

**Script for
Part II Millennials and Generation X:
Challenge and Opportunity for Religious Congregations**

Slide 1: Millennials and Generation X: Challenge and Opportunity for Religious Congregations

Slide 2: [Generational Cultures Credits]

Slide 3: [Except where otherwise noted . . .]

Slide 4: According to researchers who have studied Millennials, several key adjectives can describe this generation. White, middle-class Millennials, at least, are:

Slide 5: *Special*: Gen X was born under the shadow of contraception and abortion, conscious that many who could have been their age mates had not been allowed to exist. Millennials, in contrast, were born at a time when science was used to *conceive* babies, not prevent their conception. They were planned for and wanted; for some, their parents spent thousands of dollars on expensive fertility procedures to conceive them. Growing up with few or no siblings, they were the recipients of more parental attention.

Slide 6: [Quotation: “Mozart in the womb. . .]

Slide 7: *Sheltered*: Unlike Gen X “latchkey kids,” Millennials have been surrounded by kid safety rules and devices: “Baby on Board” car signs, ever-more protective car seats, bicycle helmets, V-chips in their computers, etc.

Slide 8: [Quotation: “I wish I lived in the ‘50s and ‘60s . . .]

Slide 9: Instead of being told to “go outside and play,” they were chauffeured to supervised recreational activities. As Millennials enter college, their “helicopter parents” continue to hover, ready to rescue them from difficulties.

Slide 10: [Quotation: “When my parents were young . . .”]

Slide 11: *Confident and Hopeful*: Millennials are far more likely than Gen Xers to assume that they can change the world. More than 90% feel positive about themselves; 77% feel confident about the future.

Slide 12: [Quotation: “I like to think of my generation . . .”]

Slide 13: Millennial girls grew up in schools where girls outperformed boys in almost every subject and extracurricular activity. As a result, they are more ambitious than boys and expect to make at least as much – if not more – money in their careers.

Slide 14: [Quotation: “At my local high school . . .”]

Slide 15: They therefore feel no need for a Feminist Movement and look at “militant” feminism in the way the Boomer generation looked at male “macho” culture: as something that exalts one gender by putting down the other one. Young women Millennials appear to be marrying earlier than Gen X women – they assume that they will have no problem “stepping out” to have children early and resuming a satisfying career in ten or fifteen years.

Slide 16: [Quotation: “We Millennials don’t understand why adults . . .”]

Slide 17: *Team Oriented*: When asked what were the major causes of world problems, Millennials listed “selfishness” (56%) and “lack of respect for authority and laws” (52%) first. Boomers and Gen Xers would have been more likely to list oppressive institutions.

Slide 18: [Quotation: “I think the thing that makes up a good community is . . .”]

Slide 19: Because of their experiences in organized group activities, from team sports to group projects in class, Millennials appear to be less creative and less self-directed than previous generational cohorts. They were more likely to wear uniforms, even in public school, and they liked it.

Slide 20: [Quotation: “Badges promote a sense of belonging . . .”]

Slide 21: *Goal Oriented*: For Millennials, “being smart is cool.” More career-driven and ambitious than Gen X, they assume that they will get a good job and make more money than their parents – and the oldest among them are frustrated to be making “only” \$35,000 in entry-level jobs at age 25. Although it is too early to be certain, the oldest Millennials appear to be choosing a career and life vocation at a far younger age than Generation X did.

Slide 22: [Quotation: “A few months ago, I had a debate with a group of Gen Xers . . .”]

Slide 23: [Quotation: “The last thing I want for us . . .”]

Slide 24: *Pressured*: Millennials are more fragmented and multi-tasking than any previous generation. They experience themselves as having less time, and there has, in fact, been a 37% decline between 1981 and 1997 in the amount of unstructured time reported by children and teens. Some 25% of 8th graders and 27% of 10th graders *never* watch TV.

With so many parental expectations, Millennials are more risk-adverse than previous generations. Millennial college women are acutely aware of studies showing the declining fertility of Gen X women who postponed having children until their 30s and 40s, and they express a desire to begin childbearing earlier.

