

Making Space for Millennials

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



A CKN/BARNA
GROUP RESEARCH
PROJECT

Sponsored by

 ASPEN GROUP

WELCOME TO Making Space for Millennials

THE CORNERSTONE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK (CKN) was founded by Aspen Group, the design/build/furnish firm for churches, which I lead as CEO. Aspen Group's mission is to create space for ministry impact. In order to fulfill our mission, we need to understand more than just how to design great space and build safe, durable churches.

To create space for ministry impact, we need to understand the intersection between culture, leadership, ministry, and facilities. In 2004, Aspen Group founded the CKN with other ministry-minded church professionals who wanted to do more than just give churches what they think they want. Aspen Group always seeks to help churches discover what they really need in light of the culture, a church's leadership, and their ministry and facilities.

Aspen Group sponsored the CKN/Barna *Making Space for Millennials* study for several reasons. First, Barna is one of the leading experts on Millennials. We wanted to partner with an organization that was deeply immersed in understanding the cultural trends that set this generation apart from its forebears and how the unique attributes of today's young adults are affecting the church.

Second, we know that church leaders are struggling with how to capture the hearts, minds and souls of Millennials. As David Kinnaman's extensive research and writing on Millennials shows, churches have largely lost this generation of young adults, and the fallout of this mass exodus will have far-reaching, long-term consequences if churches don't wake up and pay attention to what's happening in the culture.

Third, at CKN we invest in research to discover what factors, such as leadership, ministry, and facility design, impact a church's success. Because Millennials

are a large, influential generation, we wanted to learn what factors in churches help young people connect with God and which ones push them further away. Not only did we come away with a deeper understanding of the cultural trends related to Millennials, but we also have a better handle on the ministry challenges young adults pose for churches, as well as the leadership traits that are required to shepherd this generation.

Additionally, all of this data and discovery is especially relevant on a practical level for our architects and designers. As we guide and assist churches to create space for ministry impact, we can draw from the research's findings to help shape churches' decisions on what types of facilities to build.

It's the alignment of these four factors—culture, leadership, ministry, and facilities—that helps position a church for radical ministry impact. This is the driving force behind why we invest in research. It's not about having the right answers—it's about having the right conversations with churches before they build.

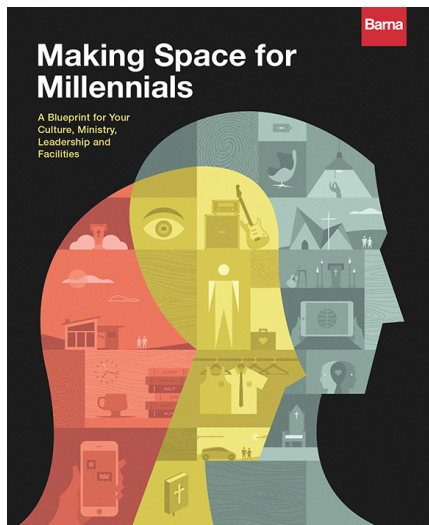
As we walk with a church and discover its unique heartbeat for God's people—its core values and DNA—we can use research like *Making Space for Millennials* to help ensure that churches build the right ministry space for lasting impact.

“It's not about having the right answers—it's about having the right conversations with churches before they build.”

The *Making Space for Millennials* study helped deepen our understanding on at least four key points: visual clarity, respite, nature and modularity. As the chapters in this executive summary reveal, there is much we can learn about young adults and their desire to connect with God and others in meaningful ways.

Beyond giving us clues about how to attract and retain more Millennials in the church, this research fans the flames of our passion to inspire and equip churches to, in turn, inspire and equip the next generation to lead the church in

WELCOME TO MAKING SPACE FOR MILLENNIALS



ways we—and they—can’t even imagine today. In order to do this, we need to first help Millennials find their way back to God, and second, make room for them once they return.

We’re privileged to join you on the journey of discovering how to better reach God’s people. This executive summary provides key topline findings from the *Making Space for Millennials* study. You can order the full report [here](#).

Ed Bahler

CEO, Aspen Group

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FIRST WORDS

WHERE WERE YOU at 11:59 pm on December 31, 1999? If you were like most of us, you were ringing in not only a new year, but a new millennium, celebrating with friends and family, perhaps watching the famous ball drop in New York's Times Square.

Midnight came, of course—and as the echoes of our celebrations have faded since then, that moment still can be seen as a marker of far-reaching cultural significance.

Millennials, the generation that has come of age in this new millennium of booming technology and rapid globalization, are deeply shaped by these cultural changes. Stereotypes and pop-wisdom about their habits and foibles abound, but one thing is certain—their importance as a bridge generation during a remarkable time in history is tough to overstate.

The growing recognition of that importance has led to them as a coveted demographic. All kinds of institutions, from tech to government, have had to reckon with how to engage this population of emerging adults effectively. Churches are no exception—a quick Google search reveals high levels of angst for religious leaders, as they seek to link this generation to those who have gone before.

In partnership with Aspen Group and the Cornerstone Knowledge Network (CKN), Barna undertook a landmark study to profile Millennial perceptions and perspectives on culture, ministry, leadership, and facilities. The report *Making Space for Millennials* offers an in-depth look at this fascinating and strategic generation.

This executive summary distills the full CKN/Barna report ([available here](#)) for a simple but incisive overview of the study.



Introduction: DESIGNING WITH MILLENNIALS IN MIND

AS MILLENNIALS (born between 1984 and 2002) enter adulthood, they are navigating familiar territory for any generation—the key life questions of career, family, community, and faith. But changing social realities and technology have shaped them into a generation stretched between many cultural and personal tensions. Designing worship spaces for this generation needs to be done with strategy, beauty, and clarity of purpose.

For this study:

- Information was drawn from both Barna's ongoing research and a major new project commissioned by the Cornerstone Knowledge Network. CKN's key question was "How can we create transformational space with and for Millennials?"
- "Space" includes both the abstract and the tangible—cultural attitudes about Christianity and religious institutions, and concrete preferences regarding the built environments of worship and community space.
- Barna's 30,000+ interviews with Millennials over the past 10 years gave vital background. Additionally, a new national sample of Millennials from varying belief backgrounds was studied.
- Millennial reactions to visual prompts and survey questions were key. Added to this were in-depth field interviews, where researchers accompanied Millennial participants to a variety of built settings (including various styles of church buildings) in Atlanta and Chicago.





Chapter One: **CULTURE**

CULTURE IS as assumed as one's mother tongue, as difficult to define as one's personality. It's closer to us all than we'd like to admit, and shapes us even as we shape it.

No conversation outlining generational qualities could happen without talking about the cultural realities that shape (and span) generations. The worldview assumptions implicit in being a Millennial are related to, but different than, those of generations before them.

Connecting any group or demographic to the Church (let alone *your* church) is a cross-cultural exercise. You don't need a post-grad degree in sociology to do it. But some study and strategy make a huge difference.

Spanning the potential divides between the culture of your church or group and Millennial culture requires taking a step back to consider the distinct qualities of each. These qualities include worldview assumptions, thoughts

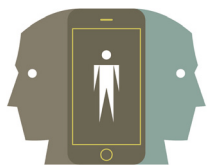
about morality and political issues, matters of taste and preference, and a sense of what behaviors and life qualities are valued.

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THE THREE “A”S

Barna president David Kinnaman notes that three major changes characterize Millennial culture in contrast to previous generations: the three “A”s of *access*, *alienation*, and *authority*.

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□ **Access** refers to the unprecedented diversity and availability of information, social relationships, visual imagery, and products all one hyperlink away. “Digital natives” doesn’t do justice to the foundational ways that Millennials process life with data. Barna notes: “You may have used digital tools as long as or even longer than the young adults connected to your community of faith. But if you are a Gen-Xer, a Boomer, or an Elder, you didn’t *become you* with the world at your fingertips.” This instant and constant access to “everything” has shaped Millennial learning styles, habits, social lives, and expectations for faith.



□ **Alienation** describes the deep skepticism (often perceived as apathy) Millennials have for institutions and roles that have long been respected, even held sacred. Millennials are unsure which of the constant competing voices—of marketers, corporations, politicians, teachers, news outlets, pastors, and so on—can really be trusted. They assume that everyone has an angle, and have seen scandal and corruption impact government, church, entertainment, and business. As a result, institutional loyalty is hard to earn.



□ **Authority** falters when the resources and information of unprecedented personal access joins with institutional alienation. After all, if a quick Google search provides a couple hundred exegetical word studies for a Bible question, why turn to the authority of a pastor—who probably just wants to recruit you for his own “vision” anyway? If one season’s sports legend is exposed as an abuser next year, why hero-worship for your team in the first place? If government scandals like Guantanamo Bay and NSA spying are what politics are these days, why vote—let alone run for office? The perception that institutions long trusted are unnecessary at best, exploitative at worst, runs deep.

