.*

As for which causes matter to millennials, worship is of the highest importance in charitable giving. This is not unlike almost all prior generations! Blackbaud observed: “For all but Gen X, places of worship receive the single largest allocation of giving dollars when asked to prioritize.”

Can you tie your church appeals to other causes that matter to this generation? When you ask millennials to pledge to your annual campaign, try emphasizing the ways in which your church helps and invests in children, animals and your local community.

*They also want to give their time and talent.*

Don't forget to give them a job, according to an Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability survey: "Nearly one in three looks for volunteer opportunities when considering a donation (29% vs. 20% of older givers)." If they have invested in your church with sweat-equity, they are more likely to invest financially.

### **Talk their talk**

*They want to see you online.*

This generation has grown up with technology and expects you to use it to connect with them, both for sharing information and for making requests for gifts. According to Blackbaud, the most viewed online tools for this group are e-newsletters, blog posts and social media posts/videos. The most utilized social media platforms are Facebook and Instagram. That tends to hold true across generations, but the frequency on those platforms each month is higher for this generation.

The message: have a current presence on these social media platforms and produce content regularly (posts and stories) to stay in front of this group.

*They want to see you everywhere!*

Don't completely abandon the old-fashioned methods, however. Blackbaud's report suggests that "the younger you are, the more open you are to a wide range of solicitation channels."

Universally, across generations, the most acceptable way to ask for a gift is through a friend or family member. Use all the tools you have to stay relevant to this generation and to get their attention in an oversaturated online world.

*They also want you to talk their talk.*

Be sure to use language that connects with them. Millennials will give a gift that is 20 percent higher if you use language about making a "meaningful" gift rather than a "generous" one. With older givers, the word "generous" is more effective.

The Millennial Impact Report suggests that to connect with millennials, you should use language that is positive, emotion-based and factual, and give them calls to action with the desired outcomes – both immediate, one-time actions and longer-term involvement. In other words, when communicating, give them concise snippets of information that are easy to connect with and inspire action.

And don't use the word *traditional*.

TLDR\* — As the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes warns us, "Do not say, 'Why were the former days better than these?' For it is not from wisdom that you ask this." Instead, learn about the millennials in your congregation by asking them what they want and need. Then connect with them in ways they say are meaningful to them and they will want to give. And remember, they are the future of the Church.

\*Millennial speak for “Too Long, Didn’t Read,” just give me the Cliffs Notes.

**Sarah Townsend Leach** joined ECF after serving as Director of Advancement and Communications for the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, FL. Throughout her ten years in the nonprofit sector, she has helped create and share sustainable strategies for leadership development, fund development and communications with a wide variety of organizations throughout the Southeast and Midwest. A native of Nashville, Tennessee, and a life-long Episcopalian, Sarah holds a BA in English Literature from Rhodes College in Memphis and a Masters of Public Administration from Indiana University’s School of Public and Environmental Affairs.

#### Sources:

- Barna, [“Designing Worship Spaces with Millennials in Mind”](#)
- Blackbaud, [The Next Generation of American Giving](#)
- Christianity Today, [Figuring Out the Millennial Christian Giver](#)
- Pew Research, [“Millennials increasingly are driving the growth of ‘nones’”](#)
- Pew Research, [Millennial Life: How Young Adulthood Today Compares to Prior Generations](#)
- [The Millennial Impact Report 2017](#)

#### Resources:

- [Stewardship in the New Millennium](#) by Erin Weber-Johnson, ECF Vital Practices webinar, September 17, 2014
- [Engaging Millennials](#) by Jason Merritt, Vestry Papers, May 2019
- [Intentional Stewardship](#) by Linda Buskirk, ECF Vital Practices blog, March 26, 2019

### Fishing Together

Zack Nyein

I grew up attending Episcopal camps at the turn of the century when the Millennial Development Goals (MDGs) were the cause du jour. Noble in their pursuit, we spent many hours with other teens participating in group discussions and globally-minded service projects focused on eradicating poverty and the constellation of associated issues by 2015. The high value placed on the building up of God’s kingdom made me proud to be Episcopalian, and our church’s emphasis on justice as central to baptized living continues to draw thousands of mercy-loving millennials to our corner of the vineyard.

