DAN KREISS AND EFREM SMITH

CHURCH FOR EVERYONE
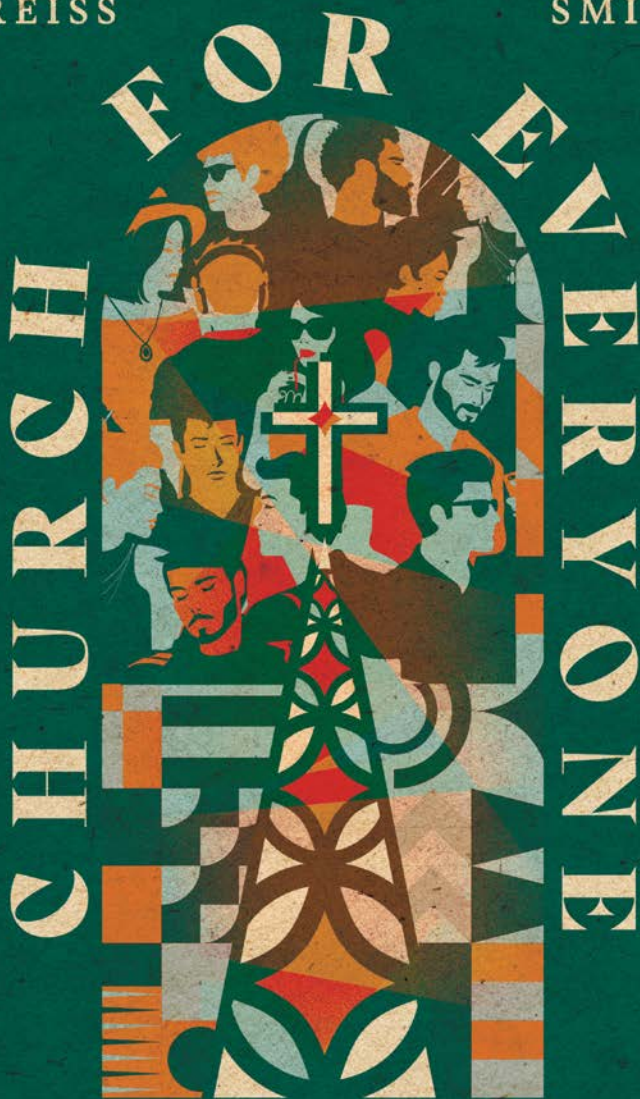
BUILDING A MULTI-INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY
FOR EMERGING GENERATIONS

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EMERGING GENERATIONS
AND THE CHURCH

THE NUMERICAL DECLINE of the church in the United States has come rather suddenly and contrasts significantly with its timeline in other Western nations. Certainly, Covid-19 has had a long-term impact on worship habits and involvement that is still being understood, but overall, church involvement remains comparatively high compared to other nations.

Only the United States saw an upsurge in both attendance and influence of the church throughout the middle of the twentieth century. Attendance levels were relatively stable through the 1960s at approximately 40 percent of the general population, significantly higher than many other parts of the Western world.[1] However, since that time the decline has been precipitous. While the Fuller Youth Institute suggests that the greatest decrease in numbers is being experienced in traditional mainline denominations such as Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, and American Baptist, the phenomenon is being witnessed in churches everywhere.[2]

Long gone are the days immediately following World War II, when the church was at its zenith in terms of strength and cultural influence in a society that found meaning in institutional belonging.[3] These shared communities of belief brought with them an impression of unity, either real or imagined, and the assumption that the nation was culturally unified. However, this is no longer the case. As Dwight Zscheile points out:

Transcendent cultural frameworks for meaning in American society have eroded, and nothing has arisen to replace them. Underneath there is a deeper shift in late modernity toward the individual self being the ultimate source of authority. Established structures and roles that once provided identity, meaning, and community have been supplanted by an expressive individualism that seeks out liberation from structure and tradition through endless choice.[4]

This is the world in which emerging generations find themselves. They are frequently caught in the dilemma of having to secure meaning and purpose for themselves outside of the institutions that provided these in generations past.[5] While they still desire to discern their own sense of meaning and purpose, many no longer perceive the church as an institution in which they can find answers to their deep questions. This difficulty becomes clear when considering the widening age gap regarding religious affiliation. In the same Pew Research study cited previously, three-quarters of baby boomers described themselves as Christian, while only 49 percent of those in the millennial generation claimed the same.[6]