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In light of these shifting assumptions, churches need to respond to the needs and expectations of Millennials. But this doesn’t look like pandering to trends or tastes (those hyper-vigilant eyes spot inauthentic strategies). It’s vital to understand a few dynamics that can shape the context for connection: *modularity*, the important triad of *home, family, and work*, and *cross-cultural communication*.



□ **Modularity** represents the key Millennial assumption that life’s constituent elements (place, work, family, faith, hobbies, etc.) can be taken apart and limitlessly reassembled. What does this look like? Don’t try to pin it down, it varies—but there’s an implicit expectation that impermanence is simply part of life. This is particularly reflected in employment, where the expectation of generations past of working for a single employer—or even in a single career—for most of one’s working life is laughable to Millennials.

When applied to church and spirituality, modularity means that Millennials don't expect to find all their spiritual or community needs met in a single place.

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Barna notes: "In our modular world, we can get great Bible teaching from a John Piper or a Beth Moore podcast, fellowship on Facebook or Skype, an opportunity to serve at the crisis pregnancy center and worship on the I Heart Radio app. We could even 'attend' the local megachurch by streaming the Sunday service on our Web browser."

Older generations may chuckle at the notion of such a pieced-together spiritual life, but it's simply reality for Millennials, who are experts in Lego-style reassembly of life's pieces. The challenge for spiritual leaders is to join Millennials in a process of understanding which elements of modularity are healthy, and which are potentially harmful. Then? Joining the process of assembly to create a "cohesive, whole, Jesus-shaped life." Barna notes: "The calling is not to compete with the other pieces, but to make space to help Millennials make sense of them all."



□ **Home, family, and work, basic though they are to our lives, are by no means immune to the cultural changes that Millennials are bringing with them. In fact, expectations and worldview understandings of these three go a long way toward understanding what making "space" means for Millennials.**

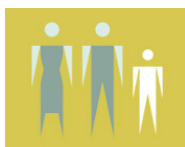
In this portion of the study, participants rated images related to home, family, and place of work to indicate preference. The results significantly favored natural images (for "feels like home," a park bench in a wooded area gained 64% of responses—overwhelmingly more than images of a beach, city, or road trip), images of "restfulness and human connection," versus images reflective of either solitary leisure or bustling activity.

Here are key takeaways for these categories:



□ **Home.** Barna notes that many “Millennials have an idyllic concept of ‘home,’ but the reality is that they are far from it.” That distance is *geographical* (sure, many are living at home, but cross-country moves for education, opportunities, or new experiences are normal), *social* (mobile friends mean that relational circles are constantly changing, as are self-identities as they enter adulthood), *cultural* (this is where the three “A”s above come into play), and *spiritual*, as a process of significant questioning is a difficult but normal (and healthy, indicated by research) element of their spiritual journeys.

Church leaders considering how “home” impacts the design and desired outcomes of worship or community spaces need to take these realities seriously. More than simple brick-and-mortar decisions, how will you leverage the strengths of your congregation or community to offer a deep sense of rootedness, freedom, and *home* to Millennials who long for a space to belong?



□ **Family.** The fractured nature of modern family life has ushered in a generation where dysfunctions and family hurts are the norm. Millennials have responded to this not by devaluing “family,” but by redefining it. Still, for all their openness to (and experience with) non-traditional family structures, in Barna’s survey, they preferred the most traditional image—a parent and child holding hands outdoors (note the natural context again). But the preference here (42%) is not overwhelming, and if you add together the two images of gathered friends, then the opinion that “unrelated” friend groups can constitute “family” is pronounced.

Church leaders seeking to intersect Millennials’ experiences of family need to understand the diversity of family experiences that they bring with them, while acknowledging that they still have deep longings for very traditional types of relationships and connections. Christian visions of family as a means of living out faith and serving others take on special relevance when developed by and contrasted with the many different shades of understanding that Millennials assume are part of “family.” Millennials have a potent yearning to find their place in a family as a person of character, and need local church bodies to point the way.



□ **Work.** Changing conceptions of work hit home with Millennial preferences. An outcome of the modularity previously discussed, 52% of Millennials chose a picture of a home office (overlooking a grassy yard—hello again, Nature!) in opposition to an executive-style office, a shared workspace, or a coffee shop. Barna notes the preference in this image for a wide, clean space with strong natural elements, but also brings in the understanding of work and home in close relationship: “...the idea that life’s pieces can be coordinated and coherent instead of further divided.”

