Generational Challenges in Collaborative Ministry

For the first time in American history, five generations (at least) are trying to make faith their own.
What characterizes each generation?
How does understanding each generation’s values and views of institutions shift ministry paths from conflict to collaboration?

TRADITIONALISTS (Pre-1945)

- Cooperate
- Serve with lower expectations that other generations
- Give generously - sacrifice
- Most rebellious – their ideas changed the world more than any other generation

Struggles:
- purposelessness/retirement,
- orientation toward both past and future; past better than it is and future scarier than it is
- trying to make sense of things

Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?” For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. ¹

Mentoring
Coaching
But they need to “keep the twinkle in their eye and hold down the cranky.”

BOOMERS (1946-1964)
First generation raised to believe people are special > hyperindividualism > focus on self and church hopping

• self-expression
• self-exploration
• personal satisfaction

These are the American dreamers
Most optimistic generation
TV (strong common experience)
Competition
From theology to psychology (note these ideas were those of the previous generation; Boomers simply lived into them)
• Religion to relationship
• Theme verse: I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. 2

GEN X (1965-1980)
Don’t like the label so they reject it > invisible
Divorce, latchkey kids,
recessions (affluence of boomers was gone), downward mobility, less home ownership, student debt
Digital natives – always there in this generation
• Information in extreme – saw behind the curtain
•
World was full of bad news!
Cynical, isolated, love isn’t forever, technology can’t solve the problems

Strengths:
Community reclaimed and not competitors
Spirituality in all of life
Family over Work

Challenges:
Build their own truth – first generation that accepted something can be true for you and not for me
Realism > jaded > cynical > build their own worlds out of cynical isolationism

Millennials (1981-2001)

Most photographed generation > gets the most attention
- Larger than Xers;
- Hands-on Dads; parenting by dialogue
- Want their parents involved in their lives

Confident – 96% believe they can do something great
- A return to making Millennials feel special

Consumers
- Ask for what they want
- Go someplace else to get it
- 53 hours/week with media technology and use more than one kind at a time

Agree that they aren’t really adults until about age 26; adulting is a new phenomenon; don’t believe they will be settled until then

Highly criticized so they need us to focus on their strengths

Strength’s
- Want meaning > involved and making an impact
- Authenticity > they watched the icons fall, they are open with their lives and flaws
- Teams > group tests, peer mediation, they easily cross boundaries of ethnicity, orientation, gender, avoid fighting over differences, cross generational differences easily

Temptations:
- Be yourself > contradictions in their morality > 34% say they didn’t know what makes something right or wrong > 40% said it had something to do with what others think of them > 53% said wrong is if it hurts someone else > 12% said society needs values and agreed on laws 40% bse their values on the bible or other religious teaching 24% recogniz religion as a general ethical influence operating in the background of their lives
- Church is good but not important > no parental model > hypocrisy > Kingdom/Kindom of God instead >
- Be good, feel good, live your life > spiritual but not religious >
The question: What must we do (differently) to reach each new generation of people?
NOT Why won’t younger people come to my church?

OPTIONS:
1. Change the church now. Ask people what they want in a church and you’re your church that church.
2. Grow old together and serve the younger generations. No real adaptive changes required.
3. Pretend you can reach all 5 generations. This is really unrealistic.

Generational IQ does a good job helping congregations explore what they need to do to reach each generation.

Xers
- Avoid over-programming that pulls them from already existing relationships
- Offer them a ‘family’ to plug into – relationships
- Worship needs tailored. Ask what they want. Media is important, polish isn’t always. Smaller settings
- Address ‘true for you but not for me’ by helping them see that knowing God is really possible, knowing the God Jesus knew is possible,
- Get comfortable with technology
- Take church out of the church building; meet the people before you ask them to mee the programs or the building

Millennials
- Invest in their lives; mentoring, friendship, not programmatically but authentically
- Humor!
- Deep teaching – get behind the commandments; remember their parents dialogued with them; 20% of 20-somethings drop out of church because they felt God was missing from the event
- Tough questions
- Address Be good, Feel good, live your life – an amazing powerful beyond nice, supportive God
For more information consult:

