

# Sharing Good News with Millennials

## Who are Millennials? And why is that good news?

The term "Millennial" identifies the generation born between 1981 and 2001, which makes them the first generation to come of age in the new millennium. A brief description about this or of any generation is a mere caricature. That is why we reject marketing soundbytes that portray all Millennials as young, gadget-laden, urban sophisticates. Millennials are even more diverse than their Gen. X predecessors. We know that most Millennials are more comfortable with technology and the constancy of change than are previous generations. We have evidence of a strong work ethic and a unique sense of civic responsibility in Millennials. They have unprecedented autonomy, great freedom of choice, and they have a decidedly experimental approach to living. Millennials (also called emerging adults) are a self-confident generation that possesses: a drive for community, a global worldview, a tolerance for diversity, and a playful, even celebrative spirit. As such, Millennials represent a demographic with good news to share and one that is open to hear the Good News. What can we say about the Millennial generation and sharing Good News with them?

**1. Millennials are techno-savvy. This is the first generation to see the real world and the virtual world seamlessly. Millennials see things through a scientific worldview and use technology to manage relationships and control life. Texting, Tweets, YouTube, Google, Wikipedia, or Facebook are just some of the ways that Millennials use technology to build relationships and manage life.**

**Good News:** There is ample endorsement for pastors and parishes to go digital. In 2010, Pope Benedict made it clear in his message [The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word](#) that church leaders must be missionaries in the digital world.

**Bad News:** You can't google God. Millennials can be blinded to the limits of technology for achieving healthy intimacy or happiness in life. An over-reliance on technology can distort the transformational and transcendental character of religious truth. There is no such thing as churchless Christianity.

**Implications:** Use technology to connect with Millennials but do not stop there. Engage Millennials through technology to face the defining questions of life that supersede the limitations of science and its capacity to provide meaning and happiness in life.

**2. Millennials *feel the love*. They were raised in homes with fewer siblings and with more attention. They know that they are important. Programs are not the way to their hearts, personal attention is.**

**Good News:** Millennials tend to be more positive and more able to take risks than previous generations. Tap their energy and creativity. Millennials are impressed by a church that cares enough to notice and reward their industry. Parishes will discover a great return on any investment of time made with Millennials.

**Bad News:** Their appetite for attention can leave Millennials feeling neglected rather easily in an impersonal congregation.

**Implications:** Get to know Millennials – personality, aspirations, talents. Give personal attention at parish gatherings. Recognize the accomplishments of Millennials within the parish. Invite Millennials to take leadership in areas of interest and let them grow into roles of greater responsibility as their confidence grows. Involve Millennials in determining their areas of activity and their level of responsibility.

**3. Community Counts for Millennials. They use technology both to control their environment and to build bridges in a highly individualistic culture. Millennials can be at home alone and still be in constant contact with dozens of people. Compared to Boomers and Gen. X'ers, Millennials are a loyal and hardworking cohort that plays together and stays together.**

**Good News:** Millennials seek out social interaction and group experiences. They welcome positive applications of peer pressure and they hunger for provocative communal experiences of worship.

**Bad News:** Millennials are easily isolated. Their reliance upon technology can make them seem aloof.

**Implication:** Encourage them to form self-directed, interest-based groups (even if it is a google group). Invite Millennials into efforts to have real impact on the lives of people. Invite Millennials into the richness of the Catholic approach to communal life. Gather Millennials into meaningful communities of care and compassion with other generations.

**4. Millennials are self-assured, energetic and cause-driven. Their mastery of technology is one cause for the great confidence that Millennials have as problem-solvers. They yearn to be helpful and they value acts of service as a practical expression of their in-the-world spirituality. They have an internal locus of authority.**

**Good News:** They are civic-minded and powerful. They are ready and willing to change the world. This was made amply evident by their role in the Obama presidential victory. They are energized by making things work again. In combination with a global worldview, this confidence makes them resourceful in strategic thinking. They have a can-do spirit and respond well to hope-filled people and positive plans for the future.

**Bad News:** Millennials can see complexities in simplistic or mechanistic ways. Millennials can be impatient with protracted approaches to human situations and indecisive leaders.

**Implication:** Expose Millennials to positive and hope-filled people. Mobilize Millennials to solve problems. Invite Millennials to apply their strategic aptitudes to address the mandate to evangelize the world through vital parishes in urban, rural and suburban settings?