Piggybacking off this, churches have immediate and easily implemented opportunities for engaging the changing realities of work. Since most churches directly occupy and engage space, they can offer resources and a haven for Millennials to work in—resources traditionally provided by an employer, but that are no longer a given in new vocational realities. Barna notes room for shared spaces, internet connections, church-based office equipment, networking, tool-sharing, and even formal apprenticeships as opportunities to make space (literally and figuratively) for the new work lives of emerging adults. “How could you adapt your communal space to help young adults reconnect ‘work’ with the rest of life?”



□ **Cross-cultural communication** becomes a vital conversation when considering how to bridge churches with Millennials. While church leaders of recent generations have majored in information-transfer, today’s pastors and mentors need to focus their efforts on deep-rooted discipleship. In a world of marketing and info-glut, Millennials don’t need more slickly packaged input, they need wisdom, and to be challenged to live meaningfully as Christians of character.

This highlights an important cultural point—Millennials, trained from the cradle to distrust marketing and question authority, will not connect if a church’s vision for spiritual formation amounts only to learning *what* to think or do. It’s the *how* of formation and character development that church communities can contribute. Older leaders eager to foster deep and genuine life in Millennials, need to hold many conceptions with a loose hand and guide formation with an open mind.

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What does all this point to? The present need for Christians of older generations to surround Millennials in their community with strategic love and a savvy sense of the real culture differences between generations. Without

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overstating those differences, the changing cultural and social realities that shape Millennial culture, thought, and spiritual practice can't be dismissed or ignored. Nor should they be over or undervalued—like any cultural reality, they simply *are*.

Christians, particularly pastors and leaders, must examine the implications of these cultural traits in light of biblical teaching, open-minded understandings of spiritual formation, and the leading of God's Spirit.

This process demands all of us to hold our cultural assumptions as loosely as we can, seeking for the new cultural realities of God's Kingdom to influence our thought and practice. From the beginning of Christianity, the Church has crossed all boundaries of language and culture, creating a new group of people whose values, language, and behaviors intersected but also stood out from their nations and generations. That same movement is needed to reach (and be reached by) Millennials.

Making space for Millennials requires skill and strategy. But bringing this unique generation into the full life of the church is vital for the mission of the church.

READY TO REFLECT? ASK YOURSELF:

- ▢ *How can we identify the cultural assumptions that our church makes?*
- ▢ *What cultural impressions might the obvious things—our facilities, worship habits, and ways of welcome—make on Millennial guests?*
- ▢ *What are we doing well—particular points of strength or connection with younger adults? How can we develop them?*
- ▢ *What habits do we need to break (or disciplines to cultivate) to foster a posture of listening and learning?*

Chapter Two: MINISTRY



AS THE NEW millennium took hold, it found Western Christianity at a crossroads. The late 20th century had seen the prevalence of business-oriented church strategy and language as part of the overwhelming phenomenon of consumerism.

Now, well into the 2000s, nearly 6 out of 10 Millennials will drop out of church at some point—even those raised in faith communities. Skepticism about the importance of church is at a cultural high. Much of this is related to ministry philosophies that resonated with past generations but ring hollow—or even negative—for emerging generations. If consumer culture shaped church as a product, it's one that many young people are not buying.

With this in mind, what does making space for Millennials in our ministries require? Understanding several key dynamics and adjusting what for some of us may be long-held ministry assumptions.

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CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

To begin, we must carefully examine the influence of consumer culture on modern ministry. That influence is hard to overstate, and for many of us, closer to our foundational thoughts about church than we'd like to admit.

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There are several (flawed) consumeristic assumptions about ministry to which most Millennials react negatively:

1. Successful ministries make people more loyal to the church “brand.”
2. Millennials leave church because we’ve failed to create “brand” loyalty.
3. To retain Millennials, we need to up our “brand’s” service to their demographic.

Let’s examine Millennial’s negative perceptions related to ministry and then note the positive connection points to find a better path for ministry.

NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS

Millennials are disengaging from church at a rate unprecedented by any generation in recent memory. Why? This generation that hates to be “put in a box” would gripe about generalizations, but clear themes emerged from Barna’s research:

► Millennials feel that church is not necessary for spiritual life

Thirty-nine percent say that God can be found elsewhere, and 35% say that church isn’t important because “it’s not personally relevant to them.” Thirty-one percent think church is boring, and 20% say that “it feels like God is missing from church.” Barna notes that “Only 8% don’t attend because church is ‘out of date,’ undercutting the notion that all we need to do for Millennials is make church ‘cooler.’” Fair enough.