Those criticizing the disconnect of the church with the changing social landscape have not been limited to those outside the church.[7] Although some find comfort in the apparent growth of several notable megachurches, overall attendance continues to fall relative to population.[8] The attrition rate of churches is most pronounced in those born after 1980; this group has gained several monikers, but as a whole are described as the emerging generations. They currently represent approximately 23 percent of the US population; however, the Faith Communities Today research team has determined that only about one in ten Christian congregations see anything close to that percentage attending on any regular basis.[9]

The effects of this are evident throughout the United States, and not limited to specific regions of the country; it includes the so-called Bible Belt. Though it may be difficult to comprehend, statistically speaking, according to author John Seel, "another American church shutters its doors every 2.5 hours. Churches thrive for a number of reasons, but they close for one reason—a failure to reach the next generation."[10]

Some in evangelical traditions find comfort when comparing themselves to mainline churches, which are experiencing a much greater and often faster decline. Yet even the largest denomination in the country, the Southern Baptist Convention, reported earlier this year that it was currently experiencing its twelfth year of declining membership.[11] Those denominations that many consider the healthiest are simply experiencing a less drastic rate of decline in comparison to others. Individual congregations that appear to be bucking the trend of decline may only be doing so through consolidating individuals from smaller congregations, as they transfer to larger and more vibrant branches of Christian community. Author Paula McGee disparagingly refers to this as the "Walmartization" of the church.[12]

According to several research sources there is absolutely no evident growth nationwide through new professions of faith.[13] This could be the result of either rejection of all institutional belonging, or a new way of belonging for those in emerging generations that is more organic and less structured. The pandemic that disrupted all aspects of life has only exacerbated this reality, and for many broke them of any habit of church attendance they might have maintained.

However, most observers studying the trends find one statistic increasingly disconcerting. Pew Research indicates that, in addition to the numerical decline, the influence of Christianity continues to wane.[14] This is in large part due to the demographic categories of people who are represented in the decline. Over the

last decade or so, the numbers of the religiously unaffiliated and unattached have risen to a point almost equal with those described as evangelicals, and are apparently growing at a faster rate than any other religious segment, from 9 percent in 1993 to 29 percent in 2019.[15]

Even more alarming for some is that this growing religiously unaffiliated group is particularly strong among emerging generations.[16] Kimberly Winston suggests that the nones "claim either no religious preference or no religion at all."[17] They are a religiously unattached, unaffiliated group of individuals, including those who self-describe as atheist, agnostic, and "nothing in particular." Although they are not at all uniform in many other respects, they are becoming an increasingly important demographic in several areas, shaping economic and social dynamics in new and unforeseen ways.[18] John Seel reports that they strongly prefer experiential learning, "where embodiment takes precedence over cognition, practice over principle, street over book smarts, and lived experience over classroom theory."[19] Thus, they almost universally prefer story and experience over worldview and theology.[20]

Such an erosion of faith adherents causes many to fear that before long, numerical decline may bring many faith-based businesses, academic institutions, and denominations into even greater financial strife and further denigrate the influence of the church on national and world affairs. There is a clear generational gap in religious ideologies between those born prior to 1980 and those born after. "Religiously unaffiliated Americans are significantly younger than religiously affiliated Americans, with more than one-third coming from those under the age of thirty."[21] Thus, not only is the church not growing, it continues to age, with a significant portion of the ongoing numerical decline caused by the deaths of those from older generations.

To gain some understanding of the underlying beliefs of many in emerging generations, particularly those self-described as "nones,"

one might look to what has become, for many, one of their defining annual cultural events. The Burning Man community event, first held in the 1980s, is one window into the values and thinking of many young people.[22] Seel suggests that this movement provides much needed insight into the developing attitudes of this generation. The movement is based on ten key principles:

1. No Boundaries/Radical Inclusion
2. Gifting
3. Decommodification
4. Radical Self-Reliance
5. Radical Self-Expression
6. Communal Effort
7. Civic Responsibility
8. Leaving No Trace
9. Participation
10. Immediacy[23]

While these do not appear to be blatantly antagonistic to the Christian faith, there is a sense that festival participants believe these values are not to be found in religion or traditional faith communities. There seems to be an understanding among the Burning Man adherents that individuals are to be accepted and respected as they are—which for many has not been their experience in the traditional church.

