



# **Leadership Across Generations: A Legitimate Diversity Issue in U.S. Congregations**

Reginald Bruce, Ph.D.  
College of Business  
University of Louisville

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Religious Research  
Association, Baltimore, Maryland, October 30, 2010

# Introduction

- This thing we call “generations”
  - For the first time in our history, we have four separate and distinct generations shoulder-to-shoulder
- We are quick to analyze factors like age, life stage, gender, race, ethnicity, SES, religion, thinking styles, Myers-Briggs profiles, and even signs of the Zodiac
  - But . . . what of generational difference?

# Generations Portrayed

- Traditionalists (1900-1945)
  - Descriptor—*LOYAL*
  - Managerial approach—*CHAIN OF COMMAND*
- Baby Boomers (1946-1964)
  - Descriptor—*OPTIMISTIC*
  - Managerial approach—*CHANGE OF COMMAND*
- Generation Xers (1965-1980)
  - Descriptor—*SKEPTICISM*
  - Managerial approach—*SELF-COMMAND*
- Millennials (1981-1999)
  - Descriptor—*REALISTIC*
  - Managerial approach—*DON'T COMMAND, COLLABORATE*

# Guiding Research Question

- Does a generation bias exist in how one sees others? That is, are individuals prone to have certain expectations of others simply on the basis of the generation in which the “others” belong?
- If such a generation bias exists, how does it play itself out in terms of congregational life?

# Sample

- U.S. Congregational Life Survey (Wave II)
- National random survey of congregations

[www.uscongregations.org](http://www.uscongregations.org)

# Data Collection

- Three types of surveys were completed in each participating congregation
  - An Attender Survey
  - A Congregational Profile
  - A Leader Survey
- A portion of those surveyed (N=1,872 in 190 congregations) answered additional questions providing their perceptions of the leadership style and behaviors of their congregational leader

# Generations of Leaders

<b>Group</b>	<b>Year Born</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Traditionalists	1900 to 1945	35	18%
Baby Boomers	1946 to 1964	134	71%
Generation Xers	1965 to 1980	18	10%
Millennials	1981 to 1999	2	1%

For purposes of further analyses, individuals from the two most recent generations were combined into one grouping.

# Denominational Family of Leaders

	<b>Catholic</b>	<b>Mainline Protestant</b>	<b>Conservative Protestant</b>
Traditionalists	30%	15%	17%
Baby Boomers	62%	74%	71%
Xers & Millennials	7%	11%	11%

---

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Xers &amp; Millennials</b>
Catholic	34%	19%	16%
Mainline	49%	62%	63%
Conservative	17%	19%	21%

**WHO ARE THESE LEADERS AND  
WHAT DO THEY DO?**

# Demographics of Leaders

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	97%	<b>83%</b>	95%
Female	3%	<b>16%</b>	5%
<b>Race-Ethnicity</b>			
White	89%	92%	85%
Black	9%	4%	10%
Hispanic	3%	2%	0%
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Never married	34%	19%	<b>15%</b>
First marriage	<b>31%</b>	60%	75%
Divorced/separated	6%	6%	5%
Remarried	<b>26%</b>	11%	0%
<b>Education</b>			
College graduate	51%	47%	65%
Graduate degree	49%	48%	30%

# Experiences Prior to Ministry

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Xers/Millennials</b>
Percent born in the U.S.	91%	94%	95%
Percent with parents both born in the U.S.	86%	91%	95%
Percent who lived in U.S. at age 5	91%	92%	95%
Age first seriously considered calling	19	21	18
Percent who worked full-time before ministry	51%	58%	50%

# Pastoral Activities

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
Hours: Preaching and worship leadership	14	12	13
Hours: Pastoral counseling	5	4	3
Hours: Teaching people about the faith	4	4	4
Hours: Visiting members and their families	4	5	3
Hours: Admin work of the congregation	14	<b>16</b>	13
Total hours worked in a typical week	51	49	<b>41</b>

# Other Activities

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Xers/Millennials</b>
Hours: Prayer, meditation, bible	9	6	7
Hours: Physical exercise	3	4	3
Hours: Using Internet	4	5	<b>7</b>
Hours: Family life	11	12	<b>19</b>

**HOW DO THEY EXPERIENCE THEIR  
POSITIONS?**

# Career Stress Experienced

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Xers/Millennials</b>
because of challenges in this congregation	2.5	2.2	2.0
felt lonely and isolated in your work	3.1	2.6	3.2
felt your work did not permit time with children	3.5	3.1	3.1
spouse voiced resentment over ministry	3.2	3.2	3.2
spouse voiced resentment over finances	3.5	3.7	3.7

Lower mean scores reflect the individual more often experienced the stressor.