► Millennials feel that church can be harmful

Simply countering negative perceptions about church’s value won’t go far enough. Sentiments that church is actually a *harmful* institution run deep. Thirty-five percent say that their negative perceptions come from moral failings by church leaders. And for Millennials who don’t attend church, bad feeling runs high: 87% see Christians as judgmental, 85% as hypocritical, 91% as anti-homosexual, and 70% as insensitive to others.

Besides the presence of negative feelings, there is also a notable absence of positive ones. Christians are seen as lacking in tolerance for others’ beliefs, and seeming like “an exclusive club.” “A significant number of young adults perceive a lack of relational generosity within the U.S. Christian community,” Barna says. (That seems like a gentle way to put it.)

Altogether, these negative sentiments are particularly destructive to Millennial views of church when understood in context with their generational value of authenticity.

POSITIVE CONNECTIONS

Still, there are reasons to hope for this generation's engagement with institutional churches and Christian ministry. Let's look at what Millennial church attenders value about church.

Forty-four percent say they attend church to "be closer to God," and 27% go to "learn more about God." Barna notes that seeking experiences of "transcendence" is a key desire. Sixty-five percent (with varying degrees of strength) are of the opinion that church is "a place to find answers to live a meaningful life," 54% say "church is relevant for my life," and 49% "feel like I can 'be myself' at church."

Sixty-two percent disagree that church teachings are "rather shallow," and 60% think that the church can be a safe place to express doubts.

Countering the failure of consumer models of church to retain emerging generations is a return to the simple, perennial realities of ministry: a rich sense of hospitality and welcome, and the human and divine relationships that characterize church at its most "real."

"[B]y and large, young adults respect the potential of organized religion," Barna observes. The split here is that between the way things are and the way that they could be. "Millennials are, on the whole, skeptical about the role churches play in society. This is the closed door. But their hope for the role churches *could* play? That's an open window."

Open indeed. But how will we respond?

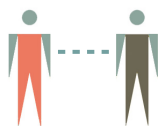
RESPONSE: MAKING ROOM AND RELATIONSHIPS

Healthy response to the changing realities of ministry among Millennials needs to cultivate both "room" and "relationships." Let's address how you can effectively cross divides in these areas.

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□ **Room.** Making room for guests in your community should account for Millennial thoughts about status and power. Many churches of older generations immediately alienate Millennials with behaviors intended as friendly, but emerging adults consider to be pushy or rude. Particularly, requests for information and follow-up are off-putting. *Very few Millennials are comfortable sharing anything more than their first name in a church setting until they choose to.* Fifteen percent would rather share *nothing*, not even their name. This reticence is particular to churches, Barna has found, likely the result of the Millennial opinion that churches do not have their best interests at heart (70% think this). “[T]hey prefer to stay off your radar until they are comfortable with you,” Barna observes. In response? Don’t ignore visitors or guests to your community, but “consider how your church could defer social status to your guests. . . respect and respond, rather than assert and demand.” What might feel like a cold step back to enthusiastic door-greeters eager to shake hands and slap backs may just feel welcoming enough to draw a younger adult out for a real connection.



□ **Relationships.** Of the multiple reasons that Millennials stay connected to church, relationships—with respected older adults in their faith community and with Jesus—are key. Millennials who stay with church beyond the teen years “are twice as likely to have a close personal friendship with an older adult in their faith community. . . . They’re also twice as likely to have had a mentor other than a pastor or youth minister.” These relationships (not necessarily with pastors or formal church staff) are uniquely powerful in keeping young adults engaged in the life of a church and growing spiritually—particularly when the relationship has a common service element to it.

Additionally, the need for a vibrant, experienced relationship with Jesus is tremendous. Twenty percent of Millennials from a church background say that “God seems missing from my experience of church.” The bottom line? If Millennials choose to engage with church, it’s because they desire a real experience with God. Fostering a personal, experiential engagement with Jesus during worship and community experiences is a vital, central part of ministry. Should that go without saying? Maybe. But in this generation, it’s important to say it anyway.