Ironically, however, the approach to faith in action that I experienced as an adolescent in the new millennium was quintessentially boomer in nature, as exemplified by the MDGs’ signature liturgy: The U2charist, a votive mass, originally conceived to raise money and awareness for the MDGs. Nothing against Bono or the liturgy’s creators, it was a classically Anglican experiment in vernacular adaptation, and I am grateful for its philanthropic impact.

Nevertheless, as my generation has been empowered for lay and ordained leadership in the institutional church, I believe we have deepened and expanded conversations around what faithful action in response to the Gospel might look like in our contemporary zeitgeist. Below are some personal and anecdotal reflections on how millennials are shaping the church's perspective on social witness in an era characterized by the exposure and recognition of our world's most raw yet ancient wounds.

### **Mutuality is key**

The millennial generation is often caricatured by its affinity for locally-grown produce and fair trade coffee, and disdain for chain stores and restaurants. Its gravitation towards the urban bourgeois can, at worst, contribute to the dispersion of communities (especially black and brown) through gentrification. But time and again, I have seen my peers — Christian and otherwise — choose to root themselves in their local neighborhoods, embracing the art and cuisine and charisms of the city not for the sake of vanity but out of a sincere desire to participate in the realization of God's beloved community.

Consider my friend Allison Kendrick, one of the most Christlike people I know and a freelance videographer based in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Like so many millennials, she cobbles together a livable income through a collage of creative side hustles. She loves the flexibility this offers, permitting her to lend time to local activism while chatting up everyone she meets as a full-time extrovert. When Allison learned of the need in Chattanooga's Westside neighborhood for care and food for children in the summer, she found the space and funding from local Episcopal and Presbyterian organizations to start the Renaissance Day Camp. It was messy, and chaotic and imperfect — and very good. It was not created to fulfill a parish's strategic plan or from a vague sense of guilt and embarrassment in the face of public issues, but out of real relationships forged from an authentic commitment to the community — through eating, talking, working and playing alongside neighbors.

In my observation, this sense of mutuality underpins so many of the most vibrant ministries by millennials. I often recall the words of the Rev. Bob Leopold, founder of Southside Abbey. His alternative to the old adage, "Give someone a fish and feed them for a day; teach them how to fish and feed them for a lifetime" is simple. "Go fishing together," he says. It's what I like to call fully "prepositional" ministry — ministry not only to and for, but with, by, of and among.

This posture challenges even our most well-intentioned prayers. While studying at Yale, I started an experimental dinner church called Table on the Green to bring town, gown and church together around a meal. We often began with a song that went, "Stand in awe of the one who hears the cry of the poor, for they shall eat and be satisfied." After our first gathering, a trusted colleague said, "why pray as if the poor are not among us?" The next week we simply changed "they shall eat" to "we shall eat." The words were an easy fix; enacting them is much more difficult. And yet I see millennial-led ministries across our church where "fishing together" is the norm.

### **Open hearts and hands**

The Rev. Chantal McKinney, founding pastor of Christ's Beloved Community in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, describes her priestly vocation as somewhat surprising, having grown up in a conventional, white Episcopal parish "with an organ and all the trappings." However, after spending time ministering as chaplain among the incarcerated, she was moved to take to the streets, committed to building relationships across difference. With a passion for bilingual ministry and breaking down racial barriers, she describes her ministerial vision as "mutual, rather than top-down, and she seeks to honor the spark of the Divine in all people."