Slide 25: [Quotation: “I don’t have a lot of time to do just whatever.”]

Slide 26: *Conventional*: Millennials had an interesting reaction to the sexual and other scandals swirling around Church and governmental figures in the 1990s: they came to view adults as less moral than young people and as hypocrites.

Slide 27: Millennials favor teaching values in school and believe that they will do a better job of embodying these values than their parents have. They “often fault adults for being too self-centered, too smug, too wrapped up in grand causes that have strayed beyond their original purposes – leaving the nation with pointless arguments, endless hypocrisy, and no capacity to make the pieces fit together any more.”

Slide 28: *High Maintenance*: Millennials expect your attention and do not suffer loss (or even delay) well, having had little personal experience of failure. They appear to expect and need more direction before undertaking projects.

Slide 29: [Quotation: “Home schooling all of us takes a lot of time . . .”]

Slide 30: [Reflection]

Slide 31: According to those who have studied them, Millennials and Gen X have some traits in common. Both groups:

Slide 32: *Value Relationships*: (Generation X with their friends, Millennials with their families). Half of all Americans ages 18-29 talk to their parents every day.

Slide 33: Both generations are *Media Savvy and Non-linear Thinkers*, emphasizing visual images over verbal ones and reading. “Today’s average college graduates have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games.” (Prensky) They are “native speakers” of electronic communication, as opposed to acquiring their facility as adults (as their Baby Boomer parents had).

Slide 34: [Quotation: “The most time I spent online was 218 hours in one month.”]

Slide 35: Both Millennials and Generation X are *Consumerist*, having been extensively marketed to since birth. “Millennials have never known pro sports arenas that weren’t named for companies, or happy meals that didn’t have movie toys, or schools that didn’t have soft drink logos and candy ads.” (Howe and Strauss, p. 281) Millennials are even more materialistic than Gen Xers: 75% of Millennial college freshmen in a recent survey said that it was essential or very important for them to be rich, as compared to 62% of Gen X freshmen in 1980 or 42% of Baby Boomer freshmen in 1966. This percentage is actually higher at Catholic colleges than it is at non-religious or at evangelical colleges. Catholic Millennials and

Gen Xers are less than half as likely as Protestants their age to say that the Bible or religious leaders have “a great deal” of influence on how they think about money.

Slide 36: [Quotations: “When adjusted for inflation, parents are spending 500% more money on kids today than parents did on Gen X or the Baby Boomers.” (David Walsh, psychologist)

“Honestly, what teenage girl doesn’t want to look cute and have the latest accessories?” (Melissa, aged 16 in 2000)]

Slide 37: *In Debt*: At the same time, the older Millennials and Gen Xers are stuck with paying off a far larger debt burden than their parents were: Millennials are even more likely to have debt than Gen X (85% more, in fact). By the time they graduate from college, 2/3 owe more than \$10,000 in college loans; one in 20 owes more than \$100,000. Added to this are often mountains of credit card debt, the result of aggressive corporate marketing. Credit card debt more than doubled for 18- to 24-year-olds between 1992 and 2001.

Slide 38: Both generations are more likely than Boomers or the Silent Generation to engage in volunteer projects. Between 65% and 75% of Millennials regularly volunteer.

Slide 39: Both generations *Value Diversity* – of race and ethnicity, of sexual orientation, of religion, of lifestyle. 82% of Millennials aged 9-17 in 1997 had friends who were of a different ethnic group than they themselves were. The downside of this diversity is that Millennials are reluctant to think critically because it looks like they are passing judgment on others.

Slide 40: If religious congregations are to survive, they must speak to God’s vocational call as it manifests itself in GenXer and Millennial cultures. This means taking seriously the unique cultural ways each of these generations have experienced God in their post-Vatican II lives. For Millennials and Gen X, the Second Vatican Council is as distant as the Council of Trent. They do not – and cannot – look at the church, the Mass, the hierarchy, the sacraments, devotions, and other aspects of Catholicism with the same cultural mindset as religious from the Silent Generation or the older Baby Boomers. “Retro” Catholic practices such as the Rosary, Eucharistic adoration, Gregorian chant, or religious habits may be attractive to young Catholics, but for different reasons and with different connotations than these practices had for their elders. The challenge for their elders is to recognize this.