ASK YOURSELF:

- ▢ *How has consumer culture impacted our congregation's expectations of church?*
- ▢ *What specific negative messages might Millennials assume of our church's life and ministries?*
- ▢ *What is the real experience of a new visitor to our building or service?
How can we improve?*
- ▢ *How can we engage Millennial hope for what the church could be?
How will that hope impact design, strategy, and staff considerations?*



Chapter Three: LEADERSHIP

IN KEEPING WITH the changes in how Millennials view culture and ministry, their intersections with leadership are important to consider. If you're reading this, you care about leading Millennials with strategy and care—perhaps formally as a pastor or youth worker, or maybe in a more informal (but no less important) mentoring or friend capacity.

***“Institutional doubt”* is the term that David Kinnaman names the skepticism that many Millennials feel toward society’s key institutions. For many, it is an important factor in them leaving the church ... or faith altogether.**

There's good news here. Leading Millennials well doesn't have to be some complex puzzle—in fact, you'll be poised better for success if you don't overthink things. But with that said, understanding a few key realities could make all the difference. What do Millennials want from those leading them? Four key things: *authenticity, significance, reverse mentoring, and vocational discipleship.*

1. AUTHENTICITY

“Authenticity” is one of the Millennial generation's core values. Barna notes that they understand it to mean “being true to who you are,” and have hyper-tuned noticing skills for seeing beyond facades to the motivations people and organizations have deep down. It's a skill honed by a lifetime of bombardment with marketing, sloganeering, buzzwords,

and viral media. It's a desire reinforced by their generation's witness to failure and scandal in nearly every institution of society—from the nuclear family, to the political system, to institutional religion, to tech companies and beyond. They're trained to expect an angle from everyone, and would like to see that angle up front.

“Institutional doubt” is the name David Kinnaman gives to the skepticism many Millennials feel toward society's key institutions. For many, it is an important factor in them leaving the church—or faith—all together. One sobering statistic? One sobering statistic: 13% of young Christians say they “used to work at a church and became disillusioned.” That's tens of thousands of young people.

It's important to understand that Christian churches and institutions are rarely starting with a blank slate when it comes to Millennials' opinions of them. Damage done by predatory “ministries” and even well-meaning Christians who seem to have a hidden agenda is tough to repair. But how?

Living out the value of authenticity. “Young adults aren't looking for perfect leaders,” Barna notes. They're looking for “leaders willing to admit they're not perfect.”

2. SIGNIFICANCE

Millennials are deeply driven by the desire to make an impact on the world. Forty-two percent want “passion for their job,” compared to only 34% wanting a “job that helps them become financially secure.” Other stats related to their work choices only highlight this great trend—meaning and significance are extremely important to them.

“As a generation, they have an undeserved reputation for a lack of loyalty,” Barna observes. “While it's true that Millennials do not generally demonstrate loyalty to *organizations* or *institutions*, most are extremely loyal to causes and people.”

Want to lead this generation well? Connect your work with the desire for significance and change-making that so deeply motivates them. Establish a “direct link” between their mission and your tasks of ministry. Don't ever share the “what” or the “how” without laying a strong “why” first.

The stats show clearly that compared to church dropouts, Millennials who remain engaged in the faith and the life of the church understand themselves and their calling in light of faith, and have received discipleship in these key areas of calling.

find that their digital savvy, passion for social concerns, and optimism might bring a burst of energy and inspiration to your work.

4. VOCATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

For many Millennials, mentoring and leadership take on their deepest hues in tracing the relationships between them and the work of their lives. Their identity is deeply tied to their sense of calling (70% say that their career is “central” to their identity), but in a world of rapidly changing economies and short-term job prospects, navigating work and life can demand a partner to help round and interpret their experiences.

They feel tremendous pressures related to work, and for many, it’s a source of “acute anxiety.” They put a lot of pressure on themselves through their jobs, and the issue is made even more complex when you introduce the language of faith and eternal meaning to the job conversation.

3. REVERSE MENTORING

It’s vital that you take Millennials seriously. They’ll sniff out even the faintest whiff of condescension or insincerity, and once lost, their trust is hard to regain. Of utmost importance in leadership relationships with Millennials is to have a strong element of reciprocity—allowing them to shape and influence you even as you shape and influence them. This “reverse mentoring” may be a bit unpredictable in outcome, but it will win you true friends in the younger generation.