I could go on to tell you about Smokey's Pantry for food insecure students and staff begun by young adults at the University of Tennessee, or about the Warrior Church we recently started in Atlanta that brings men in recovery from addiction and white-collar professionals from our well-established downtown congregation together to work out and worship at a local gym. There are countless ministries, big and small, led by millennials across our church for which I give thanks to God. Millennials are leading the Jesus Movement as chains are broken, barriers removed and truth is proclaimed with courage and conviction.

Needless to say, poverty and its cruel companions were not eradicated by 2015. It turns out, Jesus was right: the poor are still among us and always will be (John 12:8). In the information age, we know this more than ever, and in light of this these hard words, it is easy to feel deflated. And yet it is Jesus' own presence that strengthens us to press on with open hearts and hands.

Our church is alive with young people who choose to stay the course — despite our church's imperfections, blemishes, and flaws — because we have seen the One who is making all things new. Nourished by word and sacrament in the beauty of the Episcopal Church, we are reminded at font and table that none of us goes alone. Our tradition will not allow us to resign in hopelessness, nor does it call us to bear the burdens of the world alone. Again and again, we are called to go forth into the world rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. Won't you join us?

*The Rev. Zack Nyein is Associate Rector for Community Engagement and Children and Youth Formation at All Saints' Episcopal Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Zack is enthusiastic about developing creative ways of connecting and communicating the Good News of God in Christ across generations and difference as the church lives into its new and ancient calling as a community of reconciliation and renewal. He is a lifelong musician and a lover of travel, the arts and fitness. He holds degrees from the University of Tennessee and Yale Divinity School and resides in Midtown with his husband, Michael Waterson.*

#### **Resources:**

- [Simple, Not Easy](#) by Jimmy Abbott, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 10, 2019
- [Talk with Millennials, Not About Millennials](#) by Br. Angel Gabriel, ECF Vital Practices blog, May 17, 2019
- [Young People: Not Merely the Church's Future](#) by Vanessa Riutta, ECF Vital Practices blog November 15, 2013

## **¡Predica!**

Megan Castellan

Cuando era adolescente, uno de los primeros indicios de que podría tener un llamado al sacerdocio fue mi descontento con los sermones. La sacerdote de nuestra iglesia local era, para mi mente adulta, inobjetable. Pero mi ser adolescente encontraba sus sermones tan frustrantes que a lo largo de la semana sermoneaba interminablemente a mi desconcertada familia sobre lo que ella podría haber hecho mejor. Por lo general, reescribía sus sermones completamente en un ataque de ira durante la semana. No me oponía a la teología de por sí, sino a la manera en que la expresaba. Fue la forma en que ella comunicaba lo que debería haber sido el tema más emocionante y conmovedor de nuestro mundo lo que me inspiró a hojear los documentos históricos en el Libro de Oración Común.

Se ha dicho mucho acerca de la división generacional en otros contextos. Las generaciones afectan la forma en que abordamos la mayordomía, el compromiso teológico, la afiliación e incluso la música. Pero las generaciones también escuchan los sermones de manera diferente, algo evidente si alguna vez trató penosamente de leer uno de los sermones recomendados en los 39 Artículos. ¡Nadie predica así desde hace años!

Primero: disipemos parte del temor inmediato. Los sermones como una forma artística no están necesariamente muertos. Si bien indudablemente hay un lugar para un diálogo bien estructurado y homilías basadas en discusión, el formato del sermón básico y tradicional de alguien que se para y habla no es ajeno a las personas millennial (personas que nacieron entre 1981 y 1996). Piense en los podcasts. Las cátedras se pueden estar evaporando paulatinamente como una estrategia de enseñanza, pero la popularidad de los podcasts y audiolibros está resurgiendo. Así que no se preocupe: el sermón en su formato original no está en vías de desaparecer. El formato permanece constante, lo que está cambiando es el estilo.

### **Períodos de atención más cortos**

No cabe duda de que los períodos de atención han cambiado. Los podcasts y los audiolibros son populares, pero si considera la manera en que se consumen, por lo general es en medio de alguna otra actividad. Las personas que los escuchan están realizando tareas múltiples, algo cada vez más habitual (si es algo positivo o negativo es para otro artículo).