However, one should not presume, based on their withdrawal from traditional religious communities, that those in emerging generations are overtly antagonistic to faith practices, religious beliefs, or spirituality. Although the work of the Fuller Youth Institute might suggest that many are disenchanted with church and religion, youth have not completely broken these connections.[24] They appear to adhere to many traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs, while at the same time preferring to experience their faith independently and

through personal introspection, often disconnected from organized religious institutions.[25] This apparent lack of hostility toward religion highlights another concerning trend: it seems that the absence of hostility and antagonism is likely a result of their general apathy toward organized religion and its institutions. They just don't care about it all that much.[26]

Even for those who have had some form of ongoing connection with the church, it seems that few have gained much in their religious upbringing that is durable enough to sustain them once they graduate out of organized youth programs.[27] Even if we believe that the disconnect of emerging generations is only temporary, hoping that many of them will return to the fold of institutional faith once they settle down and begin to have families of their own, there remain concerns. As the Fuller Youth Institute points out in describing the reasons behind their research for the book *Growing Young*, "even those who return will have made significant life decisions about worldview, relationships, and vocation—all during an era when their faith was shoved aside."[28] It is difficult to fathom the long-term implications of this possibility, but more than likely, it will mean that church involvement will remain secondary to those other life contexts unless a substantial spiritual transformation occurs within their lives.

This disconnect raises critical future management questions for traditional church institutions as most are dependent on the consistent personal involvement of people for tithing, volunteer work, and community interaction. Continued withdrawal of emerging generations will mandate an alteration of current structures for these institutions to survive. The church and other Christian institutions have managed to endure because of the high levels of involvement of more connected generations. Traditionally the church measured its health based on the "ABCs"—attendance, buildings, and cash.[29] These are no longer sufficient measures to understand the genuine health of the church. However, sadly, economic rather

than spiritual concerns are likely to drive efforts to reengage with emerging generations.[30]

Postmodernism and the Technological Age

Much has also been written in recent years about postmodernism and its impact on young adults. Changes in thinking, convictions, values, family structure, and modes of learning have all altered the way young people perceive and engage with their surroundings.[31] Society continues in a period of transition from modernism to postmodernism, which means that there is often an ideological divide between emerging generations and older adults in terms of the way they experience and understand the world.

The financial resources in the United States were greater and more broadly available after World War II than at any earlier period in the history of the nation. This instigated the drive for upward mobility and financial independence, a greater willingness to make geographical moves for career development, and thus the growth of the nuclear family. The familial isolation, brought about by normalizing the nuclear family model, encouraged a change in values that had been relatively stable for generations, thus highlighting an emphasis on "individualism, personal freedom as self-fulfillment, and greater tolerance of diversity."[32] While postmodernism is not a direct result of these lifestyle choices, taken together, they did encourage a measurable shift in values that has had a significant impact on traditional Christian faith communities and institutions. These shifts have only been exacerbated recently with the global pandemic, the heightened racial tensions, and the increased political polarization since the spring of 2020.

The impact of postmodernism is felt throughout Western society but appears to cause particular concern regarding religious faith experience and expression. Many researchers have argued that there is an ideological conflict between the modernist perspective coming out of the Enlightenment, which is the basis of

much Western religious thought, and the postmodernist thought patterns of emerging adults. The effect of postmodernism, with its inherent skepticism, subjectivism, and relativism, is confusing and frustrating to emerging generations. It raises deep questions about the value of involvement in a traditional Christian faith community.[33] Assumptions made by previous generations regarding the value of religious life and its importance to understanding the world in which we live are no longer accepted implicitly. As a result, many young people leave the faith community, which they no longer feel is in balance with other aspects of their lives.

Others have suggested that there are too many competing stresses in life, preventing the deep immersion in religious life that is necessary to derive any meaningful connection within and value from church involvement. Rampant consumerism, which is a key cultural value in the Western world, particularly the United States, impacts one's freedom to participate in things that do not easily generate immediate economic value and security. The spiritual disconnect may also simply be a result of too many other interesting options vying for a finite amount of time. Involvement in a Christian faith community may be one of those options that is most readily dismissed as a result.