**5. Millennials believe in tolerance. Millennials are the most racially, ethnically diverse generation in this nation's history. A high percentage are open to interracial dating, interfaith or non-religious marriages. High levels of tolerance distinguish this generation from all the generations that precede them.**

**Good News:** Millennials appreciate those who confess a more humble, pilgrim stance toward life. Their natural instincts make them allies in efforts to achieve human rights for all people.

**Bad News:** They distrust religions that make broad or exclusive claims to the truth. They leaders who deal with odd personal requests in planning weddings and baptisms, Millennials view weddings, adult confirmations, infant baptism and funerals less as times to affirm the Faith, and more as moments of welcome, caring and acceptance.

**Implication:** Use the language of spiritual humility more and speak to denominational differences less. Make sacramental moments as welcoming and compassion while remaining true to our own beliefs. Partner with young adults in efforts to achieve human rights for all people - from womb to tomb.

**6. Millennials are comfortable with change. They were born into a culture where technological innovations set the pace of life. They understand that the only constant in their world is change.**

**Good News:** They can be more present to the moment than Gen. X'ers or Boomers. This allows them to be more mystical in spiritual outlook. We are blessed with the spiritual resources to satisfy the deepest longings of Millennials.

**Bad News:** They expect to be entertained and will not learn if bored. The movie industry feeds their appetite for epic stories, and cosmic spiritual struggles.

**Implication:** Offer the sacraments as moments of encounter with an ever-present God despite the passages of life. Use Millennials as resources when preparing for organization for change.

**7. Millennials struggle with moral complexity. Millennials have developed an internal locus of moral authority. Born into a post-scandal world in which many societal institutions have lost credibility, they share considerable skepticism of public figures and institutions with their Generation X predecessors.**

**Good News:** They recognize their need for moral leaders who walk their talk. They can see the limitations of a patchwork ethical system when confronting the moral nuances created by emerging medical technologies and complex public policy issues.

**Bad News:** They can seem distrustful of those who seem inflexible on matters of conscience. Many Millennials cobble together a personal ethical system from personal experiences and a variety of spiritual sources.

**Implication:** Because Millennials are cause-driven and learn in active-experimental ways, they will gain moral clarity in concrete experiences of human need. Parishes will do well to expose them to humble and courageous people from the congregation who engage in the big moral issues of our time. Because this Generation leans laterally for spiritual insight, a successful church will have to empower other Millennials for leadership and exercise creativity to engage them in prayer or faith formation experiences.

**How can we share the Good News with Millennials?** To start with, because Millennials...

... live seamlessly between the real and virtual worlds, upgrade parish websites using web 2.0 technologies (interactive forms, podcasts, blogs), to interact with Millennials online

... are outspoken and comfortable in groups of all types, we support Millennials in organizing self-directed groups for personal enrichment and spiritual growth

... are self-directed, we avoid micro-managing and instead recognize their leadership abilities and partner with them to spread Good News

... seek wisdom from sources that are more personal and collegial than institutional and vertical, we establish spiritual mentors and companions for Millennials

... are unimpressed with titles and offices, we establish credibility through relationships of trust and action

... are problem-solvers and masters of technology, media and social networking, we involve them in decision-making and welcome their new approaches to organizational tasks

... are altruistic and action-oriented, we give voice to people's suffering and mobilize them to work for justice

... have a patchwork religious identity, we use sacramental moments to welcome them, and build trust. In this way we let right belief emerge from right praxis and right relationship

... hunger for religious experiences, we offer evocative communal prayer with rich symbols and ritual in multiple venues

... are cause-driven, we inspire them with a hopeful vision of life that is found in the Gospel

#### **What resources are available to learn more?**

Consult the following publications: *Connecting Young Adults to Catholic Parishes: Best Practices in Catholic Young Adult Ministry* from the U.S.C.C.B.; *Googling God: The Religious Landscape of People in Their 20's and 30's* by Mike Hayes; *The New Breed: Understanding and Equipping the 21st Century Volunteer* by Jonathan and Thomas McKee (particularly pp. 56-63); or *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* by Christian Smith and Patricia Snell. And visit: [BustedHalo/googling-god](http://BustedHalo/googling-god), [Ypulse.com](http://Ypulse.com), [C21Resources](http://C21Resources) or the [Pew Research Center](http://Pew Research Center).

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