Entonces la tarea del/la predicador(a) ahora no se limita a mantener la atención de la feligresía por un período de tiempo, sino también una atención plena, algo que es mucho más difícil. A diferencia del/la anfitrión(a) del podcast su audiencia no puede, por ejemplo, manejar un vehículo mientras que lo(a) escucha, limpiar la casa o ingresar datos en una hoja de cálculo. Idealmente escucha cada una de sus palabras y participa de lleno mientras que el Espíritu ilumina las Escrituras mediante su predicación. Todo esto significa que su audiencia tiene un lapso de atención más corto. El/la anfitrión(a) del podcast puede sostener esa atención durante 45 minutos; usted, el/la predicador(a), puede contar con diez a doce en una buena semana.

Esto significa que el antiguo sermón de tres puntos no funciona como antes. En el mejor de los casos, un(a) predicador(a) puede salirse con la suya con un sermón de un punto. En las palabras de un mentor, "Diga una cosa, díjala bien y después siéntese". Intentar comunicar más de una idea básica, un concepto básico, es sobrecargar las mentes ocupadas de su feligresía. No es que no quieran prestar atención a lo que tenga que decir o que no les interese. Personalmente, esas cosas me importan muchísimo, pero no puedo prestarles atención más allá de cierto punto, porque nada en mi experiencia me capacitó para hacerlo.

Los programas de televisión se interrumpen para avisos publicitarios cada siete minutos, los/as maestros/as en las escuelas fueron capacitados/as para ser lo más interactivos/as posible, y estoy acostumbrada a consumir información en trozos pequeños, listos para Internet. En la actualidad, el trabajo del/la predicador(a) es entrar en nuestro mundo frenético y decir una verdad esclarecedora que pueda dar forma al ajeteo del resto de mi cerebro. Usted podrá revelarse contra esta tendencia, pero es una tarea mucho más difícil y su audiencia prestará atención a mucho menos de lo que esté tratando de comunicar.

### **El lenguaje importa**

El lenguaje, al igual la capacidad de atención, puede hacer que la juventud escuche su mensaje o que impida que lo escuchen del todo. En general, las personas millennial se criaron oyendo un lenguaje incluyente del género. (Era una política en mi universidad reprobador las monografías si en ellas se empleaba hombre/hombres para referirse a la humanidad, y yo soy una millennial de mayor edad que asistí a una universidad bastante conservadora). Muchos de nosotros también crecimos oyendo un lenguaje neutral en cuanto al género al referirse a personas en sus trabajos, relaciones y conversaciones.

Así que para mi oído y los oídos de mis pares, frases como semejantes en Cristo en lugar de hermanos y hermana o parejas o cónyuges en lugar de esposos y esposas, suenan más naturales y normales. Esto puede interpretarse como un intento de ser meticulosamente correcta, pero dense cuenta que para las generaciones más jóvenes, es un lenguaje que refleja nuestro mundo con precisión. ¡La humanidad no es toda masculina! ¡Las parejas no son solo esposos y esposas! Cuando los/as predicadores/as usan un lenguaje más antiguo, es discordante y alienante para la gente joven, porque traza una línea entre el mundo que ellos/as están describiendo y el mundo que conocemos y vivimos. El lenguaje importa.

Asimismo, los ejemplos son importantes. Una vez escuché un sermón que iba muy bien, hasta que el predicador dijo: "Sabén, es como que todos sabemos exactamente dónde estábamos cuando le dispararon a John F. Kennedy (JFK)". La gente a mi alrededor asintió, pero a mí me ardía la cara y traté de hundirme en mi asiento. No recuerdo para nada dónde estaba cuando le pegaron un tiro a JFK. Eso fue 20 años antes de que naciera. Debido a que el predicador, hablando con la autoridad del púlpito se refería a una experiencia que me excluía, en ese momento sentí pasar de ser una miembro de una feligresía que me incluía y daba la bienvenida a ser alguien que no pertenecía.