In addition to the changes taking place regarding thought processes within the wider society, a largely unanticipated transformation has occurred impacting almost every aspect of life. The technological age provides the ability to be constantly connected digitally to music and entertainment, online retail sites, as well as social media platforms that have a worldwide influence. This capacity has altered much about the way people experience the world, and the Covid-19 pandemic has only increased this influence and even moved many aspects of church life onto a digital platform.[34] Young people have never known life without these technologies.

The ability to link with people all over the world has arguably caused a greater willingness to accept diversity and tolerance of diversity. There have also been some concerning drawbacks to the present hyperconnectivity. As research continues into the effects this is having, it seems that one of the most significant changes is that society is now "a world of constant digital interruption, continuously fragmented attention, and multitasking. The result is an erosion of people's capacity to be present to one another or hold face-to-face conversations," particularly with those of differing ideas.[35] This creates yet another challenge to faith congregations founded on meaningful community engagement and interaction. Miroslav Volf argues:

> In cultures shaped by modernity, we have come to live "disembedded" lives. No longer experiencing ourselves as constituents of a meaningful cosmos and members of a social body, we modern human beings imagine ourselves and act first and foremost as individuals, ideally sovereign owners of ourselves and our actions.[36]

The demise of meaningful community may be one of the consequences of the inundation of technology in contemporary life. The hope within the church community is that it may also be a catalyst for encouraging young people back into dynamic and diverse faith communities.

The isolation that separates people from experiencing true community even has the potential to further limit crosscultural interaction. Much research continues to be conducted on the impact of the ubiquitous nature of the internet and social media connection. One apparent repercussion has been heightened cultural polarization. Zscheile comments,

> Digital media allows people to choose from an endless array of cultural channels. The result is a new micro-tribalism. . . .

It fosters cultural segregation and the collapse of common spaces and narratives. Assumptions are often reinforced rather than challenged, and it is easy to demonize those with whom we disagree.[37]

So, the paradox of contemporary life seems to be greater cultural diversity with concurrent heightened isolation and division resulting from maintaining narrow digital interaction. Unfortunately, the church is struggling with similar issues, which limits any opportunity it might have of providing a positive example and influence.

As someone who has been in youth ministry for most of my adult life, I am constantly amazed at the impact technology has on all of us, particularly how it has changed the way young people connect with each other and their faith. At several recent youth events, I witnessed young people responding to challenging messages from speakers or difficult discussions in small groups by reaching for their phones as soon as they could to connect with their "tribe" and share their discomfort. This did not allow time for processing or discussing with leaders in order to seek understanding and grow in knowledge and deepen their faith. It led to concerned calls from parents during the retreats, worried about their child, and resulted in additional stress and work for the youth staff—who were now distracted from ministering to the students in their group by simply working to ensure that no one got offended. It made me very thankful that the bulk of my time in youth ministry was prior to the cell phone age. It also confirmed to me how technology provides chances to broaden engagement with a diverse world but allows isolation to continue at the same time.

These social changes are certainly influencing the relationship between emerging generations and the church. However, to place the blame for empty pews on these seemingly uncontrollable external forces is too simple, and fails to address other factors for which the church is more overtly responsible.[38] The ongoing segregated

nature of the church in the United States is one significant concern that has yet to be addressed adequately. It is believed that transforming congregations into communities that are more reflective of their surrounding demographics will address some aspects of church involvement that are most uninviting to emerging generations.

The Monocultural Nature of the Church

The authors of *Neighborhood Church* suggest that, when traditional Christian communities lack the diversity experienced by emerging generations in almost every other aspect of their lives, this exacerbates the sense that the church is failing to capture "the imagination, authenticity and risk-willingness of this generation."[39] It's that limited diversity that this book is most concerned with. As societies around the world continue to transform—ethnically, culturally, and socially—the seeming inability for much of the church to reflect these alterations may be providing yet another reason for emerging generations to disengage. If nothing else, as Efrem suggests in a previous book, the monocultural nature of the church at least gives them an additional excuse for disconnecting.[40]

One of the significant challenges for the church in the Western world is that it remains almost universally segregated. To emerging generations, this often communicates that it is an institution trapped in the past. There are likely several reasons for the continued segregation, but it seems that implicit bias is at the core of the issue. Even with the growth of the multiethnic church movement, now representing upward of 16 percent of churches, the overall culture and theology within may continue to be largely monocultural.[41] Therefore, because of these issues, the institutional church may be tacitly communicating a sense of bigotry, racism, and exclusivity, all of which are the antithesis of what should be perceived.