Consider what give-and-take would look like in your relationship with Millennials that you’d like a closer mentor or friend relationship with. How could they influence your thought and practice? You might just

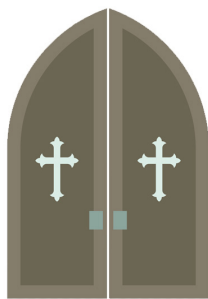
“This is where vocational discipleship comes in,” says Barna. Mentoring and engagement with an older Christian, especially if they’re established in their trade, can be absolutely invaluable, exercising real leverage for growth in the young adult’s life and career. But unfortunately, this is a need unmet for many or most Millennials. Thirty-seven percent say that they “don’t have an older mentor who gives them advice about work,” and 63% say that “in the past three years, they have not received any teachings . . . that helped shape or challenge their views on work.”

But this connection is very important for Millennials’ persistence in the faith. The stats show clearly that compared to church dropouts, Millennials who remain engaged in the faith and the life of the church understand themselves and their calling in light of faith, and have received discipleship in these key areas of calling.

ASK YOURSELF:

- ▢ *How has consumer culture impacted our leadership, expectations, and metrics for success?*
- ▢ *Might Millennials in our community interpret our leadership structures and strategies differently than other generations—or church insiders?*
- ▢ *What specific calls for significance can we make in our community? How can leaders model that first?*
- ▢ *What vocational or work realities can our people or facilities engage? How can we be proactively connecting with emerging adults?*

Chapter Four: FACILITIES



MODERN CHRISTIANS (Evangelicals, at least) are nothing if not pragmatic. When translated into Western church architecture in the 20th century, this took the form of many of the church buildings that Millennials think of as “church”—blocky, utilitarian, easier on the budget than on the eyes, and with less thought to the incorporation of meaning or theology in their construction than to the pressing needs at hand—fitting cars in parking lots, people in seats, and ministries under a clean, watertight roof.

If your church is only a place of action, with no room for rest or silence, you’ll be missing a key desire of over-taxed Millennials, who want a place available to contemplate and explore their spirituality.

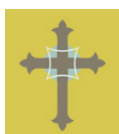
That’s generalizing of course, but there’s no question that the building concerns of the past 2-3 generations differed widely from those that came before. In many senses, the historic dynamic of a church facility as a place of sanctuary, of beauty, of sacred space and art changed to reflect a culture with other things on its mind. But with the rise of the Millennials, we need to consider the design and construction choices of our facilities carefully to ensure that they’re reflecting the values of an emerging generation.

The *Making Space for Millennials* study produced a strong profile of the preferences and dynamics with which Millennials walk into church buildings. The results show

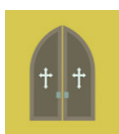
MAKING
SPACE FOR
MILLENNIALS
EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY

interesting trends: Millennials prefer many traditional building forms that highlight a desire for sacred space. This should not be interpreted as strictly backwards-looking though. Desires for natural integration and modern sensibilities mean that a nuanced combination of design elements should be considered.

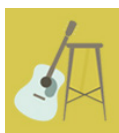
Here are key distilled takeaways from this multi-modal research of Millennial preferences in facility design:



- ***Making things feel “young” isn’t enough to capture Millennials.*** “Community,” “Sanctuary,” “Classic,” “Quiet,” and “Casual” were all descriptors selected by Millennials as more appealing than “Privacy,” “Auditorium,” “Trendy,” “Loud,” and “Dignified.”



- ***Younger adults carry a seeming contradiction in attitudes:*** “Many [Millennials] . . . seem to 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.”



- ***Church dropouts (“Exiles”) carry a few notable counter-trend opinions,*** compared to more religiously engaged Millennial groups. They (in opposition to the majority of their peers) prefer “Traditional” to “Modern,” “Authentic” to “Flexible,” “Exciting” to “Relaxed,” and “Low-Key” to “Upbeat.” This could reflect preferences that impact the experience of new visitors to your church.



- ***Millennials want a church that is honest about what it is.*** “Visual clarity”—how clearly your space is designed for its intended purpose—is vital. On one church tour with Barna researchers, an unchurched participant liked a modern church they visited . . . until she toured a cathedral later. After reflecting, “she felt like the cathedral presented itself honestly, while the modern church was trying to pass itself off as something else.” Important, for a generation who hates hypocrisy. Religious art and iconography helped communicate this clarity. Extending the principle, clear signage and directions for information are also extremely important.



- ***A sense of “respite” is important.*** If your church is only a place of action, with no room for rest or silence, you’ll be missing a key desire of over-taxed Millennials, who want a place available to contemplate and explore their spirituality. “. . . [M]any connected their desire for peace directly to their expectations of hopes for church.”