Esto es bastante fácil de evitar. Para empezar, no suponga que todos/as comparten su experiencia de vida. No todas las personas que están en los bancos de su iglesia tienen hijo/as o pueden tenerlo/as. No todas las personas están en pareja o quieren estarlo. No todas las personas pueden

participar en ciertas actividades económicas o culturales. La nostalgia aquí también es peligrosa. Si bien usted y muchos/as de sus feligreses/as pueden tener buenos recuerdos de las épocas de los años 50 y 60, tenga cuidado con la nostalgia que usa para salpimentar sus historias. Algunas personas en los bancos de su iglesia pueden recordar esos años como cuando las mujeres estaban muy limitadas y la gente de otras razas o etnias no tenía derechos.

Sé que es una advertencia severa, pero la solución más fácil es la máxima básica del/la guionista: muestre, no diga. Si desea utilizar un ejemplo de su propia experiencia en un sermón, piense detenidamente por qué. ¿Por qué esa experiencia le habla en este contexto? Si desea comparar el Evangelio de la semana con la crianza de lo/as hijo/as, en lugar de decir: "Bueno, todo/as sabemos lo que es criar hijo/as", piense detenidamente en su experiencia de criar hijo/as. ¿Qué sentimientos o pensamientos conecta con esa experiencia? ¿En qué se asemejan al Evangelio en este caso? Desglose y explique sus ejemplos. No se limite a suponer que su feligresía lo(a) puede seguir.

### **Confíe en su audiencia y en el Espíritu**

En última instancia, la función de un buen sermón es un ejercicio de pensamiento extendido. El/la predicador(a) intenta exponer las Escrituras de manera tal que los pensamientos y sentimientos en la página se vuelvan tan reales que la feligresía pueda conectar lo que esté oyendo con los pensamientos y sentimientos de sus propias experiencias de vida, tanto individuales como comunales. Como predicadora, solo puedo hacer una parte de ese trabajo yo misma. Puedo emplear un lenguaje que incluya a la feligresía. Puedo hacer coincidir mi propia jornada con las Escrituras para que todos puedan empatizar. Puedo realizar mi mejor esfuerzo para enfocar el mensaje de manera tal que la feligresía permanezca conmigo.

Pero finalmente, la audiencia, ayudada por el Espíritu Santo, es quien hace el trabajo pesado. Cuanto más pueda el/la predicador(a) hablar su lenguaje e incluirlo en la jornada homielítica, más podrán los/as feligreses/as entrar al mundo del texto por sí solos/as y ser más receptivos/as al movimiento del Espíritu en sus vidas. Un buen sermón con el que puedan conectarse todas las generaciones abre la puerta, pero lo que los mueve a lo largo de él sigue siendo el Espíritu.

***La Reverenda Megan L. Castellan** es la rectora de la Iglesia Episcopal St. John's en Ithaca, Nueva York. Ha escrito en medios tan diversos como Episcopal Café, Lent Madness, McSweeney's Internet Tendency y Toast. También contribuyó a varios libros de Church Publishing. Cuando no está escribiendo, disfruta ver a su esposo jugar videojuegos y sus mascotas planear dominar el mundo.*

### **Recursos:**

- [Dios, es tu iglesia](#) por Alfredo Feregrino, Vestry Papers, noviembre 2016
- [Preaching and Discipleship](#) por Scott Gunn, ECF Vital Practices blog and webinar, 6 abril 2017
- [Engaging Millennials](#) por Jason Merritt, Vestry Papers, mayo 2019
- [Una persona joven en una Iglesia joven](#) por Nelson Serrano, Vestry Papers, mayo 2019

## ¿Qué queremos?

Ellis Montes

Soy una persona millennial (personas que nacieron entre 1981 y 1996). Nací en 1992 en Houston, Texas. Crecí en la Iglesia Episcopal y he decidido seguir a Jesús en esta rama del Movimiento. No me gusta el café; no tengo discos ni un tocadiscos; tampoco he comido un pan tostado con aguacate; nunca he ido a Coachella ni otros lugares así; nunca he estado en Portland; y no tengo ningún producto Apple.