In general, when people consider the "average" church in the United States, their ideas center around images of middle-class White people gathered together on a Sunday morning. Without a

doubt, the church influence in the United States continues to remain in the control of a largely monocultural White middle-class mindset. James Hunter argues, "In the early decades of the twenty-first century as in the last decades of the twentieth, Christian presence in America has been a presence primarily in, of, and for the middle class in everything that this designation means."[42]

For the vast majority of those born after 1980, this monoculturalism is not indicative of almost any other aspect of their lives, including education, career, social organizations, and neighborhood. The level of discomfort they feel in contexts bereft of diversity appears to impact their perception of those monocultural institutions.

The surge of diversity, ethnic and otherwise, is also increasing rapidly. Pew Research determined that those born after 1997 will be the most diverse generation ever seen in the United States.[43] Within emerging generations, the statistics might be somewhat surprising. For the youngest of these, born between 1997 and 2011, only a small majority of them, 52 percent, are non-Hispanic White; it is anticipated that those born from 2012 onward will become the first generation lacking any ethnic majority.[44] Further, many of these young people have a multicultural heritage of their own. Terry Linhart draws on additional Pew Research to say, "Twenty-five percent of those who are under eighteen years of age in the United States live with at least one parent who is an immigrant."[45]

Paul Sorrentino, author and leader of a multiethnic campus ministry, writes, "People in their twenties and teens have grown up in a society that values multi-culturalism. They are used to diverse classroom settings and sports teams. It is what they expect. When they do not see it in the church, they are disillusioned."[46] Not only does this disillusionment cause them to question aspects of their faith experience, it also strongly communicates to them that the church intentionally maintains divisions, excluding those perceived as others. To them, this division is hypocritical and contrary to what the church overtly espouses. Organizations that either resist efforts

toward diversity or struggle to become more diverse in both participants and leadership will likely continue falling out of favor with emerging generations.

The Christian church must reflect an inclusive rather than an exclusive body of believers, as described in the book of Acts. There must be intentional efforts to enhance diversity that provide opportunity for people from all walks of life to not only participate passively, but to share responsibility for leadership, decision making, and discipleship in a manner that encourages engagement from multiple perspectives.

Young people are more comfortable in diverse environments, as this is generally more reflective of all other aspects of their lives. Thus, as they move from their home environs due to education or work, they are potentially less likely to seek out a faith community that lacks much in the way of diversity, ethnic or otherwise. If, in fact, they do desire connection with a Christian faith community, what they are seeking is equivalent to other aspects of their daily lives. According to this insight, one of the reasons many in emerging generations are moving away from Christian faith communities is that these faith communities appear to remain stuck in earlier ways of living in the world, ones that offer little meaningful interaction with those who look and think differently than themselves.

Now, the lack of diversity within the church is understandable. Faith is often very personal, central to the way in which the world is interpreted and understood. Kenny Walden argues that especially in such personal issues as belief and faith, "people have an inclination to seek out those who mirror their own thoughts, actions and images."[47] While some churches are trying to be more inclusive and foster diversity in their faith communities, most are finding this a particular challenge; they remain overwhelmingly monocultural in all but a few localized instances.[48] Certainly, this lack of diversity is not limited to older, more traditional, mainline denominations. It is an issue throughout the Western world. However, for

these mainline denominations it is certainly something that needs to be recognized as a potential contributing factor to their aging and shrinking membership.

OTHER CULTURAL CHANGES

Western culture has impacted young people and Christian faith communities in other, less overt ways as well. This is particularly true regarding the rampant consumerism that is evident in every corner of society. This ideology has infected all aspects of life, even personal spirituality. Consumeristic tendencies develop at an early age and impact perception of the world in more than simply material goods.[49] They affect pursuit of all forms of fulfillment and satisfaction. The belief is that if a need is recognized, there is a simple solution that the consumption of a product or ideology will satisfy. This is evident in church life and is demonstrated by the phenomenon that most church growth occurs as a result of transfer rather than profession of faith.[50] The assumption is that movement to a new faith community will satiate a need that was unmet previously.