- ▢ ***Nature really matters.*** Millennials crave interactions with nature and the outdoors. Space for beauty, activity, reflection, and community should integrate the indoor and outdoor sections of your space. Design time spent in making your surroundings more than just landscaping will pay off.

ASK YOURSELF:

- ▢ *What message does our church's placement in the neighborhood say to young people?*
- ▢ *How can we incorporate beauty, theological meaning, and practical design into our spaces?*
- ▢ *Who in our community do we need to seek out and listen to, in order to discover the needs we're not seeing?*
- ▢ *How can we foster church as an open-access place of peace and sanctuary?*

Conclusion: BUILDING SOMETHING GREAT



MILLENNIALS ARE a generation pulled between competing tensions. They want freedom to explore, yet desire to be grounded in community and close relationships. They crave authenticity, yet live much of their lives in the “surreal” environments of digital life. They love nature, but can’t be parted from their smartphones.

What the future holds for this generation’s relationship with faith remains to be seen, but one thing is certain—the church will be there. Grounded but adapting, offering eternal wisdom, but engaged with the pains and pressing questions of the day, and, as always, making space at the foot of Christ’s cross for those who need it.

The question is how your community and facility will engage this rising generation. How well are you poised to welcome Millennials into your church? How committed are you to creating dynamic, well-designed spaces that encourage and allow them to flourish?

How churches counter harmful realities and foster healthy relationships with God in this generation remains to be seen. But much of that work will happen in buildings, in places, in facilities made for ministry. The decisions you make now will influence outcomes powerfully.

So let’s build spaces that will meet these deep needs, bring life and beauty, and last to minister for generations to come.

ABOUT THE CORNERSTONE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK (CKN)

THE CORNERSTONE KNOWLEDGE NETWORK (CKN) is dedicated to discovering and disseminating meaningful knowledge that radically improves how church facilities impact ministry. The CKN is comprised of several church professionals from different industries who care deeply about the state and success of churches everywhere.

The CKN has commissioned several research projects with leading Christian organizations as a way to understand the alignment of:

- Culture
- Ministry
- Leadership
- Facilities

Visit CKN at www.theckn.com.

ABOUT ASPEN GROUP

ASPEN GROUP, a founding member of the CKN and the exclusive sponsor of the CKN/Barna *Making Space for Millennials* study, is a design-build-furnish firm that focuses on creating space for ministry impact. Aspen relies on relevant data that looks at the intersection of culture, ministry, leadership, and facilities to help guide churches through a building project. Aspen Group primarily works with churches in the Midwest and Southeast regions of the United States.

Visit Aspen Group at www.aspengroup.com.

ABOUT BARNA GROUP

IN ITS 30-plus-year history, Barna Group has conducted more than one million interviews over the course of hundreds of studies, and has become a go-to source for insights about faith and culture. Currently led by David Kinnaman, Barna Group's vision is to provide people with credible knowledge and clear thinking, enabling them to navigate a complex and changing culture. The company was started by George and Nancy Barna in 1984.

Barna Group has worked with thousands of businesses, nonprofit organizations, and churches across the country, including many Protestant denominations and Catholic parishes. Some of its clients include the American Bible Society, CARE, Compassion International, Easter Seals, Habitat for Humanity, NBC-Universal, The Salvation Army, Walden Media, the ONE Campaign, SONY, Thrivent, USAID, World Vision, and the CKN.

The firm's studies are frequently cited in sermons and talks, and its public opinion research is often quoted in major media outlets such as CNN, USA Today, The Wall Street Journal, Fox News, Chicago Tribune, Huffington Post, the New York Times, Dallas Morning News and the Los Angeles Times.

Learn more about Barna Group at www.barna.org.

EXPLORE MORE RESOURCES

to help you learn what it means to make space for Millennials at your church.

<http://aspengroup.com/millennials>



Visit our Millennial Resources page where we've gathered practical information and training for you and your church leadership team.

MILLENNIALS—TODAY'S 18- TO 29-YEAR-OLDS—HAVE SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED THE CHURCH LANDSCAPE.

ON OUR MILLENNIAL RESOURCES PAGE, YOU'LL FIND:

- ▢ training videos for you and your church leadership team
- ▢ blog posts
- ▢ infographics
- ▢ downloadable resources
- ▢ a free sample chapter from the Making Space for Millennials report
- ▢ and more!