Las personas millennials no somos una cultura monolítica. No somos solo lo que sucede en Los Ángeles o Nueva York. Somos de todas partes del mundo y aceptamos a quienes vienen de lugares lejanos, ofreciendo lo poco que tenemos a quienes no tienen nada. Mientras crecía, vi un elenco de personajes interesantes y diversos en la televisión y en la música, y mientras sigo observando la cultura popular emergente de las próximas generaciones, me complace ver que muchas variedades de voces están llegando a un primer plano. Somos una generación consciente, y habiendo visto la autenticidad en diferentes culturas, la esperamos dondequiera que vayamos.

Así como nuestra cultura refleja una gran diversidad, la música también debe reflejar la diversidad para atraernos. Las personas millennial están más conectadas con el resto del mundo que las generaciones pasadas. Mucho de esto se puede atribuir a las redes sociales, donde los foros y sitios web ayudan a conectar a las personas a través de intereses comunes que trascienden las fronteras. Debido a esto, las personas millennial son más conscientes de lo que es auténtico para otras culturas, y algunas se involucran tanto con nuevas culturas que se sienten parte de ellas. Por ejemplo, muchas personas de mi edad les encanta escuchar música que es popular en otras culturas. No puedo contar la cantidad de personas que conozco que escuchan K-pop o Nordic Metal, y en su mayoría en idiomas distintos al español.

### **Deja los estereotipos.**

Ahora, ¿qué significa esto para nuestras iglesias? Significa que debemos prestar atención a las personas que entran a nuestras iglesias. Hillsong United no es la única forma de cantarle a una persona joven en su congregación. Quizás les guste el himnario. Puede que les guste Taizé. ¡Es posible que les guste el canto difónico de Mongolia!

Lo más importante es acercarnos a ellos y averiguar qué les gusta. Como millennial, he leído algunos de los escritos más críticos en los principales medios de comunicación sobre personas de mi edad, artículos que nos describen como niños de edad adulta, irresponsables, y egocéntricos. Como consecuencia, muchas personas millennial entran por primera vez a un lugar llevando la carga de los artículos o estereotipos en la mente de quienes nos rodean. No es de extrañar que haya tanta ansiedad y depresión en nuestra generación. Tenemos que ser conscientes de esto en nuestras iglesias y repensar cualquier encasillamiento que podamos estar haciendo a cualquiera que entre por nuestras puertas.

### **La autenticidad es la clave**

Las personas millennial buscan la autenticidad. Por nuestra conciencia de las culturas que nos rodean en los vecindarios de todo el mundo queremos ver a toda la gente representada con respeto y no como caricaturas. Queremos escuchar lo que otras voces quieren decir. En nuestra cultura popular, estamos viendo los éxitos de las personas de diversas razas y etnias.

Hispano significa puertorriqueño, dominicano y otras culturas y países de origen, en lugar de solo mexicanos. Asiático significa singapurense, japonés, coreano y otros, en lugar de solo chino. Queremos ver más autenticidad en la forma de tratar a las personas de otras culturas en la Iglesia. Nuevamente, esto significa que los que tienen el poder deben llegar a las diferentes culturas en sus congregaciones. También significa dar a las minorías posiciones de poder y no tenerlas solo como "consultor", "asesor" o "voluntario".