Slide 41: [Quotation: “One problem with these ancient customs . . .”]

Slide 42: [Quotation: “The past has the potential to crush our future . . .”]

Slide 43: [Reflection]

Slide 44: While Millennials and Gen Xers are different in many ways, their approaches to spirituality do have some characteristics in common. Both generations are:

Slide 45: *Experientially Oriented*: Both generations consider personal, subjective experience to be the basis for authentic religious truth. “Religion as an external authority or tradition that...makes authoritative claims to form their believing, thinking, feel, desires, and living” is seen as actually *detrimental* to developing a true, authentic morality, which Xers and Millennials believe must be self-chosen. Xers and Millennials may claim a religious doctrine or practice as true *for them*, but they are reluctant to impose it on anyone else. [Click]

From this it follows that Millennials and Gen Xers are also:

Slide 46: *Image Focused Rather than Discursive*: They are moved by the stillness and time-suspension of Eucharistic adoration, the visual richness of icons, vestments, incense, candles – anything rather than the “Beige Catholicism” of post-Vatican II churches and liturgies. (Nantais) [Click]

Slide 47: Both generations *Value Community*: For Gen X, this comes from a felt lack of connection in their earlier years; for Millennials, it arises from their socialization to team activities. Both groups need to feel *welcomed* in their church – or in a religious congregation.

Slide 48: They both are *Spiritually Hungry*, not just for answers to spiritual questions, but for the knowledge of how to find these answers for themselves. [Click]

Millennials, being more conventional, are more likely to seek these answers in an organized setting, where Gen Xers are more focused on individual, eclectic spiritual quests, drawing from many different spiritual traditions. Millennials are more likely to say that you should choose a single spiritual tradition and follow it. Both generations are attracted by spiritual disciplines such as centering prayer, spiritual direction, monastic retreats, and mystical writers such as Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross.

At the same time, however, Millennials and Gen Xers are:

Slide 49: *Religiously Disconnected*: A recent study of U.S. teens found that Catholic teens averaged 5-25% lower than conservative, mainline, and Black Protestant teens on a wide range of religious beliefs and practices. The study found that this is primarily due to the fact that Catholic teens’ parents are less religious than Protestant teens’ parents. Catholic Millennials are two generations removed from the pervasive Catholic culture so many Silent Generation religious remember. Neither they nor their parents remember a time when Sunday Mass, parochial

school attendance, 40 Hours Devotions, and the Baltimore Catechism were the norm for Catholic youth (Smith et al, *Soul Searching*, p. 194). While one-third of Silent Generation Catholics, and one-fourth of Baby Boomer and Gen X Catholics, registered high on an index of Catholic identity, barely 7% of Millennials did so (Davidson et al 2007). [Click, click]

Slide 50: Instead of adhering to a particular religion, many Millennials and Gen Xers are more likely to subscribe to what researchers have labeled “Moralistic Therapeutic Individualism.” A religion and/or a spirituality becomes something they choose, as they would choose a car or a plasma TV set. [Click]

Slide 51: Both generations are Service Oriented: Millennials, especially, have a strong desire to work for the common good. They do not always, however, connect their service with religion or spirituality. One possible way of connecting the “vertical” dimension of their personal relationship with God and the “horizontal” dimension of their service to the poor and marginalized might be through a theology of the suffering Christ – a profoundly strong image for both generations. [Click]

Slide 52: Both are Intolerant of Hypocrisy and of Intolerance: GenXers tend to view the institutional church as inherently hypocritical and to be turned off by church officials’ “intolerant” prescription of a single truth. Millennials are more likely to assume that, once *they* are in charge of the institutions, they will make them better. Millennials are also significantly more likely than Generation X or the Baby Boomers to be satisfied with church leadership and to say that the church is meeting their spiritual needs. [Click]

Slide 53: Since some 85% of Millennial teens attend public schools, they are largely Unschoolled in the History and Teachings of Catholicism. As a result, they are less likely to regard the Church’s teaching authority as important, especially on sexual and gender issues. Some 87% of Millennial Catholics 18 and older favor an end to the male-only priesthood, compared with 61% of Baby Boomer Catholics.