People tend to "shop" for a church that caters to their needs of the moment. When those needs are no longer met or new needs appear that can be better satisfied elsewhere, the shopping recommences. Though it is certainly not limited to younger generations, this shopping does seem to impact them at greater levels as they demonstrate less allegiance to denominational structure. Even more disheartening is the idea that one can satiate spiritual needs through correct application of consumeristic efforts. Soong-Chan Rah laments the fact that "spiritual life becomes a consumable product that is exchanged only if it benefits the material and corporeal well-being of the individual consumer."[51] Without a sense that clear and overt benefits derive from maintaining involvement with a faith community, it seems that emerging generations are exploring other options to satiate some of their internal needs.

Even those who maintain an affiliation with a Christian community appear to do so with far less conviction than previous generations.[52] Christian Smith and Melissa Lundquist found in their national research of the religious habits of young people that, though a strong percentage of young people do maintain connection to faith communities, it seems that their ongoing involvement "simply does not mean that much or make much sense to many of them."[53] It is evident that many continue in faith practices out of habit or to maintain familial obligations, but have limited investment in these spiritual practices. Their involvement also appears to have limited influence on their lifestyle choices.

Kenda Creasy Dean, in her book *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*, argues that the inability of young people to articulate their faith hints at its shallowness. "Mainline Protestant young people are among the least religiously articulate of all teens, and Catholic youth follow close behind."[54] Yet this is not a concern solely of more traditional church contexts. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the church of the future in altering the worship habits of individuals is not yet fully understood. Early evidence suggests that involvement remains down from previous years regardless of denominational affiliation. It is uncertain when or even if a rebound can be expected.

Doubt regarding the value and purpose of faith is evident in other ways as well. In a society that endorses the pursuit of one's dreams and promotes the idea that happiness is the main purpose of life, young people are encouraged to choose wisely from the lifestyle smorgasbord on offer. Religious communities are therefore simply one of a multitude of choices they have for finding fulfillment and direction. Yolanda Pantou writes, "For young people, the church and other established institutions, are one of many options, or are up for discussion. The existence of a variety of denominations is all the more reason for them to doubt the authority of the church."[55] The options available don't encourage commitment to things about

which they are uncertain or undecided. Further, for young adults who do not understand denominational issues or distinctions, these details confirm separateness and division and do little to affirm a sense of unity or the value of involvement.

A Sense of Panic

The statistical and societal changes discussed above tend to cause panic among church leaders as they fear the eventual collapse of the church and the resulting degradation of the moral fabric of society. Dan Kimball grimly predicts that "Christians are now foreigners in a post-Christian culture."[56] Where once societal expectations were sufficient to encourage consistent church involvement, this is no longer the case. Kenny Walden writes, "Churches can no longer rely solely on their tradition to automatically sustain increase or help bring meaning to their membership."[57] There are now too many other options for people to consider, ones that often require less sacrifice and fit more readily into a lifestyle that society endorses.

Although societal changes are evident, particularly in regard to emerging generations, Anthony Elliott believes the church is loath to believe how significant it is that "we live in new worlds of social and cultural organization."[58] Minor adjustments to church organization or structure will have negligible impact on engaging the disaffected. It is a new world altogether and requires a completely new approach as a result. While this does not mean that all tradition should be discarded, it does suggest that, if the church is to remain at all central to the morals and cultural values in the future, it must embrace a theology that engages with emerging generations, fully reflecting the inclusiveness found in the message of the gospel. The church can no longer isolate itself from culture to maintain some semblance of purity. William Dyrness realizes that this has never been truer: "There is no way for the church to interact constructively with contemporary culture without being rooted firmly both in that culture and in the biblical and Christian tradition."[59]

Is There Any Hope?

The narrative of unremitting church decline is not the full story. While a decrease in church attendance is certainly happening, there is strong evidence to suggest that less monochromatic faith communities remain vibrant and may even be growing. Soong-Chan Rah, author of *The Next Evangelicalism*, describes "the reality of twenty-first century American Christianity—the White churches are in decline while the immigrant, ethnic and multiethnic churches are flourishing."[60] This more optimistic view provides some hope for the church of the future, but again, there remain concerns resulting from the ongoing changes brought about by the pandemic.