Autenticidad también significa ofrecernos algo que realmente necesitamos. Las personas millennial hoy en día están sujetas a una nueva sociedad donde todo está acelerado. Nos ocupamos de hacer negocios en los que los correos electrónicos deben recibir respuestas en menos de seis horas y los teléfonos deben contestarse al instante. Estamos creando carreras formadas por muestras de diferentes trabajos. ¡Todo esto nos desgasta! Entonces, cuando decidimos ocupar el poco tiempo que nos queda, queremos un descanso.

En el mundo del "evangelismo", he visto tantas iglesias que ofrecen servicios para jóvenes y jóvenes adultos centrados en música rápida y ruidosa, espectáculos de luces, máquinas de humo, pantallas grandes y aplicaciones para teléfonos. En cambio, los espacios que a menudo anhelamos son tranquilos, lentos y pensativos. Solo hay que ver lo que se está volviendo más comercializado para las personas millennial: programas computarizados de meditación, aceites esenciales, velas, cristales (para la oración y la meditación), yoga. Estamos buscando formas de relacionarnos con lo misterioso, no solo con lo tecnológico. Necesitamos espacios de oración, adoración y sentido, tal como Jesús nos ha enseñado.

### **La conversación construye puentes**

Durante este año, he estado aprendiendo que la conversación es una de las herramientas más poderosas para el evangelismo. Como músico de formación clásica, estoy bastante familiarizado con las personas que son directores de música, instrumentistas, cantores, coristas y músicos con otras responsabilidades en nuestras iglesias. Muchos de estos músicos y mucha gente millennial anhela una dirección espiritual en sus vidas. Muchos han sido tan lastimados por el cristianismo que tienen una visión desfavorable de la Iglesia en general, pero tocan música en una iglesia porque es un trabajo, igual como si trabajaran en una oficina. A menudo, sin embargo, el trabajo es agradable, ya que la música está escrita por algunos de los mejores compositores.

Hay una oportunidad para el evangelismo con sus músicos. Hable con ellos sobre la música. ¿Qué significa para ti? ¿Qué significa para tus músicos? ¿Qué significa desde un aspecto espiritual? Una discusión honesta puede ayudar a cerrar la brecha entre muchos de nuestros músicos y nuestras iglesias.

¿Siempre funcionará? Probablemente no. Pero es una forma de construir una buena relación de trabajo, en lugar de hacerse de la vista gorda desde el púlpito y los comentarios desagradables desde el coro que los músicos a veces escuchan.

Las personas millennial están conscientes de nuestras iglesias, y la manera de llegar a mi generación es a través de la conversación. Al hablar con ellos tendrá mejores relaciones que muestran el amor de Dios sin fijarse en la edad. De esta manera creceremos en una fe auténtica.

*Para mostrar lo que una persona millennial aprecia, aquí hay una lista de 10 piezas/cantos sagrados que realmente me gustan, en orden alfabético:*

*Anónimo: Gloria a Dios (Machu Picchu, El Himnario 492)*  
*J.S. Bach: Et in terra pax (BWV 232)*  
*Albert F. Bayly: What does the Lord require (Hymnal 1982 605)*  
*Gabriel Fauré: In paradisum (Op. 48)*  
*Sandra Montes: Todo lo puedo hacer*  
*J.A. Olivar y M. Manzano: Cuando el pobre (Wonder, Love, and Praise 802)*  
*Josef Rheinberger: Kyrie (Op. 126)*  
*Richard Smallwood: Total Praise*  
*C.V. Stanford: Gloria Patri (Op. 10)*  
*Marcos Witt: Tu Fidelidad*

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#### **Recursos:**

- [Una persona joven en una Iglesia joven](#) por Nelson Serrano, Vestry Papers, mayo 2019
- [Ven tal y como eres](#) por Lucy Cabrera Montes Vestry Papers mayo 2015
- [Sentirse valorados](#) por Ariana Gonzales-Bonillas Vestry Papers enero 2014
- [Millennials and Authenticity, or "Be Yourself"](#) por Hilary Bogert-Winkler, Vestry Papers blog, 19 junio 2019