# How Often You . . .

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Xers/Millennials</b>
doubted you were called by God to ministry	0%	2%	0%
thought of being a pastor elsewhere	6%	13%	15%
thought of leaving pastoral ministry for other ministry	3%	13%	5%
thought of leaving for secular job	3%	6%	5%
experienced stress dealing with members	9%	19%	20%

Percent reporting “Very Often” or “Fairly Often”

# % Very Satisfied with . . .

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
Housing or living arrangements	77%	74%	55%
Your spiritual life	23%	28%	25%
Relationships with lay leaders	63%	49%	50%
Relationships with other pastors in congregation	50%	54%	33%
Support from your denominational officials	21%	<b>32%</b>	25%

# % Very Satisfied with . . .

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
Your salary and benefits	43%	48%	40%
Your family life	85%	<b>51%</b>	<b>34%</b>
Your personal life	53%	39%	35%
Your work in ministry	63%	41%	32%
Your overall effectiveness as a pastoral leader	46%	41%	35%

**HOW DO THEY SEE THEIR OWN  
LEADERSHIP?**

# Transformational Leadership

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
Transformational leadership self-assessment	2.24	2.24	2.21
Transactional management self-assessment	2.68	<b>3.02</b>	2.80

Lower mean scores reflect the individual assesses themselves as reflecting the particular dimension measured.

# Servant Leadership

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Xers/Millennials</b>
Altruistic calling	2.20	2.36	2.40
Emotional healing	2.22	2.38	2.48
Wisdom	2.16	2.16	2.23
Persuasive mapping	2.44	2.43	2.48
Organizational stewardship	1.67	1.68	1.78

Lower mean scores reflect the individual assesses themselves as reflecting the particular dimension measured.

**WHAT DO WE KNOW OF THEIR  
WORSHIPERS?**

# Generations of Worshipers

<b>Group</b>	<b>Year Born</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Traditionalists	1900 to 1945	628	33%
Baby Boomers	1946 to 1964	686	37%
Generation Xers	1965 to 1980	301	16%
Millennials	1981 to 1999	257	14%

**HOW DO THESE WORSHIPERS  
EXPERIENCE THEIR CONGREGATION?**

# Worshiper Perceptions & Beliefs

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
Worship services help you with everyday living	57%	55%	68%
Time spent in devotional acts	48%	48%	53%
Spiritual needs are being met	37%	31%	<b>44%</b>
Strong sense of belonging to the congregation	46%	45%	58%
Good match between our congregation and minister, pastor, or priest	52%	49%	49%

# Worshiper Values

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
Wider community care or social justice	20%	21%	<b>10%</b>
Reaching those who do not attend church	12%	16%	<b>19%</b>
Traditional style of worship or music	35%	30%	28%
Contemporary style	15%	20%	16%
Sharing in Communion	<b>53%</b>	43%	44%
Social activities or meeting new people	11%	13%	12%
Sermons, preaching, or homilies	<b>32%</b>	38%	40%

# Worshiper Values (cont)

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Xers/Millennials</b>
Bible study or prayer groups	<b>9%</b>	13%	14%
Ministry for children	16%	18%	17%
Prayer ministry for one another	6%	8%	8%
Practical care for one another in times of need	14%	12%	17%
Congregation's school or pre-school	6%	4%	6%
Openness to social diversity	10%	14%	15%
Adult church-school	2%	2%	4%

and . . . wait for it . . .

# Worshiper Giving

	<b>Traditionalists</b>	<b>Baby Boomers</b>	<b>Xers/Millennials</b>
Percent who give 5% or more of net income regularly to this congregation	29%	<b>48%</b>	<b>58%</b>

**HOW DO THE WORSHIPERS  
PERCEIVE THEIR LEADER?**

# Transformational Leadership

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
Transformational leadership assessed by worshipers	1.70	1.73	<b>1.57</b>
Transactional management assessed by worshipers	not measured	not measured	not measured

Lower mean scores reflect the worshiper assesses their pastor as reflecting the particular dimension measured.

# Servant Leadership

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Xers/Millennials
Altruistic calling	1.62	<b>1.80</b>	1.64
Emotional healing	1.91	1.98	1.81
Wisdom	1.58	1.63	1.54
Persuasive mapping	1.98	2.06	<b>1.84</b>
Organizational stewardship	1.46	1.49	1.40

Lower scores reflect the worshiper assesses their pastor as reflecting the particular dimension measured.

# Summary and Conclusions

- There is something going on because of generation
  - Pastors, for the most part, approach their ministry in somewhat similar manners . . .
  - but, there is an effect shown from the perspective of the worshipers that impacts perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors
- These findings cannot simply be dismissed due to certain denominational family issues

# Summary and Conclusions

- The finding regarding individual giving across leader generation groups was unexpected and notable.
  - This and other analyses need to be validated using the entire Wave II sample.
- While this current study investigated solely the impact of the leader's generation, it did not address the interaction of the leader/worshiper generations.
- Perhaps results from this stream of research will lead to the development of a better understanding of the models of leading congregations in our new times.

Thank you!

# **Leadership Across Generations: A Legitimate Diversity Issue in U.S. Congregations**

Reginald Bruce, Ph.D.  
College of Business  
University of Louisville

**reg.bruce@LOUISVILLE.EDU**