So it's important to consider the church more broadly than simply the suburban, middle-class, monocultural version to fully grasp its connection within emerging generations. According to Rah the problem lies in the fact that the usual focus of concern is the accepted "normal" American church, White and middle class. He says, "As many lament the decline of Christianity in the United States in the twenty-first century, very few have recognized that American Christianity may actually be growing, but in unexpected and surprising ways."[61] While this statement contradicts the research of the Fuller Youth Institute that there is no observable growth, it does make the case that inherent assumptions about what the church is may influence the interpretation of what is occurring and even impact how research is conducted and discerned.

Discerning the Way Forward

In the age of social media, when it appears that relationships have become superficial, it seems that genuine connection and acceptance in a vibrant faith community would be attractive and inviting. Donald Lewis and Richard Pierard are convinced that "the central idea is that the world is becoming more and more a single place, a single 'village,' with all the outcomes this has on human relations and the way we see the world."[62] This single "village" is far more

diverse than in previous generations and should be reflected within all the most important institutions, particularly the church.

What this means is that pursuing diversity or a church community that reflects the wider culture in terms of gender, ethnicity, age, and social strata needs to be more than just a gimmick or a short-term effort in order for the church to survive another few years. If diversity is the goal, it needs to be purposeful and have a foundation more profound than simply the latest ploy to attract and keep the next generation. It is far bigger and more important than responding to cultural changes. This is the church as God intended. These developments may line up with what is occurring in emerging generations, but they should occur because we are responding to what the church is designed to reflect: God's love for the whole of humanity.

This book will develop the idea that several factors foster the ongoing engagement of emerging generations. They desire a strong sense of inclusion and belonging in a community that acts as an extended family network, expressing genuine care and concern for them as they are. They expect that they will be permitted to participate fully in the life of the congregation, not simply because they show up at times of corporate worship, but because they have something tangible and meaningful to offer. They also expect that worship and messages connect to their everyday lives.[63] Though these things can happen in a monocultural congregational environment, the work that is necessary to foster genuine diversity within a worship community will strengthen these qualities and garner stronger connection and deeper commitment from the young people less inclined to be there.

Ultimately, this is our underlying motivation for writing this book. It represents an attempt to encourage the church to become more representative of the community God desires and reflective of the local neighborhood surrounding congregations. Investigations into the changes occurring within emerging generations highlight

their increasing diversity. Therefore, it seems prudent to discern any link between emerging generations and diversity in the church.

Chapter two of this book presents how the church as God desires it to exist is the ideal place where the needs of young people can be expressed and ultimately find fulfillment within that community. Chapter three provides examples of congregations that have embraced a multi-inclusive ethic, providing a context for young people to become actively involved in transforming their world with the gospel. Chapter four addresses some of the challenges experienced by churches attempting to embrace a multi-inclusive ethic. It reminds us that working toward this goal is not a marketing gimmick, but a transformational change in the nature and makeup of the entire church. Chapter five recognizes that each generation has a desire to positively impact the world in which they live. It develops the idea that the multi-inclusive church is the perfect context to harness the specific passions of emerging generations as means of living out the gospel. Chapter six explains that the divisions found in the church are not limited to ethnicity; it explains the history behind the exclusivity and why it remains so difficult to shift Christian culture toward a more inclusive expression. Chapter seven develops the biblical foundations for the multi-inclusive church, providing evidence from both the Old and New Testaments that this was God's plan from the beginning. Finally, chapter eight provides multiple examples of churches growing in diversity, demonstrating that there are multiple ways to approach the challenge of becoming multi-inclusive. It will also include suggestions for helping current church members embrace the need to become more inclusive so that all feel welcome in their faith community.

The segregated and monocultural church is an issue that continues to have repercussions throughout the world regardless of denomination or geographic location. Our hope is that this book will not be limited to a specific denomination or locality, but that it will raise questions and help guide the thinking of all those who desire to engender a more complete reflection of the community of God.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Church Leader: How effectively do you feel your congregation has been in meeting the needs of those in emerging generations described here? How reflective of your surrounding community is your congregation, and what message might that be sending to those outside your church?

Sitting in the Pew: How comfortable are you with any change that might be necessary to make your church more inviting and inclusive? What role do you think you have in helping make that happen?

Millennial/Gen Z: What are the stories behind those you know who view the church with side eyes? What is it about your faith community that has kept you connected? How can this be replicated for others?

All In: Have any of the issues mentioned here impacted you personally? How has the church been a safe and healthy place for you to work through them? What have been some of the challenges associated with these issues and your congregational home?

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