(While over 50% of Silent Generation Catholics, and around 40% of Boomer and Gen X Catholics regarded the Church’s teaching authority as important, only 27% of Millennials did so. And only 7% of Millennials viewed the church’s pro-life position as a core teaching, as compared to 58% of Silent Generation and 45% of Baby Boomer and Gen X Catholics (Davidson et al. 2007). [Click]

Slide 54: On the other hand, Millennials are more likely than any previous age cohort since the Silent Generation to say that learning about their faith is essential or very important (Howard and Bendyna). They are also more likely to agree with the Silent Generation that Christ is really present in the Eucharist. Millennials are

also more likely than Baby Boomers or Gen Xers were to be interested in studying religion or theology in college.

Slide 55: [Quotation: “In my public high school, there was no such thing as truth . . .”]

Slide 56: Each generation has, potentially, its own unique way of enfleshing the vision and charism of a religious congregation. Learning to adopt and adapt different generational perspectives is thus a vital necessity for the very survival of religious life. Religious of the Silent Generation must *never* assume that a particular symbol, practice, role, prayer, or ritual means the same thing, or has the same emotional connotations, for younger generations as it did in their own youth.

Slide 57: What must religious congregations do to be open to Millennial or Gen X members? First of all, we should:

Proclaim Our Rich Heritage: Religious congregations must tell the stories of their founders and of the members who have gone before them. Gen Xers, especially, are attracted by the sheer longevity of the Catholic Church and religious life, since so much in their own lives has been unreliable and transient.

Slide 58: Next, we must:

Reclaim Our Spiritual Traditions: If a congregation’s founder was especially devoted to the Eucharist, the rosary, the Pope, the Blessed Virgin Mary, or some other saint or prayer practice, the congregation’s members should explore and celebrate this devotion for the next generation. Millennials experience the rosary, for example, as a protest action, associating it with witnessing outside of abortion clinics. Sister Mary Johnson has noted that her Millennial and Gen X respondents rarely cite traditional theologies of the Real Presence when talking about Eucharistic Adoration; they emphasize instead how much they appreciate the time to be still.

Slide 59: Create Opportunities for Common Life and Common Ministry:

This is especially important for Millennials. No religious congregation will attract them that does not provide opportunities to live and work together.

Slide 60: See the External of Religious Life from **Their** Perspective

Never assume that some practice common in Pre-Vatican II religious life means the same thing to Millennials and Gen X religious that it did to the Silent Generation. For example, Many Gen Xers see the religious habit as an iconic and countercultural witness; Millennials see it as “the Team Colors.” Neither group sees the habit as necessarily related to subordinate roles for women, conservative theological views, or a desire to avoid change.

Slide 61: Understand the Way They Process Information:

Remember that Millennials and GenX will process your message differently. This

involves several different dimensions:

Time Compression: Neither generation is used to waiting. A 12-hour delay in responding to an email is an eternity.

Visual and Nonlinear Thinking: An attractive, image-filled, interactive – and frequently updated – Web page is far more effective than any printed material. Consider the possibilities of blogs and podcasts, too!

Slide 62: Distinguish Between Them: Do not lump together every member under age 50 as “our younger members.” This conflates three different generational cohorts: Millennials, Gen X, and the younger Baby Boomers, who are not alike – and do not necessarily see things the same way. Additionally, realize that all of the members of any generation are not clones of each other: everything presented about Millennials or Gen Xers in this power point are not necessarily true of every member of that age group. And, of course, Latino, Asian-American, or African-American Millennials and Gen Xers will differ from their White, middle-class counterparts.

Slide 63: Who are Gen X and Millennials? What can they offer the church and Religious Life? What can the Church and Religious Life offer them? Amazing gifts!!!
Come and see!

Slide 64: [Reflection]

Slide 65: [End of Part II]

Slides 66-70: [Resources]