

**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.

*The **Rev. Nelson Serrano** was ordained as a transitional deacon in the Episcopal Church in Colombia in 2015. He currently serves as a cleric at the Cathedral of San Pablo in Bogotá and supports some programs of the Office of Hispanic / Latino Ministries. In 2018 he graduated as a Psychologist from the National University of Colombia and in 2019 earned a Master of Arts in Religion at Trinity School for Ministry.*

#### **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